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Sustainability of Handwoven Carpets in Turkey: Problems and Solution Proposals in Relation to Standards and Market Issues

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyse sustainability of hand-woven carpets in Turkey connection with problems and solution proposals in relation to standards and market issues.

The interaction between changing social conditions and technological improvements, due to the arrival of the industrial revolution in Turkey, has influenced the production of hand-woven carpets. The option of purchasing machine-woven carpets in the domestic market has recently increased makedly. These carpets have various colours and designs, and they are cheap. Still, the interest of consumers in hand-woven carpets does continue to some extent. Collectors and investors also have a sustained interest in high quality Turkish hand-woven carpets.

Today, the whole world is heading towards a single model of production and consumption as a consequence of globalization. Indigenous cultural artifacts are gaining importance and the protection of these values is essential, not only in tems of Turkish cultural identity, but also for the whole world as well.¹ Even more than for other handcrafted products, hand-woven carpets are the best known and most highly valued elements of the Turkish cultural heritage.

The hand-woven carpet is a product whose cultural and aesthetic elements are powerful. It should be aesthetically in harmony with individual taste and the specific environment where it is placed. Design in carpet-making is and always has been related to the manufacturing of a product that must have physical properties appropriate for use on a mass scale, that possesses artistic value, for which appropriate technical means have been used,so that a highly marketable product will result in terms of its appearance and quality. The nature of mass consumption in hand-woven Turkish carpets continously varies in terms of the environment, population structure, income level, education, culture, life principles and aesthetic values. Therefore the sustainability of Turkish handwoven carpets must rely on achieving level of quality compatible with changing and developing life conditions, without destroying their authentic structure, and introducing them to the market at a quality level that can compete, given the conditions of the free market economy.²

At this point, the market demand for Turkish hand-woven carpets is seen as the key factor. Thus, designing the products in accordance with customer preferences and demand, producing carpets that comply with the design standards of the market, assessing the products in terms of production quality and standards, and using the appropriate marketing techniques are of great importance from the point of view of customers satisfaction and also sustainability of hand-made carpet-making.

The improvement of transportation and communication technologies in our day has given rise to the globalization of the market. Quality and cost are the most important factors in

purchasing decisions, -and the bottom line is that if there are no buyers, there will be no more rugs made.²

Some regional hand-woven carpet producers in Turkey have problems particularly in terms of quality, standardization and marketing.

Problems of Hand-Woven Carpet-Making and Some Proposed Solutions

The most significant problems of hand-woven carpet-making in Turkey in relation to quality and marketing can be listed as follows: (1) regional carpet designs being woven outside of their indigenous region; (2) decrease in the quality of yarn, colourants and weaving; (3) changes in the colour palette, motifs and pattern; (4) the patterns being prepared by untrained people; (5) defects caused by poor weaving skills; (6) decrease in the quantity of hand-woven carpets; (7) carpet production not complying with recommended standards; (8) problems with advertising and promotion the product, including not succeeding in developing a recognized trademark and not having an effective inspection mechanism.³

(1) *Carpets being woven outside their own region.* The tradition of weaving hand-woven carpets in the original region is fading. Milas carpets are woven in Isparta, and Bergama, Kars and Yağcıbedir. This is perceived as a crucial problem of hand-woven carpet-making. In recent years, the existing problems of hand-woven carpet-making have become worse owing to the production of Turkish hand-woven carpets in some Asian countries.

(2) *The quality of hand-woven carpets as to their classes and types* is determined according to properties such as the characteristics of the yarn used (warp yarn, weft yarn or pile yarn), the number of knots per square decimeter, the type of the knot, the pile (nap/flock) height, the weight per square meter, the width and the length of the carpet, colour and pattern, and carpet defects.

(3) In 2006, some of the carpet shop owners in Ankara and Antalya also stated that the *colours and patterns in Turkish carpets* are considered important.⁴ Changes in pattern on the Turkish market, one can find a variety of ready-made patterns prepared by a number of private enterprises, including Sümer Hali, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Culture. Many weavers use these patterns. There are some specialists to enforce the standards, based on old Turkish hand-made carpets in Turkish Standards Institute.

(4) However, depending on the market's desire and the merchant's demand, there are also *patterns rearranged in an attempt to create "modern" designs, being prepared by untrained people.* Today there are many rugs woven based on these patterns. This situation indicates a shift towards a change in patterns particularly in hand-woven rugs aimed at the domestic market where they have to compete with machine woven rugs.

As a matter of fact, the influence of machine-woven carpet patterns, fashion colours and even Iranian patterns on our hand-woven carpet design is spreading widely.⁵

Another important problem is the imitation of the motifs and patterns of Turkish carpets by weavers in other countries. These colours, motifs and patterns reflect a highly respected art-form long associated with Turkish culture, so their availability for us on the carpets woven in other countries but labelled and sold as Turkish rugs is seen as a crucial problem. What is a valid complaint is that people are now selling rugs made in Central Asia, China or India with labels that claim they are Turkish rugs. That is unethical and unfair.

(5) *Defects caused by poor weaving skills.* One of the most important properties of hand-woven carpets is that they are woven in the original region at a high quality and uniqueness. This is verified by many handicraft experts, who assert that a hand-woven carpet reflects the culture of the region it has been crafted so it should be woven there. The life style of the weaver, as well as the locally available warp, weft and pile yarns, looms, natural dyes, weaving technique, motifs and colours, is reflected in the carpet. When rugs are not woven in their own region they lack the qualities associated with that weaving tradition. This situation can cause serious deterioration of rug quality.

India, Pakistan and China head the list of countries where some small and large Turkish firms are having hand-woven carpets made. The shop owners have expressed that last year in India, and this year in China, Turkish hand-woven carpets were being produced mostly because of cheap labour. This situation brings about problems for Turkey and Turkish hand-woven carpet-making. The major problems are unemployment for Turkish weavers and the deterioration of carpet quality caused by poor weaving.

(6) *Decrease in the quantity of hand-woven carpets.* Decrease in the number of carpet weavers is a serious problem in Turkey, because of ineffective handicrafts policies. This situation is causing decrease in the quantity of hand-woven carpets. Some carpet weavers give up carpet weaving because of poor working conditions and unsatisfactory income and turned to other more satisfactory forms of employment.

(7) *Carpet production not complying with recommended standards.* In order to ensure the sustainability of the Turkish hand-woven carpet-making, it is important that carpets conform to the standards. Turkey has a list of standards, namely, the TS 43 “Hand made Turkish carpets” standards,⁶ which was first enforced in 1962 by the “Turkish Standards Institute”, updated at certain intervals and still implemented. 1992 is the last date of published revisions to the standards.

These standards have been set to characterise the standard number of knots in the width and length of Turkish hand-woven carpets, the number of knots per square decimeter, knot style, the numerical values of warp, weft and pile yarns, fibre type, the number of twining and the number of layers. Table 1 shows the state of conformity of yarns with the standards, as identified in our research on hand-woven carpets produced in Turkey.

Table 1. Conformity of fibre types and numerical values of warp, weft and pile yarns used in hand-woven woolen carpets with TS 43.

Research region	Fibre content of yarn			Warp yarn	Weft yarn	Pile yarn
	warp	weft	pile	no	no	no
Kayseri ⁷	+	+	+	X	X	X
Yahyalı ⁷	+	+	+	+	+	+
Sivas ⁸	+	+	+	+	+	-
Niğde ⁹	+	+	+	X	X	X
Milas ¹⁰	+	+	+	X	X	+
Konya ¹¹	X	X	+	X	X	X

+ conforms to the standard
X does not conform to the standard
- no information

It can be observed from Table 1 that the carpets conform to some of the TS 43 standards, as follows: in terms of the fibre type, all (except for the warp and weft yarns of Konya carpets); in terms of the number of warp and weft yarns, Yahyalı and Sivas; and finally, in terms of the number of pile yarns, Yahyalı and Milas.

Table 2 provides the state of conformity of some characteristics of carpets (used in research on hand-woven carpets produced in Turkey) with the standards.

Table 2. Conformity of knots per square decimeter, knot style and pile height of hand-woven woolen carpets with TS 43.

Research region	no. of knots per square decimeter	knot style	pile height
Kayseri ⁷	X	+	+
Yahyalı ⁷	X	+	+
Sivas ⁸	X	-	-
Niğde ⁹	X	+	+
Milas ¹⁰	X	+	+
Konya ¹¹	X	+	+

+ conforms to the standards
 X does not conform to the standards
 - no information

According to Table 2, in terms of the number of knots per square decimeter, all of the carpets; and in terms of the knot style and pile height, all but Sivas carpets comply with TS 43. Carpet shop owners stated that the number of knots per square decimeter is not considered important from their perspective. But this is an important quality feature in terms of authenticity of regional styles.

(8) *Marketing and problems related to marketing* are among the most important problems of the Turkish carpet sector. The unrestricted circulation of capital, labour, technology and inputs due to global and regional integrations has weakened the competitive power of firms which do not have the experience or capital to compete in the global market and lack expertise in marketing.²

Trademark is another crucial problem of Turkish hand-woven carpet-making related to marketing. A trademark can usually be identified by perceived as people if they have familiarity with the firm, assuming the trademark has been effectively used in marketing. The concept of trademark involves the quality and the reliability of the product associated with a firm. It is important to support SMEs (small measured entrepreneurs) to give them an opportunity of competition and help them take advantage of trademarking process as a way of identifying true Turkish carpets, and protecting them against the unfair competition of foreign-made copies.¹³ At this point, it is important to establish cooperatives for hand-made carpet weavers. However, the standards must be enforced and maintained if this strategy of marketing a Turkish carpet trademark is to work effectively.

The inspection mechanism is important. Inspection would be a solution to enforcement of carpet standards.

Summary and Conclusions

It is believed that the traditional Turkish hand-woven carpet-making should be improved and be made widespread for sustainability of hand-woven carpets. Furthermore, high quality production should be ensured through the use of advanced techniques in raw materials, looms,

dyeing and weaving. The hand-woven carpets should be protected and enlivened. To actualise all these, it is important that coordination between public institutions and enterprises of different scales are established.

The studies for bringing in sustainability for Turkish hand-woven carpet-making should continue without interruption. Products which are favoured by both local and foreign customers and can be the symbol of prestige should be developed. Better designs should be provided by protecting the authentic properties; yet, in order to ensure sustainability, it is also important to consider consumer desires and needs to the extent that will not cause degeneration of the tradition. Development of new designs should be done by well educated experts. Finally, the trademarking process needs accelerating, patenting work should be carried out and all these need to be guaranteed by legal regulations.

In order to all of this, there needs to be stronger support for organizations that can promote and protect quality in Turkish carpet weaving.

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