

## The Changes that the Handicrafts of Turkey have Gone Through

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**Abstract:** Handicraft products are elements that bear the characteristics of cultural identity. Unfortunately, the occupation of handicrafts and the number of craftsmen in Turkey are decreasing day by day due to many effects, including particularly globalization. Although the history of Turkish handicrafts dates back to very old times, some problems are encountered for its sustainability. This study will provide information on the kinds and examples of Turkish handicrafts. The reasons for the decrease in the production of handicrafts in Turkey will be discussed and some recommendations will be made to prevent their disappearance.

**Key words:** Handicrafts, material culture, cultural identity, handicrafts' problems in Turkey

### INTRODUCTION

Handicrafts are defined as the kind of work which has evolved with the aim of meeting the basic requirements of people, uses agricultural products, wastes and any material found in nature as the raw material, made by using simple tools, requires intense labour and creativity and reflects the cultural levels, tastes and emotions of people. They are valuable not only because they can be produced anywhere easily, but also because they reflect the public culture best.

Today, the world has inclined towards single-model production and consumption as a result of globalization, which actually makes local values so important that their protection is not only vital for the country that these values belong to but for the entire world (Kongar, 2000). While handicrafts used to be perceived worldwide as the materialistic dimension of the national culture and seen as part of the public economics previously, today they are evaluated as the visual products of national heritage that can be most easily globalized (Ođuz, 2002).

### CLASSIFICATION OF TURKISH HANDICRAFTS

Anatolia, where many cultures lived throughout the history, has been the centre of various handicrafts. Its geographical location has a major influence in the recognition of Anatolia as an important handicrafts centre. The communities living in this geography have enjoyed the great advantages of its being an important passageway connecting the continents of Asia, Europe

and Africa and containing the passage of international trade roads, such as the Spice Road and the Silk Road. Many types of handicrafts have been developed to meet the needs of the people traveling through the area for the purposes of transportation and accommodation.

Ebberk (1939) and Arli (1990) classify the Turkish handicrafts according to the raw materials used as follows:

#### **Handicrafts made by using fibers as raw materials:**

Woven products such as carpets, kilims, hand-woven fabrics and woven material types such as tablet weaving; knitted products such as socks, pullovers, gloves/mittens, caps, scarves and felt products made by using animal fibres such as wool, angora, rabbit wool and goat hair. Hand-woven materials such as sailcloth, curtains and any type of covering clothes (e.g., table clothes, bedspreads, headscarves etc.), hand-printed products such as handkerchiefs, headscarves and tablecloth made by using vegetable fibres such as cotton, linen and hemp.

#### **Handicrafts made by using trees as raw materials:**

Tools used for the production of handicrafts: Hand stamping presses, looms, thread spinning tools; tools used in agriculture and transportation: Carts, oxcarts, threshing sleds, yokes, kitchen utensils such as mortars, spoons, belongings and accessories for daily usage such as prayer beads, clogs, trinkets, cigarette holders, pipes, walking sticks/canes; architectural elements such as doors, windows, locks; musical instruments such as shepherd's pipe and drums.

**Handicrafts made by using stone as raw materials:**

Architectural elements such as grave stones, fountains and pools; belongings and accessories for daily usage such as necklaces, bracelets, rings, cuff links, prayer beads, cigarette holders, pipes, walking sticks/canes.

**Handicrafts made by using earth as raw materials:**

Vases, bowls, pots, pottery products such as flowerpots and ceramics.

**Handicrafts made by using metals as raw materials:**

Architectural elements such as door knobs, locks, kitchen utensils such as knives, tea and coffee sets, vases, wall plates; heating instruments such as stoves, shovels, tongs; tools used for animal harnessing such as horseshoes, chains, collars; agricultural tools such as pickaxes, shovels, rakes; golden and silver jewellery.

**Handicrafts made by using glass as raw materials:**

Various types of blue beads (worn against the evil eye), çeşm-i bülbül, various types of stained glass, jewellery and accessories.

**Handicrafts made by using leather and animal waste products as raw materials:**

Dressing elements such as shoes, gloves, hats, boots; daily belongings made of leather such as belts, cases, cigarette holders; fur and animal skin production; binding works; shadow play characters.

**Handicrafts made by using thin branches, stalks and tree stripes as raw materials:**

Basket weaving, furniture making, belongings such as bags, straw mats, beach mattings, packsaddles.

**THE PRESENT DAY STATE OF THE TURKISH HANDICRAFTS AND ITS PROBLEMS**

In the 21st century, some of the Turkish handicrafts have been lost, some have diminished or regressed and the production style of some has changed. Factors such as migration from the villages to the cities, some handicraft products' becoming obsolete, increase in population, increase in the use of machines with the development of technology, changes of habits, fashion trends, decreases and variations in raw materials and increased products on the market that are imported from Asian and Far Eastern countries such as India and China have been influential in the diminishing and the disappearance of handicrafts (Arli, 2006).

In addition to these factors, the following can be included among the most important problems related to handicrafts today: The effect of the globalization process on material culture elements (decrease in the use of local products), having handicrafts produced in countries where cheap manpower is available, the fact that institutions working on handicrafts do not cooperate; the fact that there is not a state policy on the issue and the fact that a mutual decision cannot be taken even on some terminology to be used. These are problems that trigger each other. Globalization causes the properties of handicrafts to change and to be produced abroad. Furthermore, not having a state policy on handicrafts brings about problems for production, marketing, collecting and exhibiting them.

The problems of handicrafts in Turkey can be dealt with under the following headings:

**Museuming (collecting):** Despite the fact that ethnographic materials exist copiously in Turkey, handicraft products may easily disappear from the environment they are produced in due to reasons such as the inadequacy of museuming works, lack of knowledge and increase in the number of people who become fond of handicrafts.

Oğuz (2002) describes collecting as removing the handicrafts produced by people from their own area of production and use and transferring them to surroundings out of their natural use, without even referring to the minimum folkloric context knowledge that they involve. The formal institutions where handicrafts are exhibited in Turkey are Ethnography Museums. In addition, he states that the museums of research institutes, the hobbies of folk culture lovers, the eastern corner of local orientalists and the commercial museum management of culture tourism managers all cause handicrafts to be removed from the original places where they belong to.

Arli (2003) reported that some old examples of Turkish handicrafts were removed from their original locations and then sold after dismantling or pulling into pieces; some were even destroyed by melting or burning. The same study also established that few products were kept in public ethnographic museums and some private museums under inappropriate conditions and very few of these were statically displayed.

**Research:** In Turkey, research on handicrafts is conducted by the Ministry of Culture and in different faculties and departments of various universities.

The number of studies in the field of handicrafts in Turkey should not be underrated. Nevertheless, an inventory of the handicrafts in Turkey has not yet been

taken. Some small-scale projects that were started have not yet been completed and the completed projects are full of incomplete and wrong information (Arli, 2006).

Different units carry out research in the field of handicrafts, which causes a confusion of concepts in topics such as scope, definition and nomenclature (Öztürk, 1994; Oğuz, 2002).

**Education:** The education and instruction in the field of handicrafts show variety today and they can be generally classified as master-apprentice relationship, courses in ateliers and instruction in formal education institutes.

While handicrafts education was in the form of master-apprenticeship relationship in the past, today there is an increase in the number of institutions providing handicrafts education. Some ministries, municipalities, universities and foundations arrange various handicrafts courses (Söylemezoğlu *et al.*, 2006).

The number of handicrafts courses conducted by public institutions, on the other hand, is decreasing. The courses arranged by the Ministry of Agriculture and Village Affairs have been attended by a total of 18,885 participants to date. The number of participants in certain years was as follows: 345 participants in 1964, 686 participants in 1994 and 343 participants in 2005 (Yazar, 2005). The numbers indicate that there was an increase in the attendance rates from 1964 to 1994; whereas, the number of attendants decreased from 1994 until 2005. However, considering the population increase rate in Turkey, it will be possible to assert that these figures are too low.

In order to increase the number of handicrafts courses and participants, it is important to increase the quality of the courses and to obtain high quality products. Moreover, increasing the marketing possibilities of the products will also ensure an increase in the demand for courses.

**Marketing:** Marketing is seen as one of the major problems of handicrafts, in which the properties of the products are important. Not using high quality raw materials, disappearance of traditional characteristics and not producing new designs are some causes that lead to difficulties in the marketing.

In the province of Kastamonu, which was a prominent woven textile center in the past, the craft of weaving was about to disappear when an agreement was made in 1995 with a large store, with the efforts of the local government and fabrics were produced, creating new marketing opportunities. Increased tourism activities in the province were also another factor that created an increased marketing opportunity.

The marketing of handicrafts is mainly carried out by the private sector. Official institutions have only recently

been marketing handicrafts in Turkey. Handicrafts have been marketed in the stores called Dösım, which have been opened up in some tourism areas by the Ministry of Culture since 1984.

**Production:** The production of handicrafts is organized by cooperatives, local governments and, mostly, small and large-scale enterprises.

In recent years, many products produced in Far Eastern and South Asian countries have entered the market, which adversely affects handicrafts and the craftsmen occupied with this business. Some Turkish firms have Turkish handicrafts, particularly products that has an international market, such as hand-woven carpets and kilims, produced in countries such as India and China due to the cheap manpower available there. This situation results in a decrease in the production of carpets and kilims, redundancy among weavers and a decrease in the quality of the carpets and kilims (Erdoğan and Özgen, 2006).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Handicrafts in Turkey are rich in variety, raw materials, production methods, tools used and the usage areas. Yet, the production and the use of handicrafts are decreasing day by day. Handicrafts are elements that keep alive and reflect the cultural heritage best. In addition to meeting the use requirements, they bear cultural identity characteristics, too. Local values should be maintained in our time, in which the world has oriented towards single-model production as a result of globalization. To this end, some recommendations can be made.

Arli (2003) reported that, firstly, a correct handicrafts map of Turkey should be made. Then, instead of statically exhibiting the handicrafts in museums, it would be better to watch the processes in a space which involves the obtaining of the raw material, making of the product and the production of the tools used.

Sarıoğlu (2005) emphasized that the state education institutes, laws and economy politics are the most influential powers to ensure that our cultural values are protected and kept alive. Moreover, in order to ensure the sustainability of the national culture, these powers should be used to raise awareness among the public.

In recent years, another type of tourism activity that has arisen is rural tourism. This type of tourism highlights the local living culture such as traditional dressing, food, accomodation and handicrafts. Handicrafts gain in importance in rural tourism, in which old models of handicrafts can be exhibited and new models can be displayed in their natural environment in an applied manner.

Importance should be attached to quality in the production of handicrafts. The quality can be increased by using high quality raw materials, maintaining the traditional characteristics and providing opportunities for new designs and the higher the quality, the more the demand will be.

It is a primary must that different parties who deal with handicrafts should work in coordination. Public institutions and related universities should determine common policies and act accordingly. In this way, different disciplines can work together and the subject will be dealt with from different angles.

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