

Chapter 25

From the Working Order of Akhi–Tradesmen Organization to Economic Geography: Regional Production, Competition, and Tanner Tradesmen

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ABSTRACT

It is possible to take the concepts of economic geography, regional production, and competition, often mentioned nowadays, back to the transition to the established order in the historical process, in other words, to the agricultural revolution. However, systematically developing and implementing methods was started by Ahi Evran about 800 years ago. The working order of the Akhi-Tradesmen Organization created by Evran, based on the understanding of the economy will serve the human, not human to economy, bears a resemblance to today's agglomeration system. The fact that production factors, which are agglomerated in a specified geographical area, work with optimum efficiency spurs competitiveness. Within this framework, this chapter reveals the implementation of regional agglomeration model in Ottoman territories in historical process, which is discussed in the economic geography studies. In addition, within the scope of institutionalization, the period spent by organization of Akhi-Tradesmen in the Ottoman Empire will be mentioned.

INTRODUCTION

Regional agglomeration, which is one of the main areas of economic geography studies that has started to increase since the middle of 20th century, has focused on getting optimum efficiency with the least possible use of natural resources from the start of production date until the time it reaches the customer. Regional production, in other words, regional agglomeration traces were investigated in the past, and the

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Akhi-Tradesmen Organization as an economic organization model in the Seljuk Dynasty was encountered 800 years ago. After the Seljuks, the organization continued its existence in the Ottoman Empire and over time, it became a center of the production of goods and services by becoming tradesmen associations with laws after some arrangements. Considering the fact that the courtiers, senior staff and almost everyone except the catechism class were registered in a branch of tradesmen, the limits of extensiveness will be better understood.

Due to the assemblage of the tradesmen in the same region, it is easier to follow up the stages of production from raw material procurement to finished goods, and on the other hand, a timely intervention on possible disruptions in the process is provided. It is understood that the sustainability of the system is supported by the positive economic exogeneities it produces in addition to its internal advantages. Within this framework, the tradesmen's/producer's backward linkages with raw material and intermediate goods suppliers, forward linkages with merchants and retail end sellers contribute to expand the boundaries of regional agglomeration. Furthermore, the desire for a qualified workforce, bring with it the training of expert staff in the work of producers with knowledge. This is for the benefit of both individual producers and the professional association established in the same region. As it is seen, agglomeration is inter-related and supportive, in other words, it is a collaborative economic formation. In addition, regional agglomeration in economic geography studies is seen as a remarkable element of competition.

It was determined that the regional agglomeration model, where business partnerships and competition nourish each other, is valid within the Ottoman trades system. Considering the points where the tanner tradesmen, which are taken as an example in the study, are examined, it is seen that there are slaughterhouses and butcher's trades in the immediate vicinity. Warehouses were built to store the tanned leather according to the density of tradesmen gathered in five different regions in İstanbul. The distribution of raw materials from butchers and tanner tradesmen required a more complicated grouping. The leather tanned by tanner tradesmen is distributed to tradesmen such as shoemakers, binders, saddlers, whippers, who process the leather different. In addition to this, the meat of the animal was distributed to sheep, lamb, goat butchers, the animal fat to candlemakers, and the offal part of the animal to the different tradesmen such as soup sellers and sellers of liver. (Kala, 1992) Such horizontal and vertical organizations have helped the tradesmen to exist and make each other sustainable, and have developed a control mechanism. This mechanism has the characteristic preventing unfair competition between the organized tradesmen in themselves and the associations of the same tradesmen established in different regions.

In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the regional agglomeration model, which is discussed in economic geography studies, on Ottoman tradesmen in order to ensure optimum production efficiency. As an example, tanner tradesmen and their sub-associations will be discussed, micro, meso and macro regularisations will be mentioned, and information about where the regional professional agglomerations are located in İstanbul will be presented. It will focus on the creation of sub-professional associations in micro-scale, the division of labor between the associations in the agglomeration regions located in the meso-scale cities, and how the cross-sectoral cooperation is provided in these regions in macro-scale, raw material procurement and product distribution. The study, which is carried out on the documents obtained from the records of Ottoman archives, will point out that the historical trade axes, in other words, the regional trade organization areas, have not lost their old positions.

In the research done upon the related topic up to now, economic geography, regional production and competition issues and forms of Akhi-Tradesmen organization are generally handled alone. The study aims to draw attention to the gap in interdisciplinary fields by bringing all three issues together under

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