

# SUSTAINABILITY OF TOY MAKING: EYUP TOYS'R OURS

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## ABSTRACT

Imported toys in Turkey have alienated the local toy culture. This alienation has been based on socio-economic and socio-cultural issues in Turkish toy sector. This assumption has been investigated through a remarkable example; the Eyup toys and toy-making tradition that vanished in 50's because of industrially produced import toys. The intention was to transform the cultural values and sustainable features of traditional Eyup toys today. Our study investigates the significant characteristics of Eyup toys to see if they were sustained. In accordance with this primary concern, we raise the question about how cultural values of these toys can be transformed by product design. Through this brief discussion, design criteria have been proposed for the regeneration of the Eyup toys.

*Keywords: Eyup toys, alienation in toy culture, sustainability, product design*

## 1 INTRODUCTION: TOY CULTURE IN TURKEY

Mass produced plastic toys are so attractive with their bright colors and rich forms. They provide many possibilities of playing for kids with wide range variety of characters. Toys stimulate kids' imagination; prepare them for their future. Most of them are cheap, so they are widespread. Do we defray the cost of this attraction? Yes, we do by alienating our kids to our cultural values.

Before the era of mass production, toys were products of handcraft. Many countries made their toys by reflecting unique characteristics of their own culture (Yalcin 2003). Today, countries of Far East, especially China are the location of toy production. Almost 90% of toys, played with in the world are produced in China. Brand names of industrially developed countries prefer to order their toys produced in this country (Hurriyet, 28 March 2008).

Most of toys sold in Turkey are imported brands. These toys transfer cultural philosophies to the younger generation of the importing countries. For example, among talky toys found in the Turkish market, it is difficult to find ones, speaking or singing in Turkish. Many books printed for kids are also in English. Two TV channels for kids in 0-3 year-old are broadcasting in our native language, but the names of the characters are in their original language. Most of the songs in these TV programs are translated from foreign languages. Even local toy stores have brand names in English. These observations make us think: "Don't we have any culture of toy making, songs, names, characters for kids in this country?" Bekir Onur, as quoted below from his book titled "World with Toys" explains the situation clearly:

*"Toys, in their broadest sense, are eyewitnesses of their era ... Toys, simple as handcraft products of folk art to sophisticated hi-tech industrial products, reflect the economic, social, cultural features of their production time. The existence and non-existence of toys of an era, of a period, of a society or a location carry very meaningful and tell-tale characteristics."*

As toys reflect features of their time, the toy sector in Turkey is a seasonable and alive example of this quotation. We in Turkey do have toy brands and producers. However, because of the financial dominance by foreign brands of the global market and cheap production in China, local production suffers as "Union of Whole Toy Producers" (UWTP – TOYIB) declared (Nethaber, 5. June 2007). Market share of trade marked products in the world is \$ 50 billion. The market share of USA is \$ 33 billion; of UK is \$ 6 billion in the world toy sector, and so on. Among these figures, Turkey has a small share as \$ 200 million. Figures make clear why our kids grow up playing with the dominating American/foreign culture toys.

One of the biggest American toy brands, "Toys'R Us" has a \$ 12 billion market share in the world. This means almost one fourth of [the value of] toys, played with in the world, come from this retailer. Through

the last 12 years, it has been the dominating retailer with 35 stores in Turkey, too. (Hurriyet, 28 March 2008). As for cultural impact, it is hard to remember a name of any other toy store other than “Toys’R Us.” “As a consequential issue of economic globalization, this gives more than a hint about the concept of cultural dominance carried through toys.”

Toyiki is a recently created, widespread local retailer in Turkey. According to the company president, Murat Beyazit, this brand will import 50% of toys from Far East countries; the rest will be purchased from local producers. The company had been representing Toys’R Us for 12 years before Toyiki was established in 2008. This year, its targeted endorsement is \$100 million which makes it the biggest toy retailer in the local market (Hurriyet, 28. March 2008). Our concern is; how can local toy production gain ground?

Cultural dominance through toys is a concrete case of globalization, which, as a result paves the way for uniformed cultures. The global effect of uniformity arouses localization as a positive reaction, especially in design. In our opinion, cultural values and traditional knowledge are becoming valuable sources for product design in this situation. Hence, we have focused on Turkish traditional toys known as Eyup.

Eyup Toys was a toy-making culture, based in Istanbul during Ottoman times, starting from 17<sup>th</sup> CC. This culture, with 300 years of tradition, had vanished by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, surpassed by the plastic toy industry. In its time, it was a sustainable system in terms of material, production techniques, vending and social dynamics. These toys were a notable case in Turkish history, carrying characteristic values parallel to cultural recreation. Regenerating Eyup toys by product design is a way to revive the cultural values of toys in terms of their socio-economical conditions. We intend to continue by classifying and then analyzing Eyup toys in terms of local their cultural values and their means of production as follows.

## 2 EYUP TOYS

Toy makers crafted Eyup toys in the Eyup district of Istanbul -the capital of Ottoman in its time-, which was a ‘holy’, a ‘market’ and a ‘production,’ place, had addressed not only locality but also national toy culture in Anatolia. This district was popular with visits of parents used to take their children to Eyup Sultan Mosque to pray for circumcision and education purposes (Geles, 2001; Yalcinkaya, 2001; Wikipeidi, “Eyup Oyuncakligi”) (See Figure 1 and 2).



Figure 1 & 2 Boys in traditional circumcison costumes today and in the past  
(Figure 1: Photograph by the authors and Figure 2: Yalcin, 2003)

Eyup was a market place, located mainly around the mosque, where there were stores selling goods (Geles, 2001). It was also a production place, since the products like pots, toys, prayer beads; kerchiefs were manufactured at the back of the shops. This district surrounded by Tahtakale -where wooden products made and sold-, the Stove Makers, and the Sutluce slaughterhouse; was the industrial zone of its time. Since the toys were made at the back of the shops in the same vicinity, the waste material from these production zones, were easily shipped and used as a basic material for the toys. Toys were sold at the front of the shops as well as by the street peddlers (See Figure 3 and 4).

Toy makers could not withstand the trend of mass production and imported toys from western countries in 50’s, just as with other traditional craft made toys. Had the toy makers been innovative enough to develop new kinds of toys to satisfy 20<sup>th</sup> Century kids, this tradition might have been able to survive (Yalcinkaya quotes Ural).



Figure 3 & 4 Street peddlers recently and in the past (Figure 3, 4: Yalcin, 2003)

## 2.1 A Reproduction of Eyup Toys Project

An effort has been put forth for the marketing of Eyup Toys for local socio-economic and touristic purposes in 2005. A project, titled ‘Constructing Sustainable Work Relations and Training Housewives from Fener-Balat Districts in Eyup Toy-Making’ came to the fruition by the efforts of the Eyup Municipality, Foundation of Turkish History (FOTH), and Is-Kur, with the financial support of the European Union. Irfan Caliskan, the Culture Director of Eyup Municipality, and Halit Sengoz, a previous owner/master craftsman of Eyup Toys, emphasized the project as the zeitgeist of the ‘return of natural materials and artisanship’ against plastic mass production in China (Dalgaldere, 2006). Today, 57 housewives, trained in woodcarving and cutting techniques, drawings and materials, are working in this district, and reproducing 16 selected types of original Eyup toys (Eyup Oyuncaklari, Yalcinkaya) (See Figures 5-18) (Yalcinkaya, consultant of the project).



Figure 5 Carriage with mirror



Figure 6 Carriage with bird



Figure 7 Barrow



Figure 8 Pulled carriage



Figure 9 & 10 Carriage with cymbals



Figure 11 Seytan Minaret



Figure 12 Acrobat



Figure 13 Ferris wheel



Figure 14 & 15 Side drum and Drum with handle



Figure 16 & 17 Wired Cupboard and Cradle



Figure 18 Pitcher

(Figure 5-18: Eyup Oyuncaklari, “Oyuncaklar”)

This project has certain benefits for local employment, and -maybe- for tourism. Reproduced toys, as exact copies of original ones, are nostalgic and touristic goods, by production address more locality than it is in the past. This feature may help the survival of the Eyup toys as memories or souvenirs. However, how much these reproduced toys might become prevalent and desirable as toys of today is a controversial subject.

## 2.2 Eyup Toys, Classified

Eyup toys reflected dynamism, discovery, interactivity, and provided opportunities for group playing among family members. They had contained timeless and ageless features in playing and in their physical aspects (TRT, 2004). Only 28 pieces of original Eyup toys are preserved in the collection of the Istanbul

Municipality. We can generally categorise Eyup toys in six: **1. Movable and Audible Objects**; **2. Musical Instruments**; **3. Household Goods**; **4. Weapons**; **5. Animals** and; **6. Architecture**. Eyup toys from the collection are listed below with photographs of originals (See Figures 19-31) (Geles, 2001; Yalcinkaya, 2001; Yalcin, 2003).

### 2.2.1 Movable and Audible Objects

Carriages -with camel, two-horses and duck- , whipping top, tumblers –*haciyatmaz-*, *kaynana ziriltisi* -analogy in name: yakking of mother-in-law-, minaret of evil -*seytan minaresi-* , slap sticks, rowboats and sultan boats, ferris wheel, whirligig, whistling whirligig, whistling pitchers, *Karagoz* and *Hacivat* models -well-known traditional characters of shadow plays-, acrobats, wooden trucks and busses, balloons -made of intestines-



Figure 19 Carriage with mirror



Figure 20 Carriage with bird



Figure 21 Barrow



Figure 22 Pulled carriage



Figure 23 Carriage with cymbals

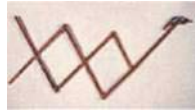


Figure 24 Seytan Minaresi



Figure 25 Acrobat



Figure 26 Ferris wheel

### 2.2.2 Miniature Musical Instruments

Tambourine with cymbals, drums, drums with handles, side drums, tom-toms, whistles, bagpipes, *kemence* -small three-stringed violin-, *cura* -the smallest variety of *baglama*-



Figure 27 Side drum



Figure 28 Drum with handle

### 2.2.3 Household Goods

Swinging cradles and cradles with mirror, pitchers, decanters, glasses, mortars, churn, mirrors, chairs, tables, wired cupboards



Figure 29 Wired cupboard



Figure 30 Cradle



Figure 31 Pitcher and whistling pitcher

(Figure 19-31: Geles, 2001)

### 2.2.4 Weapons

Wooden swords, rifles made of reed, arrows with rope, wooden hammers

### 2.2.5 Animals

Sheep and lambs, grasshoppers, birds, rats, movable storks

### 2.2.6 Architecture

Minarets without mosque

### 2.3 Analysis of Eyup Toys

Original Eyup toys (see above Figures 19- 31) are analysed under four titles below: **1. Materials and Manufacturing Techniques; 2. Colours and Ornaments; 3. Forms and Function; 4. Education and Health Factors**

#### 2.3.1 Materials and Manufacturing Techniques

Eyup toys, made of waste materials, gathered from workshops and factories: **Wood** from Tahtakale district in Eminonu -where wood products were manufactured and sold-; **clay** from Kagithane and Alibeykoy streams; **tin plates** from stove makers; **hides** and **intestines** from Sutluce slaughterhouse (Foundation of Turkish History, 2005). Major materials used in Eyup toys were wood and clay, and subsidiary materials were hide, paper and tinplate. Materials used for ornamentation were **bead** and **mirror**; others such as **rope**, **wire**, and **nail** used for joining components (Geles 2001, Yalcin 2003, Yalcinkaya).

#### 2.3.2 Colors and Ornaments

Original Eyup toys were coloured with **madder**. This natural material in bright colours like red, blue, green and white used together with yellow gilding (Geles 2001, Yalcin 2003, Yalcinkaya). Stylish, soft, wavy bands; dotted patterns; radial and simple lines; beads and mirrors were used for ornamentation in order to make them more energetic-looking. Although it has been said that non-figurative ornamentation was used on toys due to religious reasons, figurative ornamentation can be observed in “Acrobat” (See above Figure 25) (Geles 2001, Yalcinkaya).

#### 2.3.3 Forms and Functions

Roughly made-simple forms of Eyup toys covered with ornamentation and bright colours were significant (Yalcinkaya). Figures like “Acrobat” and “*Karagoz-Hacival*” reveal cultural characters. The variety in musical instruments and differentiation of a singular musical instrument in form and function signify the importance of music in Turkish culture. Musical instruments, alike with household toys -such as cradles and cupboards-, are miniatures of the real ones. Another characteristic type of musical instruments were the audible toys. There were many different types of whistling and different sounding toys.

#### 2.3.4 Education and Health Factors

Mechanic and structural designs of Eyup toys were providing functions to children to improve their abilities such as movement of muscles, hand-eye control, and rhythm senses (Koknel, Yalcinkaya). The use of natural materials encouraged sustainability and health in toy making, which have become important issues in this century.

### 3 CONCLUSION: REGENERATION OF EYUP TOYS

As we see a need in Turkey to recreate our toy culture for the future and for the local toy production [which needs new sources to survive], we are suggesting here a strategy to regenerate Eyup toys of today through design. This suggestion takes roots from our opinion that our cultural heritage can be a force against the uniformed toy culture created by global economy.

Regeneration of Eyup toys is a potential project, research and implementation for system design and product design fields in Turkey. Toy businesses can be kept busy with this opportunity. What could be the criteria for regeneration design of Eyup toys? Whatever the way, Eyup Toys do need innovation. Eyup toys need to be updated in their manufacturing, forming, visual appeal, etc. with safety, durability, health, education issues for their sustainability through generations. Otherwise, they may pass away as nostalgic objects or stay on the shelves as touristic souvenirs like the outputs of a similar “Reproduction Project” in the Balat district mentioned before, apart from its initial socio-economic purposes.

#### 3.1. Design Criteria of the Regeneration

A product / toy design process for today’s kids should focus on adopting valuable features of Eyup

Toys and toy making as mentioned before, instead of just copying the originals. These new toys should be affordable to cope with cheap and imported toys. Below are some of our ideas developed for the regeneration of Eyup toys:

Musical instruments, audible ones and mechanical structures of movable toys attract our attention as timeless objects to redesign them as contemporary ones; with figures, graphics in terms of toy classification. On the other hand, household goods such as the “wired cupboard” are not in use any more, and do not make sense for today’s kids other than being a toy of grand-grand mom’s period. Group playing and playing between generations were valuable features of Eyup Toys; this should be sustained in concept development, based on the age and pedagogical knowledge of the kids.

In terms of manufacturing techniques, these new toys can be produced by new-craft methods; computer aided manufacturing (CAM) mixed with the hand-made. Even kids can be stimulated to make their own Eyup toys with directions. Natural, biodegradable and recycle materials should be the main criteria in selection such as wood, wood-oriented materials -plywood, paper, etc.-, leather, fabric, PLA -Poly Lactic Acid-, etc. Some characteristic sub-material used in original toys may be used again such as mirror -not fragile type- that always attracts kids and babies’ attraction. Assembly of the pieces of toys should be done using clever details rather than nails and wires.

In terms of the artistic touch, ornaments and symbols were intangible and each one had its own meaning. By respecting tradition, cultural and spiritual values of today may be applied on new toys in graphics, abstracted figures, and patterns to enrich kids’ imagination and senses. Bright colours are timeless for kids, and they may be sustained in new toys with organic dye.

Parents and kids could buy these new design toys from internet and toy markets in Turkey such as Toyiki, ToyzzShop, etc. In addition, small toy stores as the traditional ones in old Eyup -toy making at the back, sales in the front of the store, which allows kids to learn about toy making- could be started as a chain of stores from the same neighbourhood. Designed and equipped street peddlers may also sell these new toys on the streets of Eyup.

Of course, instead of toys bought, having toys shared and exchanged by kids themselves is our dream, which could be realized in responsible design thinking with non-profit purposes, in addition to product design and marketing suggestions listed above.

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