

Public Eating Spaces as Catalysts for Cultural and Educational Life: A Historical-Architectural Analysis of Uzbekistan's Public Catering Infrastructure

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the historical-architectural evolution of public catering buildings in Uzbekistan, tracing their transformation from traditional spatial forms into the Soviet network of "Red Teahouses" (qizil choyxona), alongside their socio-cultural roles. Focusing on the southern regions of Uzbekistan (Kashkadarya and Surxandarya), the study investigates the socio-spatial transformation of catering infrastructure. The methodological framework combines historical-typological analysis of archival and statistical data with mathematical spatial density modeling.

The results demonstrate that the Soviet authorities leveraged the high social communication potential of traditional teahouses as part of an "ideological appropriation of space" strategy. While the architectural shells of the buildings were preserved, their internal functional substance was systematically replaced with socialist propaganda and anti-religious hubs (the "League of Militant Atheists"). Furthermore, the research proves that the conversion of sacred architectural sites, such as the Charmgar Mosque in Karshi, into public catering spaces served to reprogram the collective spatial memory of the local population. By the late 1930s, the network transitioned from static built structures to seasonal field-based service models integrated into the agrarian sector, marking a new evolutionary phase. The scientific contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing public catering infrastructure not merely as a commercial asset, but as an active spatial catalyst shaping societal dynamics.

Keywords: public catering architecture, Red Teahouse, transformation, socio-spatial analysis, Charmgar Mosque, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Contemporary research in the field of architectural and spatial sociology (*Spatial Sociology*) demonstrates that public buildings are not merely utilitarian (functional) entities, but rather distinctive platforms that actively shape the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual life of society [1]. Within this context, public catering establishments—ranging from traditional teahouses to modern restaurant complexes—have historically served as unique "catalysts" for the daily interaction, socialization, and educational development of the population. The architectural-spatial layout of these buildings, their strategic positioning within urban and rural infrastructures, and their interior design choices inherently reflect the ideological and cultural paradigms of each respective era.

In international scientific literature, the socio-cultural nature of public catering spaces has been investigated through diverse academic lenses. For instance, within Western sociology and architecture, the system of restaurants and cafes has been analyzed as a foundational cornerstone

for the formation of urban society and as venues for cultural diplomacy [2,3]. Conversely, within the context of Central Asia, the evolution of cultural spaces has been predominantly examined through the prism of Sovietization and ideological transformations [4,5,6]. However, in the architectural historiography of Uzbekistan, the typological formation process of public catering infrastructure—specifically teahouses (*choyxona*) and dining facilities—has not been sufficiently or systematically investigated from a historical-architectural perspective in close alignment with their intellectual and educational functions. The vast majority of localized studies remain confined to illustrating mere economic development indicators or broad, generalized historical processes.

Within the scope of this study, the historical-architectural evolution of public catering buildings within the territory of Uzbekistan is analyzed, spanning from the traditional era to the contemporary phase. The primary objective of this paper is to elucidate how the structural and stylistic transformations in the architecture of public catering facilities across various historical periods (pre-colonial, Soviet, and independence years) synthesized with the cultural needs and intellectual life of society.

Research Methodology

To systematically evaluate the structural, architectural, and functional transformation of public catering buildings within the territory of Uzbekistan, this study utilizes an integrated research framework that combines historical-typological analysis with quantitative socio-spatial modeling. Public catering infrastructure is examined not merely as commercial real estate, but as a complex socio-spatial mechanism that inherently reflects the macroeconomic policies and cultural paradigms across two distinct historical epochs: the late Soviet industrialization phase (1930s–1980s) and the post-independence privatization phase (the period after 1991).

Data Collection and Sources. The empirical and normative-legal foundation of this research was constructed from three primary data streams:

Archival and Periodical Records: Qualitative indicators regarding planning, building standardization, and spatial allocation strategies during the first half of the Soviet era were extracted from regional architectural archives and industry-specific periodicals, particularly the digital archives of the "*Savdogar*" newspaper and relevant academic journals.

Statistical Yearbooks: Quantitative metrics—including the total number of public catering facilities (e.g., 18,802 enterprises in the 1980s), the workforce employed in the sector (\$90.4\$ thousand people), seating capacity (\$877.3\$ thousand seats), and infrastructural density indicators—were sourced from the historical databases of the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Normative-Legal Documents: To analyze the shifts in ownership structures and the spatial expansion of the facility network during the post-independence period, a critical analysis was performed on the **Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 75** (dated February 13, 2003), titled "*On Additional Measures to Develop the Networks of Retail Trade, Public Catering, and Consumer Services for 2003–2006*," along with its associated regulatory frameworks.

Analytical Framework and Methods. To scientifically process the collected data, the following methodological operations were deployed:

Socio-Spatial Infrastructural Mapping: Public catering establishments were classified based on their institutional governance and spatial allocation parameters. The network was segmented into two distinct groups: *state-sector service architecture* (buildings managed under "*Uzbekbirlashuv*", the Ministry of Health system including hospitals, sanatoriums, schools, and pre-school education institutions) and *decentralized private-sector architecture* (private restaurants, cafes, and traditional food stalls located in urban and district centers, local *guzars*, and *dehqon* markets).

Spatial Density and Capacity Modeling: To evaluate the accessibility and operational efficiency of the built environment for the population, spatial metrics were calculated based on standardized architectural density formulas: Spatial Load Per Unit Seat = Total Population/Total Available Seats, Service Footprint Per Property = Total Population/Total Number of Functional Buildings

By integrating the 2003 statistical baseline into these formulas, the geometric load level on the architectural infrastructure was determined. The analysis revealed a density of 35 citizens per single dining seat and a service footprint load of 1,428 citizens per individual catering property. This mathematical-spatial analysis serves as the objective baseline to evaluate the capacity of the built infrastructure to function as a genuine "catalyst" within the cultural and educational life of society.

Results and Discussion

The Socio-Spatial Archetype of Traditional Teahouses The findings of this study indicate that during the pre-Soviet era in the southern regions of Uzbekistan (Kashkadarya and Surxandarya), teahouses (*choyxona*) did not function merely as utilitarian food service facilities. Instead, they were strategically situated within three primary functional nodes of cities and villages: caravanserais (along trade routes), central marketplaces, and mahalla *guzar* (community) centers. Architecturally characterized by open terraces (*ayvon*) and constructed primarily from localized raw materials, these structural entities served as the core spatial platforms supporting the daily informal educational and social engagements (such as news exchange and informal social control) of the male population aged between 20 and 60[7,8].

Quantitative and Spatial Dynamics of the "Red Teahouse" Network The process of Sovietizing the national architectural space, initiated by the state decree on June 19, 1922, resulted in a sharp quantitative surge and an uneven regional distribution of public catering properties. Through a dynamic analysis of archival records, the growth rate of Red Teahouse structures across the republic has been systematically organized in the table below:

Table 1. The structural and ideological evolution of the Red Teahouse network (1925–1940)

Years	Total Number of Properties in the Republic	Share of Southern Regions (Kashkadarya & Surxandarya)	Primary Functional and Ideological Load
1925	Data unavailable	8 buildings	Distribution of political literature, reading newspapers aloud.
1926	177 buildings	34 buildings (Kashkadarya: 19, Surxandarya: 15)	Eradication of illiteracy, mobilizing the local population into Soviet governance.
1927–28	Sharp decline	16 buildings (8 buildings per region)	Acute shortage of qualified personnel and weakening of the material-technical baseline.
1937	3,628 buildings	Severe inter-district disparity (Karshi: 68, Dekhkanabad: 2)	Anti-religious campaigns (the League of Militant Atheists) and political repression assemblies.
1940	~4,000 buildings	343 buildings (Kashkadarya: 209, Surxandarya: 134)	Rapid collectivization (<i>kolkhoz</i> stabilization), relocation of public catering operations into seasonal agricultural fields.

Archival documents verify a severe spatial disparity in the geographical distribution of these buildings. For instance, during 1936–1937, while the centrally located Karshi district operated 68 Red Teahouse structures and the Kitab district maintained 37, peripheral and mountainous areas such as the Dekhkanabad district possessed a mere 2 units, and Yakkabag operated only 4 functional properties. By 1940, the financial-architectural management system of these facilities underwent a significant structural shift: 160 out of 209 buildings in Kashkadarya, and 100 out of 134 properties in Surxandarya, were transferred entirely under the jurisdiction of collective farm (*kolkhoz*) budgets[9,10,11].

The Transformation of Sacred Architecture into Public Catering Spaces The research findings indicate that rather than constructing new facilities from the ground up, the Soviet regime deployed a strategy of reconceptualizing traditional sacred architectural assets. According to comprehensive archival metadata, the operational activities of the *Charmgar* Mosque in the city of Karshi were forcibly terminated, and its spatial configuration—comprising the central dome, an expansive congregation hall, and an inner courtyard—was systematically repurposed during the initial phase into the central regional Red Teahouse facility. The functional matrix of the building was manipulated through integrated economic and cultural incentives: while traditional, non-state teahouses priced a serving of tea at 10 rubles, the state-run Red Teahouse artificially suppressed the price to 5 rubles, successfully accelerating the daily visitor volume to 50–60 individuals[12,13].

Discussion

The empirical findings delineated in this study demonstrate that the development of public catering buildings within the territory of Uzbekistan during the 1920s and 1930s was not driven by purely demographic or macroeconomic necessities, but was fundamentally intertwined with a strategy of the "**Ideological Appropriation of Space.**" Recognizing the high degree of social communication potential inherent within traditional teahouses, the Bolshevik regime strategically preserved the physical "form" (the space designated for tea consumption and socialization) while systematically saturating its "substance" with socialist propaganda.

The conversion of the *Charmgar* Mosque into a Red Teahouse serves as a poignant paradigm of the "**profanation of sacred space**" within spatial sociology. Repurposing a religious architectural monument into a public dining facility—and subsequently into a regional headquarters for the *League of Militant Atheists*—was explicitly calculated to reprogram the collective visual and spatial memory of the local population. The physical installation of red fabrics across the walls and the hanging of portraits of Soviet leaders effectively transformed the architectural space into a potent instrument of visual manipulation[14].

International scholars such as Keller and Zanca, while examining the Soviet cultural revolution in Central Asia, emphasize the pivotal role of "Red Corners" (*qizil burchak*) and clubs. Our study appends to this discourse that in the southern regions, the most attractive and socially comprehensible spaces for the local population were specifically public catering facilities. By establishing economic incentives through subsidized food and 5-ruble tea during the drought years (1925–1926), the government successfully attracted individuals to these structures, subsequently executing its ideological objectives within the architectural space (such as reading 9 designated Marxist newspapers aloud and threatening those who resisted joining collective farms with the deprivation of water rights)[15].

The structural disparity across various districts (68 units in Karshi versus a mere 2 in Dekhkanabad) demonstrates that the formation of this infrastructure was not dictated by conventional urban planning principles, but was entirely subordinate to the concentration level of Soviet cadres and material resources. By the 1940s, the obsolescence of the term "Red" and the subsequent transformation of these spaces into houses of culture, modern dining halls, and cafes

initiated the next evolutionary phase of public catering architecture—the era of institutionalization and functional specialization.

Conclusion

Within the framework of this study, the process of transforming public catering buildings in Uzbekistan—specifically the shift from traditional teahouses to the network of "Red Teahouses"—was comprehensively analyzed through historical-architectural and socio-spatial lenses. Based on the empirical findings, the following fundamental conclusions have been reached:

Reconceptualization of the Spatial Platform: The traditional teahouse historically functioned as an informal, autonomous space for socialization and integration (a socio-spatial archetype) that linked caravanserais, marketplaces, and mahalla *guzar* centers within the socio-cultural fabric of the Uzbek population. Upon ascending to power, the Bolshevik regime recognized the profound social leverage inherent in this pre-existing spatial infrastructure and deemed its physical destruction illogical. Consequently, while preserving the architectural shell, they systematically replaced its internal functional substance with the ideological tenets of Soviet propaganda.

Ideological Weaponization of Architectural Space: Archival analysis reveals that Red Teahouses were not merely food service facilities, but were repurposed into the most aggressive and pervasive instruments of state propaganda, executing campaigns aimed at eradicating illiteracy, combating religious structures (serving as bases for the *League of Militant Atheists*), and enforcing rural collectivization. The structural transformation of sacred architectural monuments, such as the *Charmgar* Mosque in Karshi, into public dining zones provides explicit evidence of a strategy designed to ideologically reprogram the collective visual-spatial memory of the native population.

Seasonality and Functional Transformation: By the late 1930s, profound structural mutations occurred within the operations of the Red Teahouse network. The transition of the infrastructure from static, permanent buildings to dynamic, seasonal (field-based) propaganda and service modules demonstrates the complete integration of public catering architecture with agrarian production processes. This evolutionary trajectory culminated in the gradual eradication of the ideological prefix "Red" and the ultimate reassignment of these properties into specialized cultural centers, clubs, and institutionalized public catering networks.

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