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The coffee scene in Glasgow's West End: On the class practices of the new urban middle classes

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ABSTRACT

The shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism has led to the emergence of new socioeconomic arrangements as well as the proliferation of new urban cultural forms. These developments have coincided with gentrification and the arrival of the new middle classes in inner-city neighbourhoods resulting in the emergence of new consumption spaces and new urban cultures. Focusing on Glasgow's West End with a vibrant urban scene, this paper explores some characteristics of the new urban middle classes and their motivations for frequenting and patronising new urban consumption scenes. Drawn on a case study of specialty coffee bars, the study argues that specialty coffee consumers through their everyday consumption preferences and sharing a set of ethical dispositions and cultural practices, subjectively and objectively define and demarcate their sense of class.

1. Introduction

Every day, millions of people all over the world together drink hundreds of millions of cups of coffee. A large number of these consumers live in North America and Europe, where coffee has become a central part of daily diets and social rituals. Coffee gluttons would traditionally frequent coffeehouses, cafés, cantinas, and more recently supermarkets and gas stations, but they are increasingly drawn to swanky espresso bars (Bookman, 2014; Rath & Gelmers, 2014, 2016; Zukin, 2010). Such changes in urban consumption are not limited to pretentious caffeine beverages, but is rapidly broadening to other goods and services, from bread, beer, wine, whiskey, burgers, ice cream, olive oil, and mineral water to barbershop services and bicycles. The emergence of new types of amenities—such as specialty coffee bars, hot bakeries, and craft beer breweries—are some of the more palpable examples of the new spaces of cultural consumption in everyday urban life.

Urban scholars have tried to trace, describe, analyse, and explain the proliferation of new forms of consumption from different angles and at different scales. Some have argued that consumption and consumer culture are strongly related to the degrading of manufacturing industries and the rise of cognitive-cultural economies (Gordon, 2004; Kloosterman, 2010; Scott, 2007, 2008). Cities that have undergone such transformations have witnessed the development of clusters of creative producer and consumer services as well as the concomitant rise of consumption spaces. Others have linked the spread of new urban consumption spaces to a fundamental shift between production and consumption in cities where the balance of power between the producer and consumer that pervades daily life has changed in favour of the latter. Put differently, cities are increasingly built around their utility as sites for consumption (Jayne, 2006; Latham, 2003). For Zukin (2010), however, those changes are signs of gentrification. She suggests that changing retail landscapes are consequent to the arrival of the new middle classes and the latter's search for consumption spaces that fit their distinctive lifestyles and fulfil their consumption preferences (Hagemans, Hendriks, Rath, & Zukin, 2015; Zukin, 1995, 2008; Zukin et al., 2009).

These multiscalar interrelations, one way or another, have changed the demographic composition of cities within most advanced, post-industrial economies. Through investing in clusters of cultural amenities, cities that have gone through some fundamental economic changes seem to be following a new urban agenda in order to attract the new

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middle classes as a booster of the local economy. One cluster of amenities that received both the new middle classes and scholarly attention recently consists of *specialty coffee bars* (for example Bookman, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Chadios, 2005; Gelmers, 2015; Manzo, 2010, 2014, 2015; Martins, 2015; Rath & Gelmers, 2014, 2016; Shaker Ardekani, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Shaker Ardekani & Rath, 2017; Shiau, 2016; Woldoff, Lozzi, & Dilks, 2013). This article aims to shed light on consumption practices in this cluster. More specifically, it focuses on the patrons of specialty coffee bars so as to understand their lifestyle preferences and consumer choices, and more generally the social identities and class practices of what we would label the new urban middle classes.

We decided to carry out our explorations in Glasgow, Scotland, a city that during the past decades has undergone profound economic restructuring and fits—at least partially—the cognitive-cultural discourse. As Turok and Bailey (2004b) state, deindustrialisation left Glasgow with some of the worst socioeconomic problems in Britain, but the city has managed to pull itself out of the mud by a host of energetic cultural-financial initiatives from reinforcing the city's long tradition of successful sports and art festivals, strengthening cultural infrastructure and employment to supporting education and training systems and changing economic environment. Indeed, in recent years the city experienced relative economic success. Glasgow and particularly its bustling West End with a vibrant urban setting and a wide-ranging coffee scene tailoring to certain types of people provide us with an interesting opportunity to ethnographically investigate what is going on within specialty coffee bars, who visits them, what characteristics, lifestyles, and mentalities visitors share, and how visitors practice, perform, and express their sense of class.

The study sets out to explore coffee consumption as a lens through which to understand the coffee consumption habits of the new urban middle classes more specifically, on the one hand, and their broader consumption practices and tastes, on the other. This is an interesting innovative approach to understanding urban consumption and lifestyles. Moreover, a strong contribution of the paper is to bring together multiple ideas that have been developed somewhat separately by others. The paper draws upon several streams of research and scholarship and tries to combine often weakly integrated analytical schools of thought including theories of practice, distinction, sociology of consumption and consumer behaviour, the body, cosmopolitanism, omnivorism, connoisseurship, creative class, cognitive-cultural economy, environmentalism, and sociability/connectivity.

In the remaining part of the paper, we first offer a brief review of the Glasgow's new urban agenda and coffee consumption in West End. Thereafter we describe our ethnographic research methods and present the findings. We conclude that patrons of specialty coffee bars in Glasgow's West End have a set of shared cultural dispositions and embodied mindsets.

2. The revenant Glasgow

With a population of nearly 600,000, Glasgow is the biggest city in Scotland and the third largest in the UK (Glasgow City Council Area, 2015). In early days, its economy like other industrial cities relied heavily on manufacturing, textile, shipbuilding, and marine engineering industries. In the 1950s and 1960s, thus in Fordist times, the quality of the urban life deteriorated and later on in 1970s, many Glaswegians decided to move to suburbs. But when manufacturing industries also relocated, or closed down entirely, Glasgow was facing unprecedented socioeconomic problems. Between 1961 and 1981, Glasgow lost around 142,000 jobs and approximately one-third of its population (Checkland, 1981; Lever & Moore, 1986; Turok & Bailey, 2004a). As Turok and Bailey (2004b) write, parts of the city were burdened with substantial vacant, derelict, and contaminated land as well as poor quality housing. More importantly, the labour-market skills and networks of the Glaswegian labour force that served their purpose in the Fordist time, had mostly become obsolete and not very appropriate for finding new employment opportunities within the Post-Fordist era. In response, the city launched a series of strategic programmes and initiatives aimed at attracting major inward investments in financial services and biotechnology, on the one hand, and promoting re-urbanisation with a plan to lure highly-skilled people, on the other. These interventions aimed to boost employment, housing, schooling, healthcare, and other infrastructural aspects. And indeed, Glasgow did gradually show signs of economic revival (CBI Scotland, 2003; Gibb, 1983; Maver, 2002; Reed, 1993). A bunch of creative start-ups, educational amenities (including universities), new entertainment spaces, as well as cultural festivals are now among the city's showpieces, all supported by cunning city branding campaign. These profound socioeconomic changes have coincided with the rise of a new urban culture and new consumption spaces in Glasgow in general and in the West End in particular.

What we observe here is commonplace in many other world cities. In general, processes of deindustrialisation, neoliberalism, and globalisation have enhanced global flows of capital, goods, commodities, ideas, images, symbols, objects, and people, and these helped foster the proliferation of a skilled, professionalised workforce with high levels of cognitive and cultural skills (Hamnett, 1994; Sassen, 1991, 1994). These new social classes—roughly equivalent to Florida's (2002) 'creative class' or Scott's (2012; 2014) 'symbolic analysts'—have gravitated to inner-cities and changed the retail landscape.

These new middle classes are not 'new' according to their social composition since they are part of the broader middle classes. Their newness is considered primarily by their professional class, based on knowledge rather than property, which is highly related to post-industrial societies and Post-Fordist production-logics, as well as their new consumption practices through which they constantly redefine the middle-class identities that are increasingly celebrated for having liberal attitudes and associated with resource-intensive lifestyles (Lange & Meier, 2009). Their educational background, additionally, assists them to subjectively differentiate themselves from old, traditional middle classes through their engagement with political debates as well as a broad, eclectic taste in cultural items. Thus, the concept refers to more than just an income group: it comprises social, political, environmental, and economic dimensions, and likewise operates as a cultural construct combining both tradition and modernity in its ideologies and consumption styles (Anantharaman, 2014; Jayne, 2006).

The reasons behind consumption practices of the new urban middle class are manifold and anything but univocal or coherent and can be configured in various ways. From theories of practice, this class can be grasped as a class-in-practice, defined by its everyday, mundane consumption practices through which they perform their social position (Bourdieu, 1977; Gripsrud, Hovden, & Moe, 2011; Michalski, 2015; Warde, 2014). According to Bourdieu's theory of distinction (1984), this class employs consumption as a communicator and a sign of distinction in order to subjectively and objectively define and demarcate their social position. In so doing, members of this class express their identities through symbolic representation in taste and lifestyle, and a desired focus on symbolic rather than material rewards (Shaker Ardekani & Rath, 2017; Warde, 2015). Besides public performance and symbolic class expression, they share a vision of consumer sovereignty, a desire for a certain quality of life that involves both collective goods (the neighbourhood and the city where they live in as well as environmental concerns, equality, and democracy) and private happiness (Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Johnston, 2017; Kennedy, Parkins, & Johnston, 2018). Today's new urban middle classes tend to operate around the idea that they can and must control themselves through, amongst other things, looking after their bodies, state of health, and environment (Sassatelli, 2007). They are what Cohen (2000) would call 'citizen-consumers,' who simultaneously fulfil personal desires and civic obligations through their consumption practices.

Glasgow's West End—historically an affluent neighbourhood

(Simpson, 1972; Thompson, 2000; Urquhart, 2000)—was evidently affected by these developments, a process that was further promoted by the municipal's policies to promote the area as a business district (Glasgow City Council, 2016; Leishman, 2009). For instance, Great Western Road as well as Byres Road have witnessed the emergence of clusters of new amenities, notably cafés, specialty coffee bars, craft beer bars, wine bars, fusion restaurants, artisanal bakeries, bookshops, music venues, art galleries, boutiques, vintage shops, hair, nail and beauty salons, travel agencies, ethnic caterings, ethnic therapies, and design and tailor shops. These clusters shaping unique urban scenes (Silver, 2011; Silver & Clark, 2015, 2013) have been argued broadly as signs of residential and commercial gentrification (Blasius, Friedrichs, & Rühl, 2016; Hyra, 2017; Lees & Wyly, 2010; Zukin, 2010).

Most specialty coffee bars (both in West End and also in other parts of Glasgow) have particular aesthetics. They have been decorated with make-shift furniture, such as tables made of used doors or other 'authentic' raw materials and 'back to nature' styles (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Zukin, 2008), whilst the chalk layers have been carefully chipped off the wall, making the naked bricks and power lines visible (Rath & Gelmers, 2014, 2016; Rath & Shaker Ardekani, 2018). On the counter, one usually finds an assortment of muffins, brownies and other (organic) foodstuffs, and flyers of nearby hot yoga classes and other cool activities.

The proliferation of distinctive lifestyles and the emergence of new consumption spaces has so far mainly been studied through the lens of gentrification (Brooks, 2000; Zukin, 2010) and not so much as a phenomenon in its own right. In this paper, however, we will examine the proliferation of new urban styles by focusing on the ways of doing things in specialty coffee bars.

3. Data, methods, and approach

Glasgow West End with its vivacious urban setting and diverse coffee-scene provides us with an excellent case for analysing new urban consumption styles within a revitalising, post-industrial city. We chose to carry out, what Yin (2009) calls, a within-case comparison. Such a comparison contributes to the depth of the research and guides the investigation of different patterns of visitors, their characteristics, motivations, and social practices. The findings from the within-case analysis also provide a clearer understanding of the structural, underlying factors that explain differences in the relation between the specialty coffee bars and consumers and their incentives. In this respect, four specialty coffee bars have been randomly selected as the units of analysis (thereby taking account with the spatial distribution of the selected coffeehouses in order to cover a vast area of West End).

An ethnographic approach provides a more detailed understanding of the social significance of the contemporary consumption practices and their relationship to the individual motivations from the insider's perspective. The study, in this light, relies on a combination of visual and verbal semiotics. For doing so, narrative accounts of respondents, as well as direct observations of consumption spaces, clients, and personnel have been collected. In this respect, the qualitative dataset includes 80 h of unobtrusive observation and 21 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with both baristas and visitors in the selected four coffeehouses from September until November 2015. Observations, lasting between 60 and 180 min, were made on both weekdays and weekends and at different times of the day covering a variety of customers and varied patterns of social practices. In order to have an exhaustive sampling, interviewees were selected based on several criteria such as age (between 18 and 64 years old), gender, ethnicity, and social activities practised within the coffeehouses. Participants were asked about their socioeconomic backgrounds, their choice of coffee-place and coffee connoisseurship. Furthermore, in order to examine their taste, habit, and cultural know-how, they were also asked a set of cultural questions about their musical tastes, choice of news, books, hobbies, travelling, sports, eating-out patterns, and other cultural activities.

As Zukin and Maguire (2004) suggest, the goal of a sociological study on consumption is neither to praise nor to condemn consumers but to understand how and why people learn to consume in different ways. The goal of this investigation, by the same token, is to uncover the different definitions, discourses, meanings, and approaches towards consumption in general and specialty coffee consumption in particular in order to illuminate some dimensions of the lifestyles and mentalities that are emerging in the cognitive-cultural economy. Moreover, a thorough knowledge about the regulars of specialty coffee bars, their incentives and social practices could shed lights on the larger societal trends that could be related to, for example, changing cultural preferences, public behaviours, or various macroeconomic developments. Simply put, micro-level analysis can provide macro-level insights.

4. The class practices of the new urban middle classes

Our study in West End shows interesting points related to the sociocultural dynamics of the new urban middle classes. The conducted ethnographic investigation suggests that the regular visitors of the selected coffeehouses tend to share a set of qualities which we have categorised them into five themes: human capital; omnivorism, connoisseurship; inner/outer body maintenance; and connectivity. We will now examine the results of this inductive endeavour in detail.

4.1. Highly educated and connected to the creative sector

Possessing a bachelor degree or more, all interviewees are highly educated (students, university lectures, academic researchers). Moreover, almost all of them stated that they are living on their own or with working partners, constituting mostly single or double households and to only some extent, small families. David, 34, a barista at iCafe, categorises the patrons based on daily time:

> In the morning between 9 and 2 o'clock, you get the people who watch morning TVs, housewives; there is also a mosque over there, and you could see people coming and going here after their prayers; and then you get students; and then you have people coming before or after work; people are also having work meeting here.

Quite consistent with Rath and Gelmers' (2014) explorations of the specialty coffee consumption in Amsterdam, our empirical details demonstrate that the majority of patrons are pursuing highly knowledge-intensive occupations in academia and/or the creative and culture-related sectors. The prominence of knowledge- and culture-professionals is evidently related to the presence of creative industries in Glasgow's West End. It also shows the shifting urban agenda and how local government has been boosting the economy through fostering investment in the cognitive and cultural sectors as well as advanced producer services (Glasgow City Council, 2016).

The presence of the stroller-pushing parents and creative cool visitors has appeared to be also in harmony with Zukin et al.'s (2009) argument that new stores, cafés, and bars become hangouts and places for social networking for young parents, bohemians, and gentrifiers. Audrey, 29, describes Artisan Roast and its customers as:

> Trendy... I would say trendy. Quite often a little bit trendy, you can see people who dress sort of trendy, hipster style. But probably all kinds of ages... friends coming to chat, a narrow section of students who are a little bit wealthier, and moms, and professionals... Also, older people who sometimes like a little bit classier or more kind of into the scene or this kind of specialty coffee... You don't really see lower classes that much here...

Our empirical data propose that visitors of the selected specialty coffee bars tend to be mostly students, not yet established artists, cool people searching for cheap accommodation, and upwardly mobile people in a professional or managerial capacity. They have adequate

financial means to engage in the rituals of the cultural consumption (see also Blasius et al., 2016; Ley, 1996). Quite compatible with the existing literature, our investigations suggest that the patrons of specialty coffee bars personify and propel the process of residential and commercial gentrification, a process that in West End has been accompanied by upgrading the neighbourhood and displaying urban diversity (Kihato, Massoumi, Ruble, & Subir, 2010; Meissner & Vertovec, 2015; Vertovec, 2007). For instance, Shekofteh, 35, a visitor at iCafe, depicts her neighbourhood as a:

> (…) quite wealthy, affluent, educated [neighbourhood]... There are a lot of Asians here, particularly a lot of Asian families... There are a lot of young families here too, young couples and young children because schools here are quite good, and there are a lot of students here because you have two universities here... I would say that they are quite young, not too many older people unless they are living with their families... It is expensive, it is not cheap, and also quite multicultural; there are many new shops here; there are many Arabic, Persian, Japanese, and Chinese places along this street which is nice... There is also a mosque here, another 2 religious centres here as well...

4.2. Openness towards divergent cultural experiences

Related to the previous point, our interviews show that the visitors are interested in new cultural practices. They have appetites for different cultures, artworks, musical genres, foods, garments, and so forth. Some of the interviewees mentioned their passion for ethnic catering and therapies. For instance, Sharon, 59, a visitor at Urban Brew, describes her massage experiences and eating-out habit:

> I love Thai massage; it slows down the pace of my life... I eat everything, I love Arabic food as well. There are many different restaurants here. My husband and I are both quite open. My children love fish so we go for Chinese noodles and fish sometimes. We try different cuisines, sometimes we go for Indian and sometimes European restaurants.

Peter, 28, at Avenue G says that:

> I can eat anything and because of that, I'm always interested in drinks. So in a sense, I'm interested in beer, whisky, wine. I will eat anything. I'm a meat eater but I like trying vegan foods. I will try anything... I go to gigs a lot to listen to music, stand-up comedy, I interested in going to museum and galleries... I keep myself quite busy.

They seem to be representing a specific cosmopolitan lifestyle as a 'stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity' (Hannerz, 1996, p. 103; see also; Nowicka & Rovisco, 2009; Binnie, Holloway, Millington, & Young, 2006). As an intellectual or aesthetic disposition, cosmopolitanism has a close connection to cultural omnivorousness (Peterson, 1992, 2005). Both concepts are, to some extent, pointing at material practices and engagements with non-local cultural goods (Nava, 2002). Our empirical findings are also in line with Ley's (2004: 160) statements about the new urban middle classes and gentrification, where he argues that the 'residents of gentrified inner-city neighbourhoods […] have multiple points of openness to cosmopolitanism'. This line of work, further, backs up Bookman's (2013b, 2014) arguments about cosmopolitanism. Bookman (2013a) has also made a similar connection between cosmopolitanism and omnivorism in her studies on specialty coffee consumption in Canadian cities.

Michael, 43, at Avenue G, explains his cosmopolitan omnivorism:

> I listen to almost everything from rock to classic... I also go to concerts and follow them both in and outside of Glasgow... it is a way of life that is I can easily identify with a lot of people here... if someone asks me what your favourite kitchen is I would say I don't have a favourite one... I'd like to go to many different places whether it is Spanish or Japanese; I'd like to experience everything...I also read a lot of biographies, history, geography, politics, economics... I also really like to travel so I read a lot about travelling...

4.3. Connoisseurship

Our ethnographic study hints the taste and connoisseurship visitors display with regard to coffee and the making of coffee through their customised orders and employed coffee terminology. Virtually all interviewees shared with us their knowledge of specialty coffees, their quality, and tastes. For example, Marco, 41, a visitor at Artisan Roast, clarifies his distinct taste of coffee:

> Look at people: they all come here because of the coffee. Because this is a place by reputation. The first time I arrive here [Glasgow] someone told me if you are into coffee, then you should go and check out this place. This is the first place that was flagged up. They have a reputation in West End... There is so much variety and by now it is very difficult for me to navigate. But if you ask me what is your favourite by recollection, I would tell you it is the Colombian blend that they have. I am not a huge fan of AeroPress and I mostly stick to espressos... There is a sense I want to give to myself, quality consumption, so I go to get the proper coffee.

Yusuf, 29, a visitor at Avenue G, brags about his coffee connoisseurship:

> I don't know if I am a coffee geek, but I know good coffee from bad coffee. I've learned how to make steamed milk properly and I've also tried latte art a little bit just for fun.

For Peter, however, connoisseurship means authenticity:

> I think if you ask people about coffee and good coffee they wouldn't talk about Starbucks. They're aware that there are different sectors and people no longer want to get all things from one place. That's a real yearning for authenticity, and you can see it in coffee, and about almost anything. It is a real desire for authentic things. And there is a belief that supermarkets cannot replicate that authenticity.

The desire of coffee people for authentic quality coffee appear in line with foodism. Johnston (2017), see also Johnston & Baumann, 2015) argues that aware consumers search for alternatives to mainstream market options. It can be also interpreted that specialty coffee consumers through showing their expertise in coffee not only represent their high investment in cultural capital via practising their distinctive consumption habits, but consolidate and maintain their identity and lifestyle (Featherstone, 1991, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Warde, 1994), demarcate their group boundary (Clarke, Doel, & Housiaux, 2003; McCracken, 1988), and also form their social networks (Evans, Foxall, & Jamal, 2009; Lizardo, 2006). For instance, Sophia, 29, a visitor at Artisan Roast, says:

> I drink decaf, and I know that decaf over here is nice whereas some places they don't even know what it is and how to make it decaffeinated. It's quality that brings me here... I sometimes go to the city centre, but often I get disappointed. But there is a couple of places that I always go because of their good quality.

Shekofteh also adds that:

> Some people come here to catch up with friends, some come to get coffee and go, some to read for a while, some come and sit for hours and use the internet. It is mixed here but a lot of people come here for work or studying, I've noticed. I think because it is quite relaxed so they could stay here for hours. It is comfortable and there is plenty of stuff you could get if you are hungry or something... They are quite mix in age, I think here is quite wide demographic because

here is local to a lot of people, so different types of people live here and they're coming here.

4.4. Maintaining the inner and outer body

Our investigations points to another form of cultural capital. Visitors appear to pay special attention to their bodies. Almost every interviewee told us that they exercise regularly and dedicate time to remain healthy. Audrey, for instance, states that:

> […] the quality, I mean it's very important to me what I buy and eat. If I spend my money, I spend on quality… I'm interested in balanced health and happiness… I go biking, I go walking quite a bit, I go to yoga and meditation as well.

Clair, 28, a young mom with her baby girl at Urban Brew tells that:

> I go buggy-fitting. With a group of other moms, we go to Kelvingrove Park, and there are moms buggying. So I go there and start doing a lot of work there.

They seem to be physically fit, concerned with healthy eating, following a certain diet, running, working out, and going to yoga classes (Turner, 2008; Shilling, 2003; Featherstone, 2010). Through the consumption of coffee in specialty coffee bars, the visitors not only show their refined (or reflexive) taste (Guthman, 2003) but also their 'crafted bodies', which according to Bourdieu (1984) is a subtle representation of the class. Peter, for example, stresses:

> I predominantly go to the gym a lot. I quit smoking about 18 months ago, and I used that as an opportunity to start thinking about my health more seriously. So I go to the gym four to five days a week. I try to eat healthy as well.

The visitors are not only concerned with their 'inner body' but also the 'outer body', i.e. the earth and its natural environment (Featherstone, 2011; Shilling, 2007). Most individuals interviewed practise an eco-friendly lifestyle through buying biologic and organic food, walking and/or biking, taking public transport, economical use of water and energy, and separating and recycling garbage. Lisa, 34, a young mom, at Artisan Roast, for instance, says:

> When I'm cooking for myself, I like to cook organic chicken, for example. It is just a small difference, but it is enough… I had my own house for years, and then I was always dividing the trash into glass, paper, and plastics… I'm not saying that I am always cooperating with it but in small ways, I'd like to do it, and I do believe that it makes a difference.

The emergence of pro-environmental behaviours amongst the participants derives from their responsible consumption by which eco-conscious and socio-economically privileged individuals practise and promote environmentally-friendly lifestyles as a way to contribute to the quality of life and better neighbourhood, city, and environment (Soron, 2010). Additionally, their environmental concern as an altruistic attitude and a form of the moral regulator of action leads them towards protecting nature through individual restrictions and modification of their personal consumption patterns (Lange & Meier, 2009). Furthermore, through working on both inner and outer bodies, regulars of specialty coffee bars seem to be enhancing their self-worth and self-identity.

4.5. Connectivity

Traditionally, coffeehouses have been a suitable environment for people to socialise with each other, meet people, and make new friends. For Habermas (1989), moreover, these institutions are part and parcel of the civil society and venues of discussion and democratic political participation, a part of the sphere of public opinion. At face value, specialty coffee bars reminisce old coffeehouses as a gathering place for intellectuals, artists, philosophers, and other urban thinkers. Although not entirely, yet through providing a sense of a third place (Oldenburg, 1999 [1989], see also Rath & Gelmers, 2014 for a more critical view), as an informal gathering place between work and home where people meet and engage in a range of social interactions, specialised coffeehouses seem to be giving their customers a space to practise and embody their social identities. Close observations, however, show that visitors tend to engage in conversations with friends and colleagues only, thus with people with whom they agreed to meet at the coffeehouse. Spontaneous conversations with 'strangers' turned out to be thin on the ground. Yet, many visitors do appreciate the connection, they cherish the knowledge that they are not alone, and like the 'buzz'. For Sarah, 23, a visitor of Urban Brew:

> It is nice to be around human beings. I might not speak to anybody, just being surrounded by people enjoying themselves having a conversation.

Marco comes up with a similar motivation for frequenting his coffeehouse:

> I do prefer to spend 1 or 2 hours to say sitting here. I mean I will never spend the whole day but I need a break while I'm still able to read something. I sit, I sip my coffee, and I read something… This is actually a way for making work more pleasant. Instead of being trapped for the whole day in my office alone, at least you have a feeling that you are not [alone]. I mean that there is less solitude.

Our empirical investigations, in addition, propose that specialty coffee bars attract visitors for leisure activities. Reading books, magazines and/or newspapers, relaxing, sitting outside and smoking cigarettes, listening to music, watching people, playing with children, and, in general, experiencing a pleasant loneliness can be observed regularly within specialty coffeehouses. Andrew, 42, told us about how his leisure activity has turned him into a regular visitor to iCafe:

> I like the coffee here; I just sit here for a couple of hours reading and just find it quite relaxing. I come here for four years now for reading books and enjoying the vibe.

Peter reveals why he visits his coffee bars:

> Here is one of the three or four places I go to in Glasgow. Avenue G actually has two shops, my sister-in-law works at the other one. That's not the reason I started coming here though. I've been coming here for three years. I come here every fortnight and depends on how my works are going. I tend to do a lot of work at home. For example, today I've been working at home, I've been working all day, I wanted to go out, so I just thought to come and read or listen to some music and get away from work and escape from my home basically.

Furthermore, as the technology has created a highly mobile society, it has given a new dimension to specialty coffee houses and has transformed them into a multi-functional space. Put simply, based on our observations, the most relevant to coffee bars is the ability to combine work with home or other locations. In this regard, next to more common activities such as socialising and leisure, people use these spaces as a workplace, both for study and work (Hampton & Gupta, 2008; Martins, 2015; Woldoff et al., 2013). Especially during the weekdays, laptop-carrying students and flex-workers gravitate to these places as 'WiFi hunting urban nomads' (Rath & Gelmers, 2014). Whilst physically based in a small locale, all seem to be involved in what Castells (2000) would call the 'space of flows'. Clair declares that:

> I'm definitely more productive outside my place when I am sitting by myself because it is easier to get distracted. I find it is very easy to work in coffee shops because I need to be surrounded by people when I write; so coffee shops are perfect, definitely, for me, because

> I can't work alone in silence... I wrote my whole PhD thesis in places like this.

Sachi, 31, another visitor at iCafe, clarifies the popularity of specialty coffee bars for working amongst academics:

> I think it is about the association that you have in your mind... when I come here physically, I come here mentally as well. Now I'm in my work zone. The other thing is that I'm prepared here more than the university or even the library. Because over there it is too strong, it is very judgmental; you have to work there; that's what they're saying. If you are doing critical, it is really hard, because people are forcing you to do work, but you can't, you need some freedom, and because of that freedom, the work is easier to do here. As people are not forcing you, then the work just comes out. I've found out that my best works are when I don't put much time on them like I have to work 2–3 hours on it; I don't do this. I just kind of go to places, and I just see what happens but it always happens. I don't try to make it happens, and I don't want it to happen and it tends to happen.

Whilst visitors to specialty coffee bars seem to use their laptops as a shield to avoid contact with others and as means to display some 'civil inattention' in a Goffmanian sense (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1971), they do experience alone-togetherness (Turkle, 2012) and even enjoy their public privatism (Hampton & Gupta, 2008). For instance, John, 39, a visitor at Avenue G, says that:

> I found out if I stay at the laptop for four to five hours I am still enjoying doing it and writing and don't find the noise distracting. It is really good for working here.

5. Conclusion

The emergence of the creative economy and the arrival of middle-class professionals coincides with the development of new forms of urban living and lifestyles. This is particularly palpable in the amenities that have been proliferating in concert with these developments. These amenities, through cultural consumption, offer opportunities for experiencing, practising, performing, and manifesting these lifestyles and cultivated sensibilities. West End in Glasgow—a redeveloped and gentrified neighbourhood—is one of those urban spaces in which these practices can be observed.

By focusing on one of the most popular types of amenities—specialty coffee bars—we shed light on these new forms of urban living. Specialty coffee bars, as a specific type of institution and a distinct form of organisation, are manifesting a particular culture, beliefs and value patterns, shared knowledge, collective norms, meaning and communication systems, and social practices. We studied four random specialty coffee bars that are part of the local coffee scene. These specialty coffee bars, so we observed, clearly cater to a particular type of urbanites: urban professionals with high levels of cognitive and cultural skills. Our investigations, in addition, show that in spite of different combinations of and interplays between their cultural and economic capital, visitors of the selected coffeehouses tend to share a set of cultural dispositions: they are mostly young, well-educated, culturally omnivorous, connected to the creative sector, environmentally concerned, corporeally aware, and authenticity seekers.

The grounded interdisciplinary perspective of the study brings together different ideas and theories developed separately and makes a strong contribution to several research streams. Surprisingly, our findings are very much in line with other scholars investigated specialty coffee bars in other urban settings. For instance, we back up Bookman's (2013a, 2013b, 2014) findings on the urban café sociality in the Canadian context. Our study, however, suggests that the term 'new urban middle class' is conceptually complex which cannot be reduced to refer to a homogenised group with a clear boundary. Whilst they may differ in terms of work, income, education, cultural know-how, and origin, they do share embodied lifestyles revolving around common traits, ethical dispositions, and cultural practices. Possessing adequate economic and cultural resources, our interviewees revealed that, alongside their embodied expressive lifestyles, they actively engage with the global cultural Other via their omnivorous tastes and cosmopolitan attitudes. Their aesthetic consumption practices are also visible in artisanal workshops, fusion restaurants, beer bars, wine bars, and coffee bars, as well as high-end burger places and ice cream parlours. Their performance of embodied lifestyles, identity, and sociability, appear to be a communicator and a sign of distinction in order to subjectively and objectively define and demarcate their sense of social position.

Altogether, from the findings it could be discussed that parallel to the deindustrialisation and processes of suburbanisation occurred in most advanced economies during the 1970s and 1980s, cities have gone through a long process of re-urbanisation and revitalisation through attracting flows of creative capital and knowledge and the development of the cognitive-cultural economy. The local manifestation of the restructured economy, as well as processes of globalisation, can be seen within the concomitant growing presence of the new middle classes in the urban milieus, gentrification, a wide array of new amenities, and a new and polymorphous form of public urban culture. New consumer preferences and practices, furthermore, have helped foster distinct patterns of consumption and retail landscapes. These developments are manifestations of new urban identities and further stimulate the formation of those identities.

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