

The Role of Corporate Identity in Sustainable Conservation: “Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi Mahdumlari”, Coffee Manufacturer and Retailer, Istanbul

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Abstract

Nowadays a new understanding of cultural conservation in line with sustainable development based on human values and able to create visions for future has appeared. This new perception that can be denominated as “cultural heritage” enables heritage to be owned and sustained more efficiently. Within the framework of this paper it is intended to understand and discuss on one hand the local interpretation of the international “sustainable conservation” and on the other the reflection of the local on the international, examining the case of a traditional family firm’s heritage perpetuation experience.

Keywords: Sustainable Development; Cultural Heritage; Corporate Identity; Coffee Enterprise

1. Introduction

Nowadays the relationship “heritage” establishes with “culture” where heritage is perceived as a static entity in relation to the past, brings forth the responsibility to tie heritage to the future a fact that eventually leads to protect it and to hand it over. As it is known although the protection of heritage or conservation has deep roots in the past, it turned into an ever-widening practical and theoretical discipline only from 19th century onwards. Heritage that had been defined basing itself on tangible values up until the middle of the 20th century had been perceived as “figures that are remembrances belonging to the past or objects of registration or record that would change in time into a cultural heritage inventory¹. Conservation that was limited for years to the mere making of this inventory gained a different perspective at the end of the twentieth century. As the positive impact of cultural heritage on social life, natural environment, ecology and economy has been recognised, cultural heritage has become the actual subject of the discussions concerned with ‘sustainable development’. Nevertheless the commodification of “cultural heritage”- the economic power of which has been noticed- and the risk of its transformation into a consumption object in the globalizing world resulted in the fact that focus was made to it’s the social value. And at the same time a “new heritage” understanding appeared in the 21st century. According to Fairclough this kind of heritage focuses more on the process of an interaction between people and their world instead of an interaction between people and objects, buildings or sites. Furthermore, it is about social and cultural interactions amongst and between people².

According to the Faro Convention “new heritage” is everyday life (the use of the past in the present and its renewal in the future) and as it is created again and again it is an a continuous process. In other words living heritage is the heritage that values the future and this kind of heritage changes continually³.The acceptance of the new heritage as a continually re-creatable, transformable and expandable phenomenon having mankind at its centre results in the fact that it becomes easier to appropriate and to sustain it.

In this article it is intended to analyze the “Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi Mahdumlari” within the context of this concept of “new heritage”. It is presently the headquarters of a chain of Turkish coffee manufacturer and retailers. Here the main objective is to understand how the preservation of a traditional enterprise that can be evaluated as valuable sets the appropriate criteria for future

¹ (Nora, 1996).

² (Fairclough, 2009).

³ (Fairclough, 2012).

developments. Furthermore it intends to demonstrate the effective role of the owners during this process.

2. “Genius Loci” and the Relationship “Heritage” Establishes with Coffee Culture

The building that houses the above mentioned enterprise embodying the “new heritage” concept and which is the object of our analyses may be considered as a representative of “coffee culture” having its roots in the 16th century. The retailer is located in Istanbul’s historical and commercial core, named *Tahtakale*. It is still one of the two most significant commercial areas of the town (fig.1).

In the traditional Ottoman bazaars streets and roads were named after the goods that were sold and the products that were manufactured there. A typical example is the street where the retailer was located; it was called “*tahmis*” meaning to sift or roast the green coffee bean.

At the beginning of the 16th century coffee beans originating from Yemen were spread to Hejaz and Cairo. Coffee reached Istanbul via Syria probably through pilgrimage caravans⁴. Sources agree on the fact that under Ottoman rule coffee was spread by the end of the 16th century, and it was sold for the first time in Tahtakale and that coffee culture was born there.

“When coffee reached Istanbul custom’s duty was paid, then stored in a *han* (traditional warehouse) waiting to be sold to the tradesmen. Bought from the herbalists by merchants coffee, after being roasted, was marketed in retailers shops”. Marketing took place around Tahtakale, the Egyptian Bazaar and in the surrounding hans, storehouses and shops. As the Egyptian Bazaar was a bazaar gathering tradesmen and namely herbalists⁵ this area turned into a centre of attraction for the coffee trade. According to a 17th century source there were two *tahmishanes* in Tahtakale and its surroundings and coffee trade could be taken under state control thanks to these establishments as coffee sales were monopolized and regulated through these *tahmishanes*⁶.

As explained above the commerce of green-coffee beans and the production of roasted and ground coffee gained such an importance that the streets in Tahtakale were named after coffee. The names of the streets which are still in use today left their mark on the place (the lieu) and have thus conveyed the traditional production schemes as “memory” from the past to the present. Memory is what we can remember, that is to say it has to do with the past we can relate to our present and it is related to the tangible context of the “locus”. Assman asserts that memory needs space...⁷ Whereas Hegel (1770-1831) considers space as the residue and product of the time that has to do with history⁸. “Becoming conscious of the capacity of space to keep knowledge and to preserve experience mankind has challenged the act of forgetting with the same method since mythological times”⁹.

As such Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi Mahdumları situated in the historical city core in Istanbul on the corner of Tahmis and Hasırcılar streets is an example that challenges to be forgotten (fig. 1). The enterprise is as it was in the past is still one of the representatives of coffee manufacturing and trade.

3. The Recreation of “Heritage” through Modernization and Modernism

As stated above, “the Mehmet Efendi coffee manufacturer and retailer” establishes a strong relationship with coffee culture being a heritage that transmits its “scent”, its “aroma” or its spirit to the place (the lieu) and it takes its strength from the past. The traditional family firm adopts “heritage” consciously and it produces it again and again for the future. In other words while heritage is conserved, it is at the same time reproduced or recreated. While tangible values (such as the building, the space, architectural elements such as lamps for example) are kept as objects of remembrance at the same time heritage is used as a source and investigation for the future.

4. From Past to Present: the Changing and Developing Manufacturing Identity of Heritage

4 (Hattox, 1996).

5 (Bostan, 2001).

6 (Ayvazoğlu, 2011).

7 (Assman, 2001).

8 (Özaslan, 2010).

9 (Demir, 2012).

As coffee turned into a valuable commercial commodity in the 19th century in order to promote coffee and to develop the demand within the frame of a marketing policy importance was given to the establishment of coffeehouses. To serve this end it is asserted that the first coffeehouse was opened in Tahtakale and that coffee was introduced by the Syrian Hakm and Shams¹⁰ to Istanbul. At the beginning places called coffeehouses had double functions; they used to be traditional commercial spaces where green coffee beans were treated and brewed ready to be cooked.

Hattox reports that coffee mills did not play an important role in shaping the spatial layout of cafés as in the following centuries wholesale traders appeared who supplied grinded coffee to cafés¹¹. In Tahtakale from the 19th century onwards with the increased demand for coffee, many shops were opened where coffee was processed and sold. One of those shops was the origin of the Mehmet Efendi Coffee Company.

In time the spice and raw coffee business Mehmet Efendi inherited from his father in 1871 gradually evolved into an enterprise where coffee beans were roasted and grinded. Hence the shop which was originally dealing with the trade of green-coffee beans and spices was transformed into a coffee manufacturer. After a short period of time Mehmet Efendi who sold grinded coffee developed into a well-known business and begun to be called as Mehmet Efendi Coffee¹².

The enterprise which was organized by Mehmet Efendi was appropriated as heritage by his three sons and was reproduced/recreated at the same time as it was improved. After Mehmet Efendi passed away in 1931 the family adopted “*Kurukahveci*” (roasted and ground coffee) as its surname in 1934 and the enterprise entered into a process of modernization thanks to Mehmet Efendi’s visionary sons. Hulusi Bey (1904-1934) who was one of Mehmet Efendi’s sons of the time aimed at increasing the capacity of the production. And on the site of the original family shop on Tahmis Sokak he commissioned İsmail Zühtü Başar (1886, Istanbul-1949, Istanbul), one of the architects of the time, to design the coffee manufacturer and retailer that we can still see today¹³.

In industrial buildings the main factor that shapes architecture is generally the activity which takes place in it, here it consists of manufacturing. The architect Zühtü Bey, in his writing in the architectural magazine of the era *Mimar*, states that after examining various coffee businesses in Berlin and Vienna he designed the building in order to address local necessities. In the same article Başar specified that the building was designed to fulfill a double function: coffee would be processed and then it would be sold¹⁴.

It can be drawn from Başar’s words that the building was conceived as a small factory and that coffee milling was considered as the crucial function for the overall design of the building. In other words filling, milling, grinding, discharging which are part of a coffee mill (coffee grinder) was adapted to the building. The building was and is still a three storeyed building, and it was so designed as on its upper floor filling was realized, on its ground floor grinding was done and on its basement discharging was solved (fig. 2, image 1).

The coffee beans roasted in a separate space nearby were carried by dockers and poured into the timber coffee bin. Grinding was and is still made on the first floor by the three mills brought from Czechoslovakia in 1932¹⁵. After milling the coffee is collected in the bins in the basement, directed to the packaging unit on the ground floor by a dumb waiter and then finally is put up for sale (figg. 3, 4, image 6). The manufacturing and trading processes are regarded in a holistic way by combining the vertically arranged production activity with the horizontally planned spaces such as the storage in the basement, shop on the ground floor and the offices on the first floor. The traditional business enterprise has been reconstructed as ‘heritage’ while it is being modernized.

5. The Appropriation of a New Architectural Identity via Modernity

¹⁰(Hattox, 1996).

¹¹(Hattox, 1996).

¹²www.mehmetefendi.com/mehmetefendi/eng/pages/kkme1.html.

¹³www.mehmetefendi.com/mehmetefendi/eng/pages/kkme1.html.

¹⁴(Başar, 1933).

¹⁵From the interview realized on 09.09.2014 with Mehmet Kurukahveci.

Although the designer received classical education in the School of Fine Arts where he had studied in the first quarter of the 20th century, the building commissioned by the family was executed according to Art Deco principles. The holistic approach concerning production and commerce was also a determining factor in the use of the architectural style employed here. Whereas we can discern a faithful application of modernistic principles in the overall design, in the overall planification, the decoration has streamline deco properties. The building is therefore an early and qualified example for this type of architecture. In fact from its facade to the details of its stairs, from its lamps to its doorknobs as to its chimney, it is designed according to *gesamtkunstwerk* principles (fig. 2, images 1-4). The plan is free. The characteristics of the style are visible in horizontal window frames, the three layered string courses that divide the ground floor from the first floor, the horizontally arranged iron balustrades and the geometric and floral ornaments on the door knockers.

According to Tahsin Öz who was in 1928 the director of the museum of the Topkapı Palace after his graduation from the school in 1917 among the many restorations Başar conducted there was the Topkapı Palace complex too. In a publication dating back to 1949 and dedicated to the works undertaken on the field of the palace Öz reports that he can even claim that today the parts and rooms that today we can restore owes much to the quick maintenance that constitutes the first principles of renovation. Öz also informs that Başar constructed many buildings in Istanbul in addition to his restoration projects and had to be engaged in building contracting works¹⁶. For this reason the building can be seen as one of the still existing works representing some expounding elements to understand Zühtü Başar's design skills and architecture at large.

The emergence of the style followed a similar path as in Europe. The style that is named Art Deco containing geometrical ornaments became popular and served as the first step towards modern buildings in Istanbul in a similar way to Europe in the post-war 1920s¹⁷. Art Deco became popular in the 1930s in Istanbul and survived up until 1939 in the various districts of the city. It can be claimed that the architectural language employed in the building is one of the representatives of the transition from the traditional Ottoman design understanding to the universal forms of Modernism in Istanbul.

It can also be observed that the same style was employed in the company's Kadıköy sales branch in 1989. As stated by the current owners of the company Art Deco was deliberately chosen for the new building by the architects¹⁸. Thus it can be claimed that probably in time the streamline Art Deco style in Tahtakale Tahmis Street has been decided by the firm to be used as the specific style to serve as a corporate identity and as the image of the enterprise.

As it can be seen at the Mehmed Efendi's web site, the corporate logo and other promotional elements designed by İhap Hulusi (1898-1986) are also in Art Deco style, and this stylistic choice became an important step in turning a small business into a new brand (fig. 5).

6. Retaining 'Heritage' as Corporate Identity and its Connection with the Future

Mehmet Efendi Coffee Company still dynamically continues its business and conveys its physical and intangible assets to the future generations. This traditional company is yet to be registered as a heritage item and recognised by heritage experts but its significance has already been well understood, valued and improved by the members of the family. Instead of an imaginary significance imposed by external appreciation, a genuine, spontaneous and naturally evolved heritage has been sustainably created.

In certain communities, heritage consciousness is still dominated by elites and expert concerns. Looked after by professionals and academics, one can ask the role of the public in this process?¹⁹ In a world where the significance of heritage is emphasised in the context of society, the success of conservation is directly related to what is understood as heritage by the general public.

When we look at Mehmet Efendi Company through the 'new heritage' concept as mentioned in the introduction it can be much better understood how heritage is considered in a holistic approach. The 'human' sits at the very centre of the heritage concept of the company which reflects the efforts, determination and philosophy of the whole family since Mehmet Efendi. The moral heritage of

¹⁶(Öz, 1949).

¹⁷(Batur,1984).

¹⁸From the interview realized on 09.09.2014 with Mehmet Kurukahveci.

¹⁹(Palmer. 2009).

Mehmet Efendi, has become the main motivator behind the development of the company, and the creative mentality and sincerity of the new generations have transmitted ‘the heritage’ to the present day and created the company’s vision.

Heritage has not been taken into consideration by focusing on the ‘product’ only but also the people who manufacture the product and the relationship between the company and the space are emphasised. The continuity of the relationship between coffee culture, which goes back to the 16th century, and the company, which marked its scent and spirit to its locus, has increased the historical significance of the company. While the relationship between the historic company and its past can be best read through the space, its connection with the future can be properly understood over the traditional production method and its architecture which emerged after modernism and inherited by present generations.

The company, which was modernised and reproduced as ‘heritage’ in the 1930s, has been preserved with regard to its authentic function and architecture, and could successfully be developed into a part of cultural life. As well as the items which have been inherited from the company — namely the building, furniture, lamps, machinery etc. — the adventure of the heritage as a process is also important.

Fairclough describes the definition of heritage in the Faro Convention as not only limited to ‘the things we wish to pass on intact’ but also ‘everything we have inherited’²⁰. As stated Palmer, heritage is a concept that can be reproduced by continuously adding something on it. It cannot be ‘merely preserved and protected’, but instead it can be ‘modified and enhanced’²¹. This perception helps the recognition of the significance of heritage with respect to its economic, social and environmental dimensions in sustainable development. Fojut, in his assessment on Faro, states that rather than being used by society, the new concept is that heritage should serve society²².

The use of or derive benefit from heritage, consciously or unconsciously, lies in the background of keeping the Company as a family owned business. While the family owned small business was being renewed in parallel to the increasing production and improved technology, a new heritage has been created by appreciating an architectural style which was reflected in the corporate identity.

First generation architectural historians (as Aslanoğlu or Batur) see this style as the expression of the progressive, modern, reformist values of the young Republic which superseded the outdated Ottoman Empire²³. The continuity of the company and its well rooted history have been emphasised in the promotion and marketing of the coffee, and therefore heritage has been used in this sense. Today the company which is well developed beyond Tahtakale and emerged in the world markets is supported by its well protected heritage, and therefore it establishes a vision for the future.

In conclusion in Tahtakale, at the very centre of Istanbul’s historic trading district, the Mehmet Efendi Coffee Company is a ‘living heritage’ which defines its identity through the values inherited from its own past. It has created a ‘new heritage’ in line with the changing conditions and planned its future by using its legacy as a source of inspiration.

In terms of this heritage ‘human’, the ‘manufacturing process led by human’ and the ‘product’ are all perceived as a whole. In Mehmet Efendi Coffee Company ‘heritage’ has been recognised as the principle component of the corporate identity. Its role in the development of the company has been valued, and with this approach the continuity of the heritage has been established. As a local example of the universally defined ‘sustainable heritage concept’, we may say that Mehmet Efendi Coffee Company successfully represents the importance of the recognition of the heritage in its sustainability and at the same time gives constructive messages to the concept of universal conservation.

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²⁰(Fairclough, 2012).

²¹(Palmer, 2009).

²²(Fojut, 2009).

²³(Aslanoğlu, 2010).

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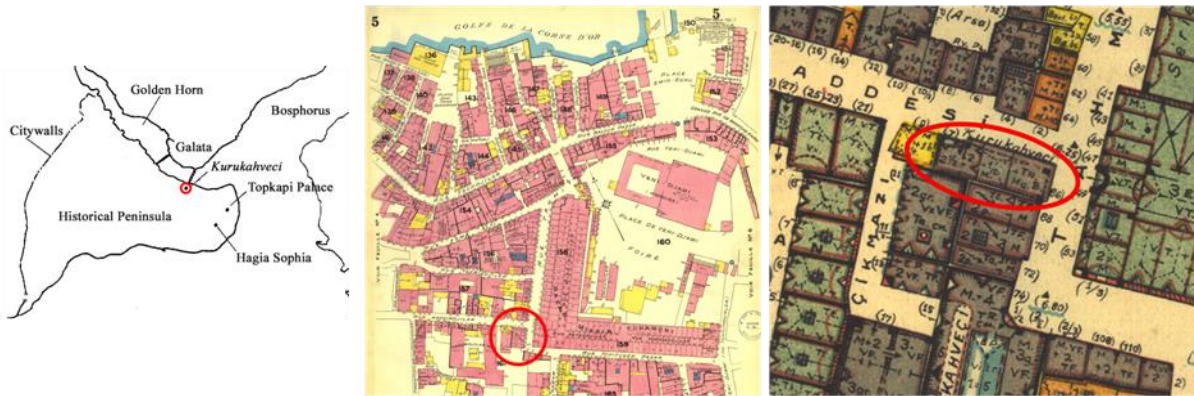


Figure 1: The location of the traditional building in Istanbul's historical commercial area. Goad (1905) and Pervititch (1944).

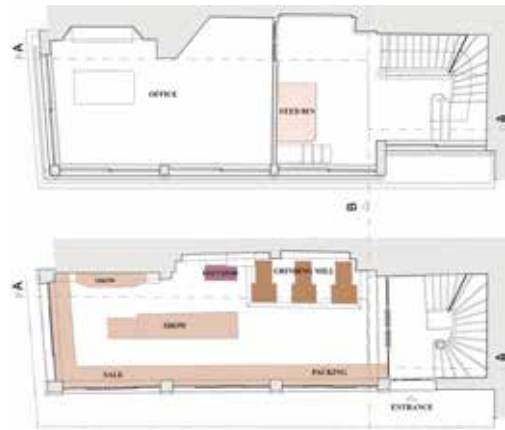
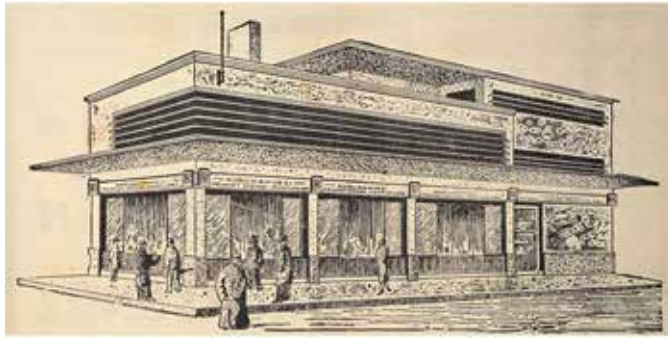


Figure 2: A drawing of the building (the 1930's).

Figure 3: Plan.

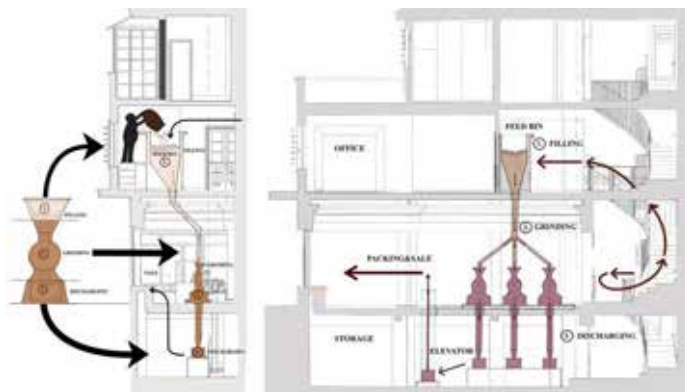


Image 1: The facade (Mimar 1933)

Figure 4: Sections and the production scheme.



Image 2: The signboard of the enterprise(Mimar 1933).

Figure 5: The logo and poster in Art Deco style.



Image 3: Views from Tahmis street (1933 and 2014).

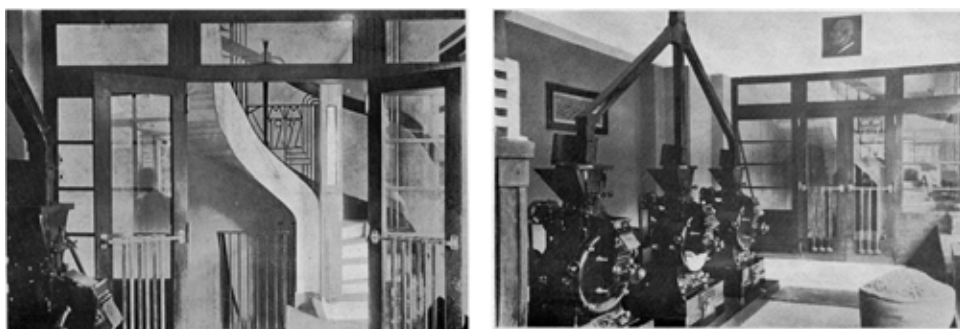


Image 4: Indoor photographs (Mimar 1933).



Image 5: The different phases of production within the building. Filling, milling and discharge.



Image 6: Art Deco stairw

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