Mehmet Ali Icbay / Hasan Arslan /
Francesco Sidoti (eds.)

Research on Cultural Studies

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Economic and Commercial Spatial Connections of the Traditional Country Fairs in Turkey

Introduction

Traditional fairs, the existing examples of which are found at the district centres – and few examples of which are found in the villages – in Turkey, "are examples of trade spaces which are set up as commodity (merchandise) and/or animal markets for periods of one day or several days within extensive lands in specific places of specific districts and villages at specific dates in a specific season and which draw attention with their traditional forms of shopping." Fairs are places in which people who particularly live in rural settlements and lack frequent and regular shopping possibilities go on meeting their seasonal or annual household needs and their needs for various agricultural tools and materials besides their everyday needs. Fair organisations also have a function of entertainment with the forms of entertainment generally identified with the fairs. Depending on these features of fairs, the fairs constitute an attraction for the masses of spectators and tradesmen; moreover, their commercial and economic connections also display a wide spatial distribution.

In connection with the socio-economic and technological developments historically experienced in the recent past and with the changes in the understanding of entertainment, some of the traditional fairs have now turned into entertainment or trade fairs or into festivals and their numbers have decreased considerably. Although retail commercial activities have substantially developed and become widespread recently, the fairs set up in the relatively isolated areas of the rural environments constitute quite an important attractiveness for the inhabitants of these environments.

Fairs not only attract visitors from various places, particularly from neighbouring settlements, but also have a pull effect on the mobile retailing tradesmen who reside in various regions of Turkey. The significant majority of those who deal with trade at fairs are the mobile fair tradesmen who make a living by following the fairs established successively. These mobile retailers visit the fairs on a route that they regularly follow every year and use their box-body vehicles, which they

generally drive by themselves, in carrying the goods and in their need for accommodation at the fair. During fairs, they sell goods and services in the temporary places they rent for a specific fee.

Essentially, fairs are competitive environments which are created by the gathering of small-scale tradesmen who are completely producers; who are partially producers and also do the trade of the goods that they do not produce; and who are not producers but only sell the products/goods they procure. The fair tradesmen are the small-scale tradesmen who have particularly specialised in the retail sale of specific products and services and are between wholesalers and consumers. These tradesmen are continually in contact with the wholesalers in the product branches in which they generally operate, and they obtain and store the products with reasonable prices so that the needs of consumers can be satisfied at quite low prices during the fairs. At this point, it will also be useful to somewhat elaborate on the definition of a tradesman, for the scope and definition of a tradesman and an artisan in Turkey differ from the practices in the countries of the European Union. In Turkey, the terms "tradesman" and "artisan" are generally used together. A "tradesman" is recognised as an entrepreneur who works in the lines of business of trade and service but whose activity and income are not as great as to be regarded as a "merchant." With the term "artisan," an entrepreneur who works in the lines of business of manufacturing but whose activity and income are not as great as to be regarded as an "industrialist" is understood (Darıcı, Coşkun & Balık, 2012). On the other hand, a small number of the tradesmen who operate at the fairs are registered as taxpayers. Especially, it must be underlined that the majority of those who make a living only from the fairs are people who belong to the low-income group and lack a commercial registration as a result of their financial inadequacies.

Almost all the people who do the trade of goods/products and services at the fairs make a living in relation to the fairs. These mobile tradesmen go to a large number of fairs and operate, which means a great retail network and mobility. Furthermore, the locations of fairs and the centres from which goods are procured according to the product branches are also quite various. Hence, there is a national trade network which takes shape on the basis of the fair system.

The commercial connections between fairs as a market and the centres which are the suppliers of products and goods for this market are based on various factors. The study presented here fundamentally focuses on the direction of flow of the wholesale and retail trade taking place within the framework of the fairs in Turkey and its spatial relationships. It is evaluated that the spatial relationships determined on the national scale may contribute to the planning and managing of the fair trade network considering it on the national scale and to the producing of policies for the future.

Purpose and Method

The main purpose of the study is to reveal that fairs are not a local phenomena but indeed qualify as a national trade network in integrity and in relation to each other. Within the scope of the study, it was aimed to determine the distributional characteristics of the centres from which the fair tradesmen procured goods and products and of the wholesale centres specialised on a product basis.

The information and data provided in the study are based on the questionnaires and interviews performed during fieldwork in 13 different provinces between 2013 and 2014 (Table 1). A total of 611 questionnaires were applied to the tradesmen – one of the most important components of fairs. Some 256 tradesmen who also attended fairs other than the fair in which the questionnaires were applied visited eight fairs per year on average. Hence, the data obtained from the mobile fair tradesmen were the basic sources of data about the annual cycle of the fairs.

Table 1: The sample fairs at which fieldwork was carried out and the number of tradesmen surveyed within the scope of the research

Fair and Name of the Province in which it is found	Number of questionnaires applied to the tradesmen	Fair and Name of the Province in which it is found	Number of questionnaires applied to the tradesmen
İnhisar, Bilecik	38	Karadede, Bafra, Samsun	35
İznik, Bursa	52	Zile, Tokat	51
Gönen, Balıkesir	50	İspir, Erzurum	30
Yenice, Çanakkale	50	Seferihisar, İzmir	46
Gerede, Bolu	52	Simav, Kütahya	52
Boyabat, Sinop	52	Pınarpazarı, Eğirdir, Isparta	52
Pehlivanköy, Kırklareli	51		

Findings

To be able to evaluate the spatial connections of fairs in commercial terms, the mobile quality of the fair tradesmen should be explained briefly first. Next, it will be necessary to present the relationship of wholesale and distributor centres according to the product branches with the subject and their distributional characteristics.

A significant amount of the fair tradesmen can be regarded as mobile tradesmen. They make a living by touring the fairs set up successively as being separate from their home in a significant part of the year. The data obtained from the studies we

conducted at the sample fairs reveal that about half of the fair tradesmen (50.9%) resided in a province other than the province in which the fair was set up, whereas 72.5% of them resided in a district other than the district in which the fair was set up. Besides this mobile quality of the fair tradesmen, their various retail and wholesale trade connections created an active retail and wholesale trade network which was rich in its spatial relationships and which was distributed almost nationwide.

Like the presence of those who make a living merely by touring the series of fairs, there are also people who make a living by making sales in other market forms, along with fairs. According to the result of all fairs in which the questionnaires were applied, the question "Do you go to other fairs as well?" was answered with "Yes" by 256 tradesmen (41.9%) but with "No" by 355 tradesmen (58.1%). This value is undoubtedly a value which represents the average of all fairs and varies by fair. For instance, whilst all tradesmen (52 people) who attended the Eğirdir-Isparta fair said that they went to other fairs, all tradesmen (30 people) at the İspir-Erzurum fair stated that they did not go to any other fair. On the other hand, the responses to the question "What other types of markets do you also work at apart from fairs?" more than one marking was done, revealing the "mobile tradesman" quality of the fair tradesmen (Table 2) since the responses other than the response "only fairs" mostly entail being a mobile tradesmen.

Table 2: Other types of markets in which the fair tradesmen make sales according to the results of the questionnaires

Type of market	Number of responses marked
Only fairs	207
Weekly markets besides fairs	261
Festivities and festivals besides fairs	188
Tableland markets besides fairs	47
Animal markets besides fairs	5

According to our questionnaire data, the fair tradesmen go to eight fairs per year on average. The numbers of fairs that the fair tradesmen go to within a period of one year are different from each other. Tradesmen who went to 36 fairs per year were also recorded among the samples. The results in Table 3 show that the annual mobility of the tradesmen who toured the fairs was high.

Table 3: The number of fairs that the tradesmen attended per year (apart from the fair at which the questionnaires were applied)

Number of fairs	Number of tradesmen (f)	Percentage (%)
1	3	1.2
2–3	43	18.3
4–6	81	34.5
7–10	65	27.6
11–15	15	6.4
16–20	18	7.7
21+	10	4.3
Total	**235**	**100**

It was established that the 611 fair tradesmen who responded to our questionnaire resided in 50 provinces of Turkey. The first ten provinces (and the number of tradesmen) inhabited most by the fair tradesmen are as follows, respectively:

İzmir (62), İstanbul (55), Balıkesir (45), Isparta (41), Samsun (36), Bolu (35), Bursa (32), Kırklareli (31), Kütahya (26), and Manisa (24). Fairs are undoubtedly set up in all these provinces except for İstanbul. We determined that a large number of tradesmen from the provinces in which no fairs were set up (e.g. Artvin, Elazığ, Erzincan, Konya, Mardin, and Zonguldak) also made a living from the fairs. We encounter a similar case when we also consider the distribution by geographical region. The places of residence of the fair tradesmen are distributed within all geographical regions of Turkey, namely the Marmara (221), Black Sea (142), Aegean (128), Central Anatolia (55), Mediterranean (52), Eastern Anatolia (11), and South-eastern Anatolia (2) Regions, respectively. It is discovered that there are fair tradesmen within the boundaries of the geographical regions where no fair examples are available, although small in number. These results qualify as proof of a trade network which is quite active and of economic importance depending on the mobility of the tradesmen on the national scale.

The Commercial Profile of the Fair Tradesmen and the Branches in which they operate

One fourth of the tradesmen operating at the fairs are producers, and they market their own products. Nevertheless, the rate of producers at the fairs is estimated to decrease with every passing year. The largest group (70.5%), however, does not comprise of producers and they make retail sales of products and services. The

remaining small group (5.1%) makes the retail sales of the goods and products they buy wholesale besides the products they produce.

The majority of the tradesmen who are producers are the producers of refreshment products at the fairs (Table 4). As fairs are places where long periods of time are spent, eating & drinking are essential issues too. Likewise, an eating & drinking culture unique to fairs also formed in time. For those people who inhabited the rural environment, lemonade, ice cream, halvah and confectionery used to be products only encountered at the fairs. "Kuzu çevirme" (lamb roasted on a spit) is quite common among the foods identified with the fairs. However, this tradition is no longer encountered at some fairs (the Gölpazarı, Osmaneli, İznik, İnhisar, and Zile fairs). The Pehlivanköy fair is a place where the tradition of "fair candy (necklace candy)" that used to be produced only for fairs at the Thracian fairs in the past is maintained. Fairs also assume a carrying mission in terms of sustaining the cuisine culture.

Table 4: Branches of products produced by the producers

Branches of Products	Number of producers (f)	Percentage (%)
Convenience Food & Refreshment Products	34	15.1
Fresh Fruits and Vegetables	33	14.7
Textile, Clothing, and Ready-made Clothing	28	12.4
Traditional Handicrafts & Craft Products	25	11.1
Animal Food Products	25	11.1
Living Animal (Cattle)	24	10.7
Living Animal (Sheep/Goats)	21	9.3
Halvah, Molasses, Confectionery, and Dessert	14	6.2
Accessories & Bijouterie	10	4.5
Living Animal (Poultry)	8	3.6
Other	3	1.3
TOTAL	**225**	**100**

It is seen that fresh fruit & vegetable producers rank second at the fairs (Table 4). Such producers predominantly offer for sale agricultural products which can be stored for a long period of time or which are favourable for drying (e.g. onion, potato, garlic, melon, watermelon, and pumpkin). Similarly, animal food products also predominantly include such products as cheese pickled in brine and butter, which can be stored for a long period of time without spoiling.

Cattle, sheep/goat and poultry raisers constitute almost one-third of the producers at the fairs (Table 4). In general, the official name of the fairs in Turkey is already "the Merchandise and Animal Fair." At the animal fairs, producers sell such beasts of burden as horses, donkeys, and mules besides the cattle, sheep, and goats they raise. Essentially, there used to be strong ties between animal husbandry and fairs in the past and we understand this also from the reflection of this on the official names of the fairs, for fairs were the only places to sell the excess animals that would not be put into the barn while entering winter in the rural environments in the past. Nevertheless, today fairs are not spaces without any alternative for buying or selling animals. In the last decade, animal markets set up for weekly periods began to operate in many districts where fairs were set up. In addition, the merchants who buy animals do this business by touring the villages today. We can determine the fairs which stand out with their volume of animal sales as the Gerede, Boyabat, Gönen, İspir, Sarıcakaya, and Seferihisar fairs. The Seferihisar fair is already an animal husbandry fair as a whole. The Gerede fair is a fair at which buyers from all around Turkey arrive because it is the only fair where mules are sold.

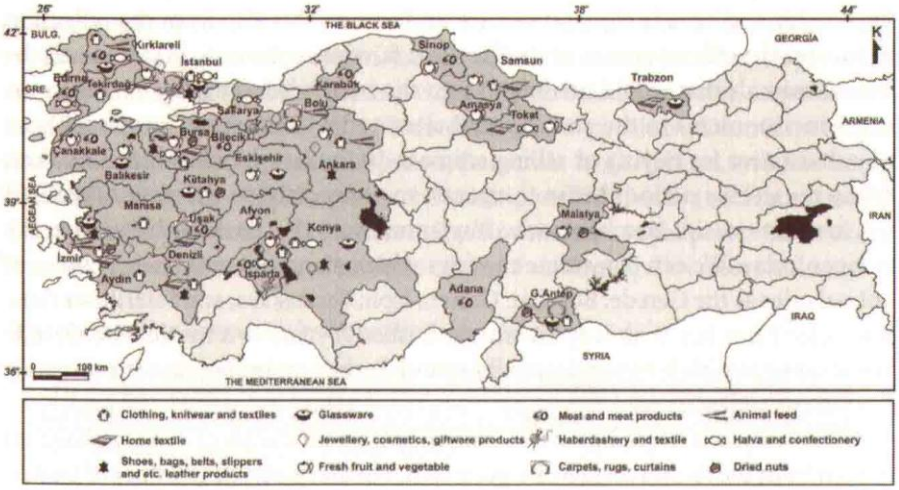
When evaluated regardless of whether they were producers or not, the branches of activity of the fair tradesmen are quite rich. Furthermore, the number of tradesmen who operate in the branch of "textile, clothing, trousseau, dry goods, and notions" is markedly high and ranks first. These results suggest that the people living in the rural environments have high demands for the products in this branch and still perform their shopping annually.

Fairs assume significant functions in sustaining traditional production. There is no doubt that the function of fairs weakened in time. Still, fairs mediate in the sustaining of the existence of those producers and craftsmen who market the products that they manufacture by themselves and in preserving traditional production and products. They include hand-woven carpets, kilims, and heybes (carpetbags) (the Ayvacık, Bayramiç, Çan, and Lapseki fairs); needlework and lacework (the Gönen fair); handmade kitchen utensils as well as copper vessels and coffee pots (the Gerede fair); handmade wooden spoons and ladles; handmade tools required for animal husbandry (bells, halters, and accessories); ground clothes and baskets woven by using grass and reeds; and sieves made of leather (the Boyabat fair).

The inclination of the workshop-type manufactures in some settlements towards the products demanded at the fairs for long years also led to specialisations in the settlements concerned. For instance, the drum oven and samovar products offered for sale at the fairs are predominantly procured from the workshops in

Karabük, Tokat, and Samsun, while large cooking pots and cauldrons are obtained from Kahramanmaraş.

Figure 1: Distribution of wholesale centres where trading products are provided by product type and province.



The number of provinces from which the tradesmen procure products and goods for trade at the fairs is 28. The provinces with an important place in the commercial economy of Turkey such as İstanbul, Bursa, and İzmir draw attention at the top ranks among these provinces. Besides, it is understood that goods and products are procured for the fairs also from the provinces where no fair example is available (e.g. Denizli, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Trabzon, and Uşak). Distributed over an extensive area outside the areas where the fairs are set up, these commercial relationships reveal that the economic impacts of fairs are on the national scale (Figure 1).

Table 5: Provinces from which the Fair tradesmen obtain Goods/Products according to their Branches of Activity

Provinces	No. of Tradesmen	No. of Branches	Main branches and the number of tradesmen operating in these branches
Istanbul	188	14	Clothing, tricot, and textile (107); Home textile (15); Shoes, bags, belts, and slippers (19); Glassware & porcelain (kitchen utensils) (16); Bijouterie, cosmetic, and souvenirs (17); Fresh fruits & vegetables (1); Dry goods & notions (3); Carpets, kilims, and curtains (1); Halvah & confectionery (1); Hardware & Hardware store (2); Toys (2); Beverages & Tea (2); Furniture & white goods (1); and Books & stationery (1)
Izmir	30	13	Clothing, tricot, and textile (5); Home textile (1); Shoes, bags, belts, and slippers (5); Glassware & porcelain (kitchen utensils) (3); Bijouterie, cosmetic, and souvenirs (2); Carpets, kilims, and curtains (1); Animal feed (2); Dried fruits (2); Toys (2); Sheep/goat husbandry (3); Milk and milk products (1); Flour (1); and Motorcycles (2)
Bursa	29	9	Clothing, tricot, and textile (11); Home textile (4); Shoes, bags, belts, and slippers (1); Fresh fruits and vegetables (1); Carpets, kilims, and curtains (3); Halvah & confectionery (3); Dried fruits (4); Furniture & white goods (1); and Olive & olive oil (1)
Bolu	18	6	Bijouterie, cosmetic, and souvenirs (2); Fresh fruits and vegetables (1); Dry goods & notions (9); Carpets, kilims, and curtains (1); Animal feed (4); and Hardware & hardware store (1)
Ankara	17	9	Clothing, tricot, and textile (2); Shoes, bags, belts, and slippers (3); Bijouterie, cosmetic, and souvenirs (3); Fresh fruits and vegetables (1); Animal feed (3); Legumes (1); Toys (2); Tractors (1); and Funfair services (1)
Kirklareli	14	9	Clothing, tricot, and textile (3); Glassware & porcelain (kitchen utensils) (1); Meat and meat products (2); Animal feed (1); Halvah & confectionery (1); Legumes (2); Beverages & Tea (2); Flour (1); and Books & stationery (1)
Gaziantep	12	5	Clothing, tricot, and textile (6); Glassware & porcelain (kitchen utensils) (1); Carpets, kilims, and curtains (2); Dried fruits (2); and Motorcycles (1)

Provinces	No. of Tradesmen	No. of Branches	Main branches and the number of tradesmen operating in these branches
Isparta	11	8	Clothing, tricot, and textile (2); Bijouterie, cosmetic, and souvenirs (1); Fresh fruits and vegetables (2); Meat and meat products (2); Dry goods & notions (1); Halvah & confectionery (1); Milk and milk products (1); and Beverages & Tea (1)
Denizli	10	5	Clothing, tricot, and textile (1); Home textile (6); Shoes, bags, belts, and slippers (1); Carpets, kilims, and curtains (1); and Hardware & hardware store (1)
Konya	10	8	Clothing, tricot, and textile (1); Shoes, bags, belts, and slippers (2); Glassware & porcelain (kitchen utensils) (1); Bijouterie, cosmetic, and souvenirs (1); Halvah & confectionery (1); Legumes (2); Flour (1); and Tractors (1)

According to the research data, the branches represented by a minimum of ten tradesmen and the provinces from which the products in these branches are procured wholesale are shown in Table 5. According to the results of the questionnaires, the provinces from which fewer than five tradesmen who are not seen in the table procure products are as follows: Afyon, Antalya, Amasya, Aydın, Balıkesir, Bilecik, Çanakkale, Edirne, Eskişehir, Kütahya, Malatya, Manisa, Sakarya, Samsun, Sinop, Tokat, Tekirdağ, Trabzon, and Uşak.

Some provinces from which the fair tradesmen procure products have weighted shares in some product branches. It might be stated that some provinces in Turkey are in the position of wholesale centres for fairs in some product branches in connection with the demands of the fairs. Even though the fairs are geographically distributed over an extensive area, such metropolitan cities as İstanbul, Bursa, and İzmir and the provinces which are generally distributed in western Anatolia stand out as wholesale centres (Table 6).

Table 6: The provinces from which the fair tradesmen procure goods/products most and the wholesale branches which stand out in these provinces

Provinces	Branches (Percentage- %)					
İstanbul	Clothing (73)	Bijouterie (65)	Shoes (61)	Glassware & porcelain (59)	Home Textile (48)	Toys (29)
Bursa	Dried fruits (40)	Halvah & Confectionery (27)	Carpets, kilims, and curtains (25)	Home textile (13)	--	--
İzmir	Motorcycles (67)	Toys (29)	Dried fruits (20)	Animal feed (17)	Shoes (16)	--
Ankara	Tractors (33)	Toys (29)	Animal feed (25)	--	--	--
Bolu	Dry goods (70)	--	--	--	--	--
Eskişehir	Fruits & vegetables (25)	--	--	--	--	--
Uşak	Carpets, kilims, and curtains (25)	--	--	--	--	--
Denizli	Home textile (19)	--	--	--	--	--

Conclusion and Recommendations

The fairs whose existence has gradually diminished in the Republican period for various reasons still maintain their existence in a total of 63 settlements on various administrative scales today. However, the diversity of commercial connections reveals that such fairs have a far more extensive sphere of influence than the area where they are distributed.

According to our research results, the fairs are distributed in 21 provinces in Turkey today. Nevertheless, those who make a living by being tradesmen at the fairs reside in 50 provinces of Turkey. Today the fairs existing in Turkey are only distributed in four geographical regions (the Black Sea, Marmara, Aegean, and Mediterranean Regions), whereas the residence of those who do trade at the fairs is in the settlements distributed in all geographical regions of Turkey.

The geographical regions where the most examples of fairs are seen and the regions which generate the largest number of fair tradesmen are generally in agreement. Especially the Black Sea and Marmara Regions, where the most fairs are distributed, are also the regions which generate the largest number of fair tradesmen.

The number of provinces from which the tradesmen procure products and goods for trade at the fairs (28) is also higher than the number of provinces where

examples of fairs are available (21). These results indeed suggest that the traditional fairs constitute an economic and a spatial system which must be regarded as a whole on the national scale in Turkey.

The traditional fairs have an order in the form of seasonal, local, and regional series, i.e. a cyclic quality. The products supplied and demanded at the fairs are also undoubtedly in harmony with these cycles. Stationery, trousseaus, the products stocked for winter, farm animals and stoves are demanded more at the fairs in autumn, while glassware & porcelain, wedding preparations, beasts of burden, etc., are demanded more at the fairs in spring. The products which have become famous as being unique to each locality are also substantially demanded at the fairs of the relevant localities. The diversity of products supplied and demanded and the network of fairs where this diversity spreads throughout the whole year reveal the presence of a rich trade system on the national scale.

The fair cycles support the existence of each other also in connection with the mobility of the mobile tradesmen. Essentially, the fair cycles and the concentration lines on the route of the annual fair series have facilitative effects on the connections between sellers and suppliers in the procurement of products and goods. Hence, the fact that the neighbourhood relations of the fairs were supportive of the existence of each other in economic terms was effective on the formation of local cycles. The information obtained from the questionnaires and interviews applied to the tradesmen within the scope of the study also revealed that each fair cycle had a flexible structure within itself and in connection with the other cycles. Accordingly, the tradesmen who follow the fairs can attend the local cycles in a timeframe suitable for themselves. However, the fairs which will disappear in these series in time will negatively affect the resistance of the fairs that constitute the other rings of the series. So, the resulting spatial gaps will negatively affect transportation costs and the annual turnover of the mobile tradesmen, thereby reducing their competitive power in economic terms.

The mobile tradesmen of the fairs are far from a productive working life due to the inadequacies of capital and education. It is understood that these tradesmen mostly fail to develop their business owing to the unavailability of adequate capital as well as financial and educational support. The providing of the tradesmen who operate at the traditional fairs with tax support besides loans with no interest or with low interests is an important issue. Nevertheless, the tradesmen follow the developments and innovations on this matter at an inadequate level.

Also given the contributions of the traditional fairs, whose number has been gradually decreasing in the recent years, to the socio-economic, and cultural lives

of the rural environments, there is a need for the studies in which the proposals listed below are taken into consideration:

- There is a need for improving supportive regulations which are directly aimed at the fair tradesmen.
- There is a need to create higher boards in order to plan and organise commercial activities at the fairs.
- The processes of organisation and planning of the traditional fairs should not be left to the responsibility of local governments only. The institutions in charge of producing policies in the fields of economy, trade, and culture on the national scale should also be in this process.
- For the traditional fairs that draw attention with their economic, cultural, and social roles, strategies and policies should be produced on the national scale considering their functional attributes.

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