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## CONNECTING RURAL CHANGE AND LOCAL CRAFTS: REBRANDING SOCK KNITTING IN YENİKARAAĞAÇ (1)

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Burak GÜREL\*\*\*

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**Keywords:** Sock knitting; Bursa; crafts; rural development; postcard project.

1. This study was conducted as part of Bilge Merve Aktaş's Master of Arts degree studies and discussed in her thesis (Aktaş, 2015). The abstract of this article was previously presented at the International Culture(s) in Sustainable Futures: theories, policies, practices conference Helsinki, Finland (Aktaş & Veryeri-Alaca, 2015).

### INTRODUCTION

Based on a study of Yenikaraağaç Village, located near the city of Bursa in western Turkey, this paper studies the relationship between local crafts and rural development. In order to address the problems of rural underdevelopment and outmigration, we suggest a designerly approach to rebranding rural handicrafts, illustrating how craft practices – more specifically, sock knitting– can support socioeconomic and socio-cultural well-being.

As Glenn Adamson (2013, 1-6) argues, the wider economic and social presence of crafts (when compared to that of art and design) has occasionally caused them to be considered less valuable, especially when certain crafts are associated with gendered or ethnicized practices. However, as Anna-Maria Ihatsu (1998) notes, the field of crafts is heterogeneous and can be understood through various approaches, including conventional production, artistic, and designerly processes. These approaches, especially those related to design and craft, are rooted in similar ways of thinking about the process of production (Aktaş and Mäkelä, 2017).

In not separating craft from design, the context of creative practices can be expanded to offer a new understanding of current practices and solutions to complex situations such as the disappearance of rural practices. Cross (2001) conceptualizes design in relation to the ways in which people interact with artifacts. Cross proposes that these interactions impact the production and maintenance of artifacts. The designerly approach expands the intuitive and reflective nature of design to broader contexts, thereby leading to new understandings of existing systems or practices (Cross, 2001). This study perceives design as a way of creative thought meant to generate new perspectives. As Sennett (2013, 131) notes, by further developing their skills, craftspeople can generate constructivist progress. If given the suitable platforms, craftspeople

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could support their own independent and personal development. Correspondingly, our postcard project presents a designerly way of branding local knowledge that can be used to mediate artifacts in order to provide better economic conditions for local craftspeople. Improved economic conditions, in turn, encourages the further development of their skills. The distribution of custom-made postcards, showcasing the crafted artifacts, would inform urban citizens about Yenikarağaç crafts, more specifically sock knitting, thereby delivering rural practices to urban contexts. In our study of sock knitting, we examine how this undervalued practice, when accompanied by a designerly approach, can assist rural development.

Because rural flight and rapid urbanization have been defining characteristics of modernity, the non-farm rural economy has been studied extensively. The main “push factors” behind rural outmigration include an increasing population, the scarcity of farmland and other resources, rising costs of agricultural production (due to the increasing use of modern inputs and farm machinery), the intensifying competition in agricultural markets, and dispossession of small peasants from land (by state or market mechanisms) (Araghi, 1995). According to Ashley and Maxwell (2001, 395), a successful rural development strategy requires exploring the potential of non-farm rural activities. One recent advance in non-farm development uses cultural markers and local resources (such as folklore, ecologic food cycles, natural material regeneration, and crafts) to provide social and economic well-being to locals (Ray, 1998).

Rural tourism has become an important non-farm activity, attracting both local and foreign tourists (Heneghan, 2002). Using the concepts of “cultural economy” and “cultural rural tourism,” many scholars (Hampton, 2005; Joppe, 1996; Kochel, 1994; Lewis, 1998; MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003; Ray, 1998) have described the mutually-supportive relationship between tourism and rural culture, one which incorporates local values, traditions, identities, arts, handicrafts, landscape, and cuisine. The cultural peculiarities of rural areas attract urbanites interested in spending time closer to nature, experiencing rural lifestyles, tasting local foods, and learning and/or participating in farm and handicraft production. Such interest not only creates opportunities for villagers to earn additional income, but also encourages mutual interaction between villagers and visitors, thereby fostering an informal learning environment for both parties.

When rural tourism is organized around cultural practices, it can provide two benefits with both short and long-term outcomes. Firstly, it can preserve heritage and cultural identity; secondly, it encourages new socioeconomic models for sustainable well-being based on culture (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). When villagers lack financial sources and market knowledge, urban entrepreneurs remain dominant in rural tourism, which keeps the profit share of ordinary villagers in the sector at a relatively low level. Cultural tension between tourists and local populations has also been identified as a problem in some areas. The aging of the village population is an additional obstacle to the provision of necessary services for the development of rural tourism. Despite these serious problems, however, the literature has generally portrayed rural tourism as an important method of sustaining a viable rural economy

and increasing the income of rural households (Cánoves et al. 2004; Forstner, 2004; Riberio and Marques, 2002; Verbole, 2000).

### **The Employment of Crafts for Rural Development in Turkey**

Similar to most of the developing world, urbanization did not take off in Turkey before the 1950s, a period during which three-fourths of the population lived in the countryside (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2019). Caused by an increasing population, rapid development of transport infrastructure, agricultural mechanization, and urban development, the scarcity of farmland triggered mass migration from rural to urban areas (Karpas, 1976). In 1980, the share of rural population in the total population fell to 56% (Turkish Statistical Institute 2019), accelerating in following decades before declining to 26.6% in 2015 (World Bank, 2016). As in the rest of the world, a mass reverse migration back to the countryside does not seem on the horizon in Turkey.

Reflecting global trends, Turkey has introduced new rural policy initiatives over the last two decades, many with an emphasis on rural tourism (Çeken et al., 2007; 2012). Following the beginning of accession negotiations between the European Union and Turkey in 1999, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were founded across the country. Working in collaboration with the Ministry for EU Affairs of Turkey, RDAs have utilized EU funds to implement development projects of various types and sizes in an effort to reduce regional imbalances in Turkey (Berber and Çelepçi, 2005; Tutar and Emiral, 2007). Some RDA projects have addressed key problems such as limited employment and entrepreneurship. Typically, these projects include design education programs for women to promote local arts and handicrafts, while empowering underprivileged women.

Although RDA-funded projects have led to tangible improvements, we believe most have addressed urban problems without seriously engaging with rural areas. Also, the perspective of these projects is usually short-sighted. Therefore, they have not succeeded in bringing sustainable solutions to the country's rural problems. Finally, RDA projects have paid only limited attention to local culture. Rather than being a constitutive element in rethinking long-term developmental priorities, local culture has typically remained a backdrop in the design and implementation of short-term projects. For instance, open-call design competitions have employed themes inspired by regional cultural elements such as cuisines or archaeological and historical sites, but they have typically been one-time events which fail to develop close and long-term relations between local communities and designers.

In addition to governmental initiatives, non-governmental organizations and researchers have also conducted designerly studies on rural development. These studies typically argue that a creative approach to rural problems can generate site-specific solutions in order to develop and maintain projects that increase the well-being of people. Manzini (2014) argues that through community building, the reinterpretation of existing knowledge, and the use of local resources, design can be used as an instrument to overcome social challenges. He suggests that designers can play different roles in these processes such as facilitators, participants, or co-designers. Some Turkish projects have followed this approach. These projects include themes such as woman empowerment (Atalay, 2015), the use of local practices in designing new products (Ödekan,



2008), collaboration between designers and artisans (Kaya, 2011), and the preservation of knowledge and practice of traditional crafts through design interventions (Gümüşçü Çiftçi and Walker, 2017). Moreover, educational projects designed to improve the quality and marketability of local handicrafts have been implemented at the village level and have led to positive results, illustrating the potential of rural revitalization through cooperative structures and the improvement of local handicrafts (Atlıhan, 1993; Hart, 2011). Such projects have led to both short and long-term improvements for local craft communities.

The existing literature proposes designing renewed interpretations of existing craft practices, structures, or workspaces through an educational process collaboratively facilitated by designers for craftspeople. To better understand the role of design within craft studies, Disaya Chudasri and Krittiya Saksrisathaporn (2017) offer four constructive ways of maintaining local practices: Design in production, Product design and development, Design for marketing and sales, and Design for skills and knowledge transfer. Our research utilizes design to advertise existing craft practices and artifacts. Because marketing is a tool that is currently overlooked, we instrumentalize design to publicize the existing practice and knowledge of sock making. Only after building a strong community of people who are aware and interested in such crafts, can we renew the designs of rural crafts. Moreover, based on our initial interviews in Istanbul's city center, we claim that a market for sock makers already exists. Because of its limitations, however, this market needs to be sustained as well as expanded. Therefore, the re-implication of sock making as part of craft and design discussions is an important first step in enlarging the field, or, if necessary, in creating a space for the field.

### Sock Knitting Practices in Turkey

Due to their symbolic motifs, visual language, collective production process, advanced production techniques, and deeply-rooted history, handmade socks are not only a part of textile crafts but also the cultural heritage of Yenikaraağaç, as well as the whole of Turkey. Although wearing these socks has not been fashionable for a long time, they are still available in the commercial market, both in local and touristic shops. Handmade polyester or natural yarn socks featuring new or traditional motifs can be found in many shops (**Figure 1**).

**Figure 1.** A selection of socks, made by h.A., An interviewee in Yenikaraağaç Village. Motifs: clove (left), rug pattern (center), hand in hand (right). Material: Polyester (Photo: Aktaş, 2014).



Motifs, color combinations, and production techniques have been the most significant elements of hand knitted socks and have been discussed extensively in folklore studies (Özbel, 1976; Erbek, 2002; Barışta, 1988). Traditionally, the motifs of handmade socks, in addition to being decorative, were used for spiritual and practical reasons such as conveying messages, wishes of luck, or information about the owner (Özbel, 1976; Erbek, 2002).

Sock knitting used to be highly associated with rural life. However, beginning in the 1980s, local sock knitting has gradually lost its dynamism and has instead become a leisurely pursuit. Since the 1980s, accessibility to mass-produced garments and market competition have increased, causing the decline of small-scale ateliers. Major changes in the garment market have negatively impacted local village economies, since, in terms of production capacity, economic accessibility, and product duration, hand-knitted socks could not compete with mass-produced wool and polyester socks. The number of sock knitters has been decreasing, and young adults prefer seeking alternate jobs in urban centers. However, despite the significant decline, sock knitting has managed to preserve an audience, and projects have been developed to maintain the tradition (Aktaş and Veryeri-Alaca, 2017).

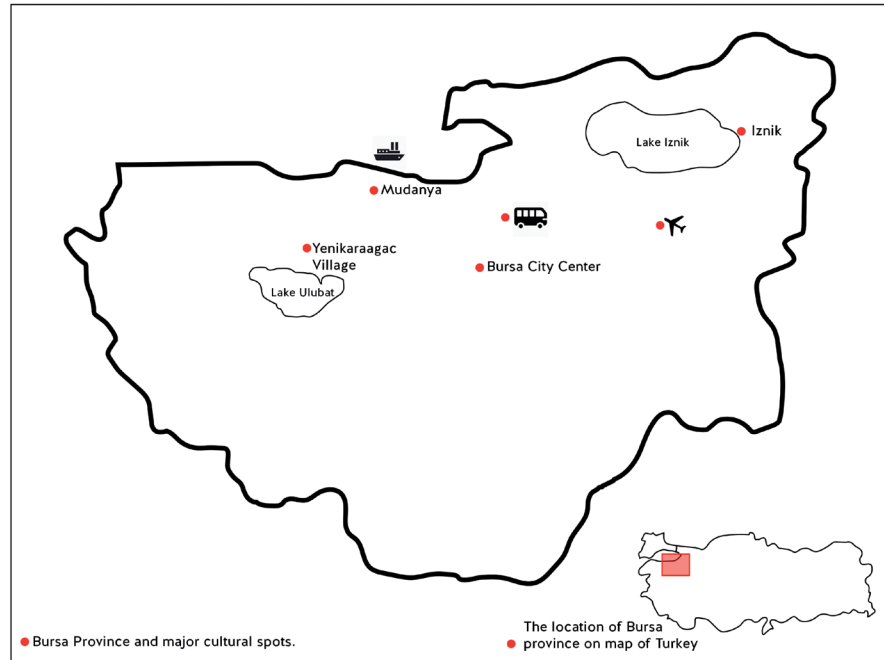
This article is part of Bilge Merve Aktaş's master's study (Aktaş, 2015) in the Design, Technology and Society programme at Koç University. Incorporating discussions of local knowledge, craft histories, and newly-developing maker cultures, her study of handmade socks adopts a design perspective to examine renewed approaches to craft practices. Sock making in this case is a complex example of how cultural heritage, women, and craft studies intersect. The study involved 20 interviews conducted with sock sellers in Istanbul's city center, 12 of whom were women. Eight of the female interviewees stated that they themselves knit the socks. The other eight male sock sellers stated that their socks were also made by women (See also Aktaş, 2016). Within this context, sock making in Yenikaraağaç Village is an unusual example, since sock knitting in the village is a gender-neutral practice. The authors, Bilge Merve Aktaş and Ilgım Veryeri-Alaca visited the village to study its dynamics and to examine possible ways of spreading this gender-neutrality to other locations. The postcard idea and designs were developed by Bilge Merve Aktaş. Ilgım Veryeri-Alaca co-planned the field trip and studied the data, and Burak Gürel helped to develop the theoretical framework of this paper.

## **METHODS OF STUDYING SOCK KNITTING IN YENİKARAAĞAÇ VILLAGE**

The study of sock knitting in Yenikaraağaç is an attempt to reassess global and national trends at the micro-level. Yenikaraağaç Village is an unusual example in that on the one hand, it is an isolated, rural area that, to a certain extent, manages to preserve its cultural values. On the other hand, it is close enough to the urban realm to enable access to it (**Figure 2**). Its unique location has contributed to the transformative mindset of the villagers, though barely facilitating the maintenance of local practices.

In Yenikaraağaç, sock knitting is a historically deeply-rooted practice of earning a living and has shaped the identity and socioeconomic structure of the village. According to the villagers, sock knitting had until recently

**Figure 2.** Map demonstrating the location of Yenikaraağaç Village, Bursa's city center, and İznik, a popular tourist destination (Illustration: Aktaş, 2015).



been one of the main sources of income for many of its residents. However, rapid urbanization has led to a decline in the village population and sock knitting. Hülya Taş (2008) states that 1,861 people were registered as village residents in 2005. Other sources estimate that there were 784 registered residents in Yenikaraağaç in 2014 (Nüfusu – Population database, 2014). The numbers illustrate a consistency with the general population decline in rural Turkey.

In order to comprehensively understand the dynamics of Yenikaraağaç, we conducted this study in three stages: pre-field trip, field trip, and post-field trip (**Table 1**). These stages facilitated an examination of various aspects of the field as well as suggested possible solutions. The study mainly employed ethnographic research tools such as interviews and field notes. Differently from typical qualitative research we proposed a design project. The role of design in this study was partially to employ creative visual elements as communication tools in order to reach a larger audience and ultimately improve the working conditions of sock makers.

Pre-field trip	Study of the interviews published in newspapers to familiarize with the field
Field trip	Interviews with residents who either used to knit socks or who still knit socks in order to earn a living
Post-field trip	Examination of field notes and interview materials by grouping the problems explained by interviewees  Proposal of a solution to problems raised by interviewees by employing design as an instrument (postcard project)

**Table 1.** Three stages of the study

Interview	Description	The aim of the study
Type 1	Local newspaper reporters' interviews with villagers between 2009 and 2016. N: 10	Gaining basic knowledge of the field
Type 2	Aktaş and Ververi-Alaca's interviews with the regional research group in 2014. N: 2	Understanding socioeconomic and cultural changes in the region
Type 3	Aktaş and Ververi-Alaca's interviews with villagers in 2014. N: 5	Understanding the villagers' experiences and expectations

**Table 2.** Three types of interview data used in this study.

Due to the limited number of studies in the field and region, interviews are an important method of gathering information. Three types of interviews inform this study: previously conducted interviews published in local newspapers, our interviews with the regional research group, and interviews with villagers (**Table 2**).

### Studying the Interviews

The gender-neutral knitting culture of Yenikaraağaç has attracted several news reports. Therefore, we began our study by examining the existing interviews. Ten interviews, published between 2009 and 2016, contain information about the gender-neutral knitting culture of and recent economic and cultural changes in Yenikaraağaç. In order to identify the characteristics of the village, the interviews were studied using the cut and sort method proposed by Ryan and Bernard (2003, 94-6). Keywords used by reporters and villagers while describing the village were categorized according to the story's title and content. These keywords were then grouped into three descriptive classifications relating to the practices, economic activities and social pattern of the village. These keywords and categories were used to understand the main concerns and current patterns of the villagers. These concerns, which usually centered on economic and historical issues, were then used to formulate interview questions.

After gathering initial information, interviews were conducted with the researchers at *Köy Araştırmaları Merkezi* (Research Center for Village Studies), a branch of the municipality-funded Bursa Research Center. Researchers associated with this center have conducted oral history research focusing on the daily routines, cuisine, social activities, weddings, and traditional clothing of the village. In order to understand the general situation in rural Bursa, an interview was conducted with the research team at the center before visiting the village. This was a group interview conducted with two civil servants, one of whom was in charge of the oral history project and head of the research group. The second interviewee was an art historian working as a reporter in the same project. This two-hour informal group discussion provided knowledge about life in the Bursa countryside and observations about craft fields, especially sock making. The interview did not provide specific information about the village, as both interviewees had never been there.

The Research Center for Village Studies contacted the village headman (*muhtar*), who then contacted up to five villagers willing to share their experience in sock knitting. Employing a mediator between researchers and interviewees was advantageous in that the field was prepared before the researchers' arrival. It was disadvantageous, however, in that time spent at the village was primarily planned by the research center's officers. We





**Figure 3.** Y.A. Demonstrating sock knitting. He was taught sock knitting by his father (Photo: Aktaş, 2014).

shared our intentions of interviewing both female and male villagers before the field trip. Accordingly, the headman contacted our female interviewees, while male interviewees were randomly invited at the field, the first contact point being the village cafe. Our sample, therefore, is a purposive one in which, according to Uwe Flick (2009, 122), typical and convenient cases can be examined based on the time and space of the event taking place. Because our study's interviewees were contacted by the headman, we believe this study avoids sampling bias.

Semi-structured interviews designed to collect information on the subjective and everyday knowledge of participants were conducted in the village. Although a set of questions were prepared before the visit, the interview process was also shaped by the interviewees. The questions concerned how and from whom villagers learned knitting, their experiences as knitters, knitting as a profession, and villagers' plans for the future. Questions about sock making were also included, inviting discussion of the participants' knowledge of sock knitting, as well as changes in production methods and the market conditions. The interviews were conducted in three locations: the village coffeehouse (*köy kahvesi*) and two participants' homes. In addition, one male interviewee demonstrated a method of sock knitting (**Figure 3**). Interviews were documented through written notes and photos.

At the village cafe, we interviewed three men who were familiar with knitting but had not been actively practicing. This interaction was organized as a group discussion which enabled us to investigate specific causes of the decline in sock knitting. Villagers stated that the coffeehouse previously functioned as an atelier where men gathered to knit socks during the summers. During our visit, two coffeehouses were crowded, but there was no knitting activity.

After initial interviews at the coffeehouse, we interviewed three knitters, two women and one man. All three were middle-aged or older and had learned sock knitting from their fathers. Knitting was the only source of income for the two female interviewees; the male interviewee was a retired civil servant and knitted as a leisure-time activity. In the field of



**Figure 4.** H.P. Knitting typical drama socks, named after the village from which their ancestors migrated (Photo: Aktaş, 2014)

sock knitting, craftspeople typically work with intermediaries (Aktaş, 2016). Similarly, the two female interviewees, H.P. (born in 1930) and H.A. (born in 1954), reported working with intermediaries in order to sell their products. When asked about sock knitting, one of the female interviewees said (H.A., interview by the Aktaş and Veryeri-Alaca on June 2, 2014):

I knit many pairs and give them to shops. Girls like you come and take [the socks] from me ... This [sock knitting] is a profession as well. Not everyone can do it. I have neighbours here and they can't do this... For instance, in the long nights I can knit one pair [of socks] in one night. But now nights are short [because it is summer]

H.P., who began knitting socks at the age of seven, reported working under more challenging conditions due to her old age and weaker networks with intermediaries (**Figure 4**). Both interviewees admitted that their income from knitting is insufficient but they continue knitting. H.A. stated (interview by the Aktaş and Veryeri-Alaca on June 2, 2014):

I raised my two daughters with the money from knitting (socks), now I wouldn't be able to do that, I hardly survive

#### **The Current State of Sock Knitting in Yenikaraağaç**

Villagers claimed that the production of handmade socks has been declining since the 1980s. Due to economic changes in Turkey, factory-made polyester socks, which are more affordable, have slowly replaced handmade socks. As these changes occurred, villagers began to use small knitting machines that are operated manually and are capable of producing a pair of socks in a much shorter time. Despite the time-saving capacities of the machines, craftspeople claimed that the quality of the product was inferior to that of hand-knitted socks. According to the knitters, this negatively impacted the reputation of handmade socks and caused a decline in sales, which forced villagers to find new avenues of income generation by commuting from village to town or even migrating to larger urban settlements such as Karacabey, Bursa, and Istanbul.



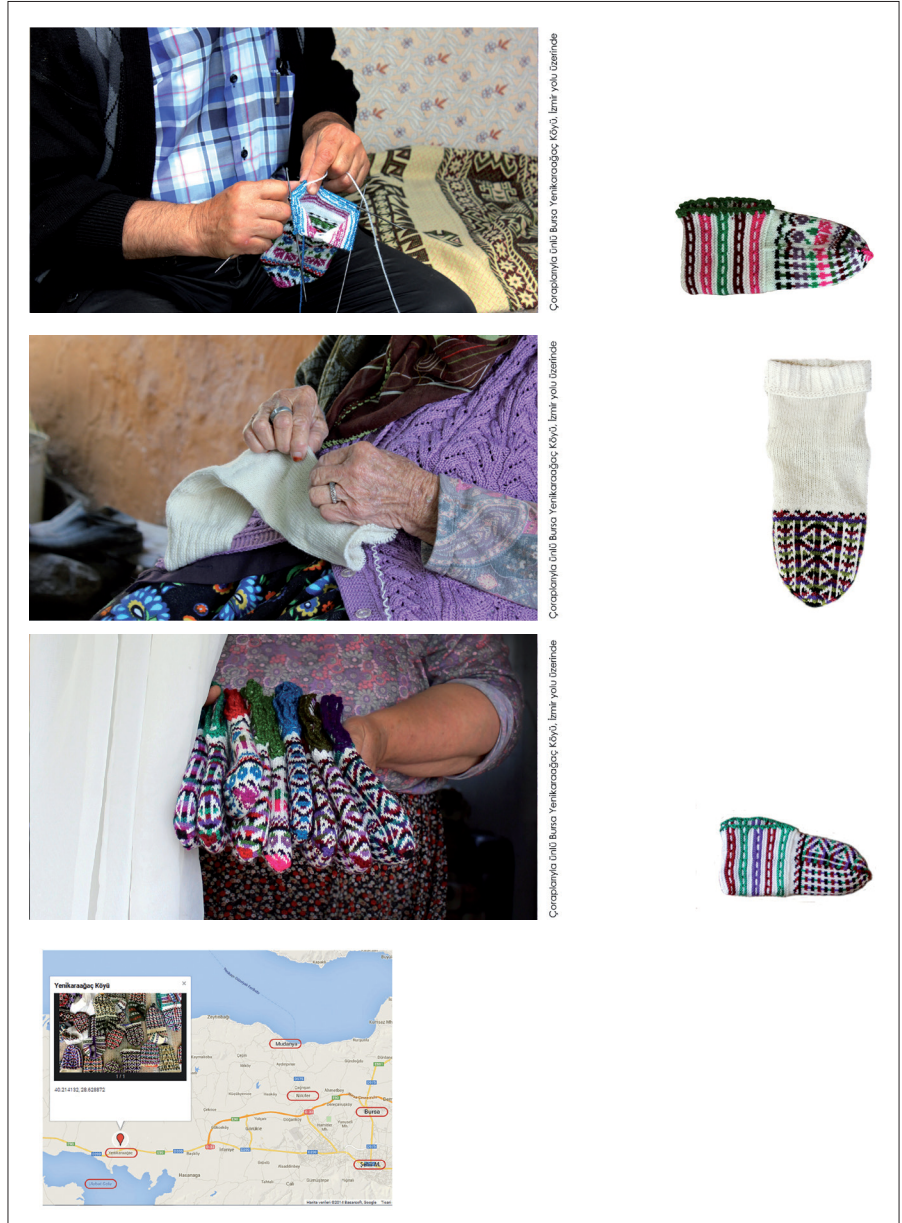


**Figure 5.** Drama socks made for women, knitted by H.P (Photo: Aktaş, 2014).

In addition to the change in knitting techniques, Yenikaraağaç also saw changes in the materials used to knit socks. Previously, craftspeople spun wool bought from wholesalers in Uşak, a city in western Turkey. Today, however, they either use mass-produced polyester yarns or buy handmade natural yarns made in Uşak. The disappearance of traditional features is related to the economic well-being of the villagers: a more labor-intensive process would increase the price of the product, which would be risky in a highly-competitive market with limited demand.

Despite the changes in production materials, craftspeople still prefer to use traditional motifs. In Yenikaraağaç, most motif names are inspired by nature, plants, and flowers (Taş, 2008). Some motif names include clove (*karanfil*), rug motif (*kilim deseni*), branch of basil (*fesleğen dalı*), and almond (*badem*). These motifs are mostly used for *çetiks*, a type of sock that only covers the feet (**Figure 1**), whereas typical Drama socks are quite simple (**Figure 4**), (**Figure 5**). Men's Drama socks are made of plain white natural yarn, while women's are made with colored yarn, featuring simple motifs at the toe and heel.

Interviewees' responses were organized around three main issues: changes in the market economy, quality of the endproduct, and clothing trends. Although the gender-neutrality of sock knitting in the village was one of the main motives of our study, the villagers' concerns about changing economic conditions led us to shift our focus. Also, interviewees did not seem to hold positive attitudes for male knitting. Inspired by the changing mobility of people living in urban centers, we developed the postcard project proposal in order to link the rural to the urban. The project primarily focused on bringing the awareness of rural practices to urbanites with the hope of supporting sock knitting in the village. Gender-neutral knitting deserves a study of its own.



**Figure 6.** Informative postcard designs for Yenikaraağaç with photos of socks, information about the craftsperson, and a map of the village (Design and Photo: Aktaş, 2014).

### Linking Rural to Urban via Yenikaraağaç Postcards

The postcard project was proposed in response to the eagerness of the interviewees to rebrand the village and its sock culture. Our observations in the field indicated that most of the socks transported to city centers, especially to Bursa and Istanbul, were made in Yenikaraağaç. Therefore, most buyers of Yenikaraağaç socks live in urban areas. Rather than trying to design a new product we decided to modestly support the existing sock knitting practice by designing a new infrastructure for economic activities by utilizing the increased mobility of urbanites interested in cultural tourism. Designed to address the problem of disconnection between craftspeople and their potential audiences/consumers, the project aimed to distribute free postcards to cafes and bookstores in Istanbul.

The postcards were carefully designed to both draw attention from and easily communicate with the potential customer. They showcase photos of the craftspeople and the socks produced by them. The back side of the cards includes a map and GPS coordinates of the village (**Figure 6**). The postcards featured three different designs, each demonstrating a different maker and sock. The photographs featured in the postcards had been taken during the interviews and were selected based on qualifications such as clarity, focus, colour, and composition. The sock appearing on the card was selected to resemble the sock in the maker's photograph. During our field trip, we collected twenty pairs of socks from the village, most of which shared similarities in design. The toe of the sock, for example, typically features floral patterns or triangles of various sizes, while the heel features short lines to bring in colour (**Figure 1**). The postcards were distributed to three locations: Robinson Crusoe (a bookstore in Beyoğlu, Istanbul), Tasarım Cafe (a design bookstore/cafe in Kadıköy, Istanbul) and Isis (a cafe in Kadıköy, Istanbul) (**Figure 7**). These locations were selected because they already had a stand for free postcards and brochures related to art and cultural events. Also, the customers of these venues, young people from diverse backgrounds, matched our target group. Postcards were distributed monthly for approximately six months, each batch including five copies of each design.

To monitor the impact of the postcards, a link to a previous online project was printed on the card. This previous project (*Türkiye'den Çoraplar/Socks from Turkey*) utilizes Facebook as a platform for archiving traditional handmade socks, enabling an online exchange of communication between



**Figure 7.** A snapshot from the Facebook page *Socks from Turkey*, depicting the postcards distributed to bookstores (Photo: Aktaş, 2015).



sock makers, customers, and anyone else interested in the subject (Aktaş, 2014). The Facebook page presents various examples of socks made in different regions of Turkey, with the name and meaning of the motifs, as well as stories behind the production of the socks, if relevant. The link was included in the card so that people who find Yenikaraağaç or handmade socks interesting would visit and like the page.

Because the Facebook interface allows its admin to track daily visits to the page and number of reviews per post, we were able to compare the number of people who looked at the posts before and after distributing the postcards. While it was clear that the number of visits had increased after distributing the cards, the number was not significant enough to point to the postcards as the primary cause of the new attention. Still, we believe that the postcard project has the potential to broaden the audience for handmade socks and therefore to benefit Yenikaraağaç, which might improve its current economic status. Chudasri and Saksrisathaporn (2017) suggest that design can be utilized as a marketing tool for sustaining local crafts. Similarly to their suggestion, our postcard project aimed to disseminate sock making culture in Yenikaraağaç by reaching out to a larger group of people through social media.

## DISCUSSION

The Yenikaraağaç study offers three socially beneficial outcomes in the context of craft production. Firstly, the fact that interviewees say that they learned sock knitting from their fathers suggests the potential to correct the current gender bias of rural craft production in Turkey. Secondly, since knitting is quotidian work that the majority of villagers are able to practice, the production and trading process involves social engagement and encourages collective action, based on equality. Finally, the Yenikaraağaç experience has the potential to contribute to contemporary global debates about maintaining local knowledges. As Ashley and Maxwell (2001) argue, a successful rural development strategy requires multi-angled approaches; therefore, studying only craft-related economies is not a comprehensive approach. By studying rural developments in relation to craft economies, promoting equal participation in economic activities, and overcoming accessibility problems, we propose that employing design as an instrument can offer multifaceted approaches for development strategies.

On the other hand, this project can create both short and long-term effects. Short-term effects include introducing sock making to new audiences, and long-term effects include the endorsement of gender-neutral knitting, which may promote gender equality in other domestic practices. Moreover, considering the cultural economy's direct and indirect effects (Bowitz and Ibenholt, 2009), rebranding Yenikaraağaç socks as an endproduct could directly and indirectly benefit the villagers. Given the long history of textile production in Bursa (İnalçık, 2011), re-emphasizing the connection between crafts, history, heritage, and contemporary sites could help Yenikaraağaç residents overcome their relative isolation from other cultural spheres and regional audiences.

Traditionally, sock makers cooperated with other practitioners and tradespeople in order to access materials and transport/trade their goods. These tradespeople came from both urban and rural regions, facilitating a naturally-occurring transmission of knowledge and exchange of ideas. A potential revival of sock knitting, therefore, might facilitate the establishment of new connections in the region. A collaborative effort

between different communities and enterprises would provide platforms for interaction while sustaining traditional and oral knowledge.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The experiences of rural change in Turkey (as well as in rest of the world) have shown that farming alone has been unable to keep the processes of outmigration and aging of the rural population in check. The development of non-farm activities such as small-scale industries, handicrafts, and rural tourism appears to be indispensable in providing a sustainable livelihood for ordinary villagers, preventing excessive rural outmigration, and maintaining a lively rural culture that combines current achievements with valuable traditions. Our case study of Yenikaraağaç Village indicates that despite its history as an important sock production center, it currently suffers from an unsatisfactory rural economy and migration to the cities.

Our interviews illustrate that due to competitive conditions, lack of entrepreneurship skills, limited networking, and distance from major centers, villagers struggle to participate in the commercial craft market. The decline in sock knitting in Yenikaraağaç has triggered the fading of intangible cultural heritage, oral history, rural knowledge, productive lifestyles, and ecologic sustainability. As a result of the regression in socioeconomic well-being, the local pattern of the village has changed, and many people, particularly young people, have moved away.

We suggest studying existing knowledge in designerly ways and building on present identities such as those of traditional sock makers, who are slowly becoming obsolete over the current regression period. In the case of Yenikaraağaç sockmaking, Schein's (1985) iceberg metaphor illustrates the making and transferring of knowledge processes, as well as the tangible part of rural culture. The intangible elements constitute local identities, which, when drawn out into the open, provide resources for new strategies of revitalizing rural crafts. The willingness of Yenikaraağaç villagers to rebrand their heritage indicates that they build relationships easily if they find the approach culturally relevant.

The postcard project used social media to track interest in the project. But because Facebook's interface only records direct interaction (such as following the page or liking a post) the recorded activity represents only a portion of people who visited the page. Accordingly, we could only measure the project's impact by monitoring the change in the number of likes. Also, Facebook only provides information about interactions for a limited period of time, which prevents retrospective studies. Although linking material and immaterial tools can be a powerful approach to collecting comprehensive data, future projects may benefit from using a more suitable online platform for recording interaction. Another limitation of the study concerns the participation of local research partners experienced in village studies. Although their local knowledge proved valuable, it also complicated our motivations. Some insights may have been overlooked because they were already common knowledge for the local partners. Accordingly, future researchers are encouraged to spend more time with the interviewees and recruit more of them, possibly through snowballing. The study could also be expanded by interviews with sellers, intermediaries, and sock owners. Hence, this study can be considered as a conception of research through practice. As further steps, measuring the

outcomes of spreading postcards should be studied and the results of this analysis should inform thinking about the gap between rural and urban craft practices and ways to reconnect them.

Peter Dormer (1990) argues that a traditional craft can be perceived as contemporary work if it is developed in accordance with current styles, while still being practiced in a traditional manner. In a similar sense, by connecting traditional ways of sock knitting with contemporary channels, an alternative perspective to local practices can be developed. Consideration of the current context of craft making in rural collaborative initiations would provide better functioning systems to craftspeople. The presented case is built upon collaboration between craftspeople, researchers, and designers, as well as between various mediums, such as between the practice of crafting and online platforms. A cooperative effort among villagers, artists and designers, textile industrialists and traders, government agencies (especially the RDAs mentioned above), and urban customers could help to reconstruct sock production on modern foundations. We believe that designerly approaches can revive local practices and the use of resources in order to develop site-specific methods for improving the quality of rural life, and to this end, we suggest the reconstitution of existing traditional identities through creative processes of culturally relevant and bottom-up applications.

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### KIRSAL DEĞİŞİM VE YEREL SANATLARI İLİŞKİLENDİRMEK: YENİKARAAĞAÇ KÖYÜ'NDE ÇORAPÇILIK ÖRNEĞİ

Kırsal kalkınma literatürü, modern dönemde çiftçiliğin kır ekonomisini geliştirmek, kırdan kente göç ve kırsal nüfusun yaşlanması süreçlerini kontrol edilebilir seviyede tutmak için tek başına yeterli olmadığını göstermektedir. Küçük ölçekli sanayi, el sanatları, kır turizmi gibi tarım dışı faaliyetlerin geliştirilmesi köylülere nispeten yeterli gelir sunmak, kırsal alanların terk edilmesinin önüne geçmek ve çağdaş kazanımlar ile nesillerdir saygı duyulan gelenekleri birleştirerek kırsal yaşamı canlandırmak bakımından zorunludur. Bursa İline bağlı Yenikaraağaç Köyü'nde yaptığımız saha araştırmasına ve İstanbul kent merkezinde uyguladığımız kartpostal projesine dayanan bu çalışma, tasarım temelli yaklaşımların yerel zanaatların hitap ettiği kitleyi genişleterek kırsal kalkınmaya katkıda bulunabileceğini ileri sürüyor. Yenikaraağaç örneğinden yola çıkarak el yapımı çorap üretiminin tarihsel seyrinin, güncel durumunun ve gelişim potansiyelinin anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlıyoruz. Yenikaraağaç Köyü'ndeki çorap üreticilerini Bursa'nın geri kalanı ile internet ve sosyal medya ağları aracılığıyla ilişkilendiren kartpostal projemiz, tasarım temelli yaklaşımların el sanatlarının kırsal yaşamı nispeten kendine yetebilecek biçimde sürdürülebilir kılarak destekleme potansiyelinin anlaşılması bakımından yararlı olduğunu gösteriyor.

### CONNECTING RURAL CHANGE AND LOCAL CRAFTS: REBRANDING SOCK KNITTING IN YENİKARAAĞAÇ (1)

Rural development literature has demonstrated that in modern times, farming alone is usually unable to provide sufficient returns to develop a rural economy and keep the processes of outmigration and aging of the rural population in check. The development of non-farm activities such as small-scale industries, handicrafts, and rural tourism has been recognized as an indispensable method of providing relatively sufficient income to villagers, preventing rural exodus, and maintaining a lively village culture which combines contemporary practices with time-honored traditions. Based on a fieldwork in the village of Yenikaraağaç (located near the city of Bursa in western Turkey) and the outreach postcard project connecting the village to urban areas, we argue that design-based approaches can expand the audience of local craft practices and contribute to rural development. This argument is supported by our examination of the historical trajectory

and current state of sock knitting in Yenikaraağaç. The postcard project, which connects sock knitting in the village to other areas, is an example of how designerly approaches present the potential of local crafts to maintain dignified livelihoods in rural Turkey.

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