COĞRAFİ BİLİMLER DERGİSİ
CBD 13 (2), 79-92 (2015)

Folk Music, Local Dances and Summer Pasture Festivals in Rural Areas of the Eastern Black Sea Region, Turkey[1]

Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi'nin kırsal alanlarında halk müziği, yerel danslar ve yayla festivalleri

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Öz : *Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi Türkiye'nin kuzeydoğu köşesinde yer almaktadır. Bölge dağlık bir alan olduğu için kırsal nüfus için hayvancılık ve yaylacılık önemli ekonomik faaliyetler haline gelmiştir. Köylüler sürülerine otlak bulmak için yaz aylarında yaylaya çıkarlar. Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi'nin halkı, özellikle de kırsal kesimde yaşayanlar, geçimlerini sağlamak için çok çalışmak zorundadır. Bu nedenle çok aktif ve canlı bir yaşam tarzına sahiplerdir. Bu yaşam tarzı insanların halk müziği ve yerel danslarını etkilemiştir. Yayla şenlikleri bölgedeki yaylacılık kültürünün bir parçası olarak yüzlerce yıldır geleneksel olarak kutlanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi'nin kırsal kesiminde birbiriyle ilişkili olan halk müziğini, yerel dansları ve yayla şenliklerini keşfetmek ve anlamaktır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın amacına yönelik olarak nitel veriler 2010 yılının yaz ve sonbahar döneminde on beş kişi ile yapılan derinlemesine görüşmeler ve kişisel gözlemler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Derinlemesine görüşmeler sırasında yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formları kullanılmıştır. Toplanan tüm veriler betimsel analiz yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları, Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi'nde halk müziği eşliğinde oynanan yerel danslarla, geleneksel yayla şenliklerinin halen devam ettiğini göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, yaylaların işlevindeki değişim ve yayla festivallerinin turizm ürününe dönüşmesi, bu eşsiz mirası bozulma ve yok olma bakımından tehdit etmektedir.*
Anahtar kelimeler: *Halk müziği, halk dansları, kırsal şenlikler, Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi, Türkiye.*

Abstract: *The Eastern Black Sea Region is located in the north-eastern corner of Turkey. The region is a mountainous area where livestock and transhumance have become important economic activities for rural population. The villagers move into the yayla (**Yayla**: a temporary settlement in mountain pastures; plural: **yaylalar**) during summer to find pasturage for their herds. People of the Eastern Black Sea Region, especially those living in rural areas, have to work very hard to make a living. Therefore, they have a very active and vibrant lifestyle. This lifestyle of the people has also made impact on the folk music and local dance. Yayla festivals have been celebrated traditionally for hundreds of years as part of the transhumance culture in the region. The aim of present study is to explore and understand the folk music, dances and festivals which are related each other in rural area of the Eastern Black Sea Region of Turkey. Qualitative research techniques have been used in the study. Keeping in view the aim of the research, qualitative data have collected through*

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[1] This paper was submitted by the authors for the *"2015 Annual Conference"* held by the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) on September 1-4, 2015.

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Makale Geliş Tarihi: 3.04.2016
Makale Basıma Uygun Tarihi: 5.05.2016

personal observations and in-depth interviews with fifteen people during summer and autumn 2010. Semi-structured interview forms have been used to collect information during in-depth interviews. All of the collected data have been analyzed by descriptive analysis techniques. The findings of the research show that traditional yayla festivals of Eastern Black Sea Region, where local dances are played on folk music, are still continued. However, both the change in function of yaylas and transformation of yayla festivals into tourism product has threatened the unique cultural heritage in terms of degradation and extinction.
Key words: *Folk music, folk dances, rural festivals, Eastern Black Sea Region, Turkey.*

1. Introduction

Mountain regions cover about one-fifth of the continents and greatly influence regional and continental atmospheric circulation as well as water and energy cycles. They provide direct life-support base for about a tenth of humankind, and indirectly affect the lives of more than half. Such indirect effects refer to the provision of goods and services including desired volumes of high quality water, hydro-electric power, agricultural and forest sproducts, and landscapes for tourism and recreation (Price, 1999).

Mountains are focal points of global biodiversity, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions, but also in the temperate zone, where they retain a greater number of species than adjacent lowlands, impoverished through centuries or millennia of human use. Many mountain areas with the greatest biological and landscape diversity are parks or other types of protected areas. In many cases, this diversity results from and must be maintained through, human intervention. The management of mountain areas must strive for a careful balance between the protection of natural resources, the needs of local people, and the desires of tourists (Mountain Agenda, 1999).

Mountain people have a rich cultural heritage, including traditional practices, buildings, and ways of life. One key element of this heritage is recognized by the existence of many sacred places in mountains – not only for pilgrims, but also for local people. The cultural heritage of mountains is often threatened by tourism; yet tourism can also provide opportunities for mountain people to maintain their specific identity and to inform and educate tourists about their heritage. In the long term, cultural heritage is a key element of the attractiveness of mountain regions for tourists – and tourists should be aware of this heritage; it must not be sacrificed for short term benefits (Mountain Agenda, 1999).

Geography as a discipline is concerned with the character of place as well as the spatial arrangement and organization of the myriad phenomena on the earth's surface, both natural and human made. It is primarily an exercise in locational analysis seeking to understand why various phenomena are where they are. Human geography research has focused on virtually every segment of human spatial behavior ranging from industrialization to settlement patterns. It has concentrated on the material (tangible/visible) and nonmaterial (oral/spiritual) elements of human spatial behavior including the distributions sports, and foodways (Carny, 1994:1). However, there is a lack of research work on spatial and environmental traits of Turkish folk culture in Turkey.

Several studies on cultural geography have investigated a variety of culture traits unique to the Eastern Black Sea Region including house types, traditional economies and transhumance. Cultural historians, folklorists, and sociologists have long recognized unique rural culture of the Eastern Black Sea region. However, very little research has been conducted on mountainous region of Black Sea by geographers creating a literature gap on this issue. The aim of present study is to examine and understand the folk music, dances and festivals in the rural area of the Eastern Black Sea Region of Turkey in the context of cultural geography.

2. Location and Geographic Features

The Eastern Black Sea Region is located in the north-eastern corner of Turkey (Figure 1). The region with mountainous shoreline, covers 36,837 km² (4.7% of the country) and has a population of 2.6 million (2014 census). The Eastern Black Sea region consists of seven provinces; including provinces of Ordu, Giresun, Trabzon, Rize and Artvin, located along the eastern coast of the Black

Sea, and two inland provinces of Gumushane and Bayburt. The border with the Republic of Georgia forms the eastern boundary of this region. It exhibits great diversity in geological structure, topography, climate and vegetation cover.

Within the region, high mountain ranges run parallel to the Black Sea coast in the north with undulating plateau on the southern foot of the mountains. High ridges trending east-west rise abruptly from the Black Sea coast, and the coastal plain is thus narrow. The mountain ranges get higher,

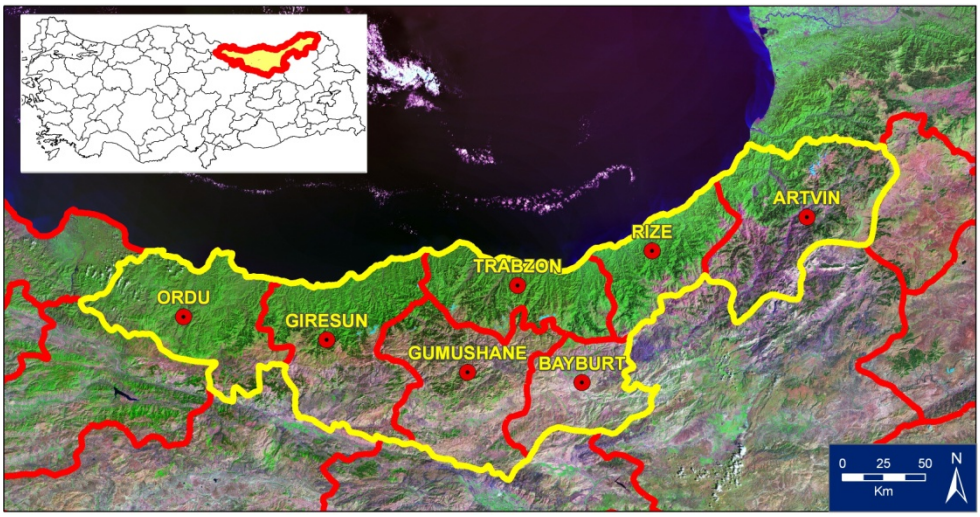


Figure 1. Location map of the Eastern Black Sea Region

narrower and steeper toward the eastern area. Less than 50 km from the coast, the Eastern Black Sea Mountains rise to more than 3700 m, with a maximum elevation of 3932 m in the Kaçkar range, one of the steepest topography in the world (Japan International Cooperation Agency & State Planning Organization the Republic of Turkey, 2000).

Climate of the region is highly humid with annual rainfall of 2000 to 2500 mm. Thus country's densest forests grow in this area. In addition, the area is hard to access due to its distance from developed areas and harsh topographical conditions (Somuncu and İnci, 2004).

3. Data and Methods

Participatory qualitative research techniques have been used in the study. Authors have participated in the festivals held at *Kadirga Yayla, Kumbet Yayla, Kazıkbeli Yayla* and *Ayder Yayla* to get the first hand information. Photographs have been taken at the festivals as part of the research process. Moreover, film and sound recording have also been made by authors. Keeping in view the aim of the research, qualitative data have collected through personal observations and in-depth interviews with fifteen people during summer and autumn 2010 (Table 1). Among these interviewees include musicians, peasants, representatives of local authorities and representative of regional tourism association. Semi-structured interview forms have been used to collect information during in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted in the homes or workplaces of the interviewees in the festival spaces, *yaylas* and cities while the duration of interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours. All of the collected data have been analyzed by descriptive analysis techniques.

4. Transhumance, Summer Pastures and Community Life

High mountain ranges with steep slopes and limited flatlands restrict agricultural activities in the Eastern Black Sea Region. As mechanization is difficult under these conditions, crop cultivation depends largely on man power. Therefore, livestock in the region has become very important

economic activity. Major livestock types in the region include sheep and cattle, poultry and apiculture (beekeeping). Besides, horses, buffaloes, mules, asses etc. are kept mainly for draft. Among animal products produced in the region, important ones in terms of production are cow milk, beef, cattle hides, hen eggs, honey, and wax. Particularly dairy and honey productions are of great importance (Japan International Cooperation Agency & State Planning Organization the Republic of Turkey, 2000).

Table 1. Stakeholders interviewed and their characteristics

Stakeholders	**Name and Surname Initials**	**Job**	**Interviewed Place: Yayla/Province**	**Interviewed Date**
Villagers	C.M.	Headman of Uzundere Village	Kumbet Yayla/Giresun	22 July 2010
	A.Ç.	Headman of Kumbet Village	Kumbet Yayla/Giresun	18 July 2010
	A.V.	Guest-house owner and minibus driver	Kazıkbeli Yayla/Gumushane	25 July 2010
	Y.S.Y	Local businessman	Ayder Yayla/Rize	28 October 2010
	D.G.	Local businessman	Ayder Yayla/Rize	28 October 2010
	M.Y.	Hotel owner	Ayder Yayla/Rize	29 October 2010
	H.S.	Villager	Kadirga Yayla	16 July 2010
Local Instrument Players	M.Ö.	*Kemençe* player	Kadirga Yayla/Gumushane	16 July 2010
	B.F.	*Tulum* player	Ayder Yayla/Rize	1 August 2010
	H.Ç.	*Kemençe* player	Kadirga Yayla/Gumushane	16 July 2010
Representative of Local Tourism Authority	T.D.	Chief executive/ Association of Black Sea Tourist Guides	Trabzon	30 October 2010
Representatives of Local Authority	T.Y.	Manager/ Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism	Gumushane	26 October 2010
	İ.K.	Manager/ Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism	Trabzon	24 October 2010
	İ.L.M.	The Mayor	Ayder Yayla/Rize	29 October 2010
	T.K.	Agriculture engineer/ Provincial Directorate of Agriculture	Trabzon	25 October 2010

Livestock activity performed in the mountainous areas of the Eastern Black Sea Region is a low-efficiency *"pasture-based livestock production"* that is dependent on grasslands, summer pastures and human efforts. The villagers move into the *yaylas* during summer to find suitable pasturage for their herds. The transhumance begins with approaching hot weather in early summer during which the herders live in traditional wood homes in the *yaylas* and return back to their villages with the approach of autumn. Most villages and towns in the Eastern Black Sea Region highlands have their own allocated *yayla* where the upper limit of these *yaylas* is 2500 meters high (Somuncu, 1989). It has been found that economic activities in rural areas of the region that are dependent on the natural structure of the area have shaped twofold lifestyle. The villagers in the region stay at villages during autumn and winter seasons while in spring and summer seasons they move to the *yaylas.*

Although lifestyle at the *yaylas* is just like of villages but in *yaylas* only animal grazing is performed instead of other agricultural activities. Therefore, all family members engage in activities like grazing and milking of animals, production of butter, cheese, yogurt and marketing of surplus products.

5. Folk Music and Dances in Rural Area of the Eastern Black Sea Region

Since prehistoric times, in a social group whose survival depends on nature, the individual and the group have been viewed as identical. Every line of behavior and tradition in such groups has been depicted as anonymous, and these anonymous features have represented the group itself. That is, society has determined its own life style based on an unwritten set of rules, which in turn has led to the emergence of the concept "tradition" in societies living on farming, stock farming, forestry, ant etc. (Alaner, 2010; Sun, 1969: 10-20; 1992:287). Tradition is defined as *"a set of habits with unwritten rules which is passed on from one generation to the next fostering a common spirit and a strong affiliation among the members of the group."* (Alaner, 2010; Türk Dil Kurumu, 1988:534).

Folk music has come to be associated with a wide range of styles, influences and social practices. It has become closely linked with an oral tradition in which songs are passed down between generations and/or places through performance, rather than formal transcription (Esen, 1999: 9; Tanrıkorur, 1992: 379; Tokel, 2000:14). A rather normative definition of folk music is that it is: *''collectively owned, of ancient and anonymous authorship and transmitted across generations by word of mouth; a canon celebrating life in the past and urging change for tomorrow, the performance being on simple instruments in natural settings the joyful performance by specially gifted but not 'professional' musicians."* (Yarwood and Charlton, 2009: 195). Hungarian composer Béla BARTOK provides the following definition for folk music: *"Folk music can be alternatively defined as peasant music. Here peasant is used to refer to those who employ themselves in agriculture, and who express themselves in their own creative way, fulfill their physical and spiritual needs in accordance with traditions which they have deeply internalized."* (Alaner, 2010). Present research deals with folk music of the Eastern Black Sea Region in the context of above mentioned definition.

A folk song usually expresses things of daily life, whether it is a work song, a story-telling ballad, a love song or a dance song. The subject of the song usually reflects the way people live and work, the language they speak, the instruments they play. Folk songs called *"Türkü"*, reflect the past events experienced by Turks (Esen, 1999: 2; Sözer, 1964: 432). *Türkü* changes with the changing times. Folk songs always have a story behind them. Sometimes it is a love story and sometimes it is the expression of deep emotions. The regional mood also affects folk songs. For example, folk songs of the Black Sea Region are lively in general and express the customs of the region (Bartók, 1991: 48; Hamzaçebi, 2015; Uçan, 1996: 10-58).

People of the Eastern Black Sea region, especially those living in rural areas, have to work very hard to make a living. Therefore, they have a very active and vibrant lifestyle. This lifestyle of the people has also made impact on the local music and dance. For instance, the music played with *"Tulum"* and "*Kemençe"*, two local instruments of the area, is very active and alive (Arıcı, 1992: 120; Gazimihâl, 1975: 44; Giray, 2002: 29; Sözer, 1964:217); (Photo 1-2-3-4).

Tulum is a musical instrument like Scottish bagpipe, which is made up of goat skin. A blowing pipe called *"lülük"* is attached to one of the two fore legs of animal skin to blow the *Tulum*. In the same way, the instrument like reed pipe called as *"nav"* which produces twofold whistle, is attached to one of the back legs of animal skin. The top of *Tulum* is covered with beautiful and embroidered fabrics to make it nice-looking. Anybody who plays it takes it under his armpit and inflates the *Lülük* by constantly blowing it. Due to compressed air in *Tulum* the *Nav* produces a musical sound and a melody is made by pressing holes on the *Nav* with fingers (Arıcı, 1992: 120; Gazimihâl, 1975: 44). However, *Kemençe* is a stringed instrument played with fingers by holding it vertically (Giray, 2002: 29; Sözer, 1964: 217). The folk music of the region describes the natural

beauty and human relationships with mountains, meadows and *yaylas.* Local musicians explained their opinion on this subject:

> *"First of all, in my opinion the meaning of music is love. Another meaning of the music is the sound of nature. The melodies coming out of this Tulum are like the songs of flowers, beetles, trees and mountains" (B.F. 2010).*





Photo 1-2. Tulum is a folk music instrument in the Eastern Black Sea Region (©M.Somuncu)





Photo 3-4. Kemençe is a folk music instrument in the Eastern Black Sea Region (©M.Somuncu)

"(…) All our music has a very beautiful meaning, for example love for each other and nature" (M.Ö. 2010).

"(…) Kemençe is a musical instrument that is particular to Black Sea Region. People of this region are also very different from others. Therefore, the instrument of Kemençe expresses the emotions of this region's people, their love and attachment to nature" (H.Ç. 2010).

Folk dances of the Eastern Black Sea Region are most active and live as compared to local dances of other regions in Turkey. This extremely lively dance, on the music of *Tulum* and *Kemençe*, is called *"Horon"* in local language (Giray, 2002: 27; Haberal, 2013: 163), (Figure 2). The most important feature is that everyone participates in this dance including young and old, men and women, holding hands together in a circle while an experienced person in the group directs the dance. Everyone who participates in the dance sings songs accompanied with melody of the music. Sometimes, singers divide into two groups while dancing and sing the songs and improvise facing one another (Somuncu, 2010; Zaman, 2000: 294).



Figure 2. Extension and distribution of folk dances in Turkey (Source: Wikipedia)

"(…) Dancing together, making the same movement together, turning to the right, seeking the good" (H.S. 2010).

Horon dances include a number of other steps and movements, many of which are physically demanding, especially since they are often done in quick succession. Usually an ever increasing tempo is kept up by the musicians (*Kemenceci" or "Tulumcu),* who stomps the beat with his foot as he plays (Giray, 2002: 28). These movements include: kneeling, sudden squats, sharp turns left and right, stamps, kicks from the knee, high thrusts from the thigh, walking while squatting, hopping forward on the left leg while "pawing" on the right like a horse, sudden outward arm thrusts and others (Photo 5-6).

The dancers, who may be male or female, form a line with the leader in the center. It may be interesting to note that the women's *horon* dances are just as quick as the men's and involve many transitions between challenging movements, along with a virtually constant shoulder shimmy. When men and women perform together, the dance is often referred to as *rahat,* or *comfortable horon.* Usually the dancers clasp fingers and extend their arms just below or above shoulder height, standing

comfortable apart from one another. At other times, their bodies are closer together, with arms at their sides or bent at the elbows (Giray, 2002: 27).



Photo 5-6. Folk dance (Horon) in Kadirga Yayla festival in the Province of Gumushane (©M.Somuncu)

6. Traditional Festivals in Rural Area of the Eastern Black Sea Region

Festivals have come to play an important role in the economy and culture of rural world (Janiskee and Drews, 1998: 157). *Yayla festivals (Şenlikler)* comprise an important dimension of the culture of transhumance (Kızılarmak, 2006: 20; Şişman, 2010: 552; Zaman, 2000: 292; 2007: 281). Certain aspects of the festivals held in the East Black Sea region are of special interest. The festivals are held at the peak periods of crowding, usually at the beginning of the *yayla season* or at the end of the grass-mowing process. Villagers *(yaylacilar)* wear traditional clothes (Photo 5-7), market such animal-based products as milk, butter and cheese, and various handicrafts, give musical performances and dance shows, and arrange various types of entertainment (Photo 8-9). Some of the villagers explained:



Photo 7. Villagers in traditional dress during a Kadirga Yayla Festival in the Province of Gumushane (©M.Somuncu)

"Yayla festival is organized to entertain people every year. However, a large local market is established in the festival area. Villagers sell products they produce in these markets" (A.V. 2010).

"*Yayla festivals are the most important entertainment of the people in the Eastern Black Sea Region. The people not only have fun in this folk festival but also make shopping in the local market. Kumbet Yayla Festival is one of the most important festivals for it (A.Ç.2010).*

"Local market is established in Kumbet Yayla every week. However the festival market is greater than the weekly market"(C.M.2010).

Yayla festivals are the most important platform for the execution of local music and dance in the Eastern Black Sea Region. Therefore, local music, dance and festivals are interconnected elements of rural folk culture in the region. During festivals people perform the traditional dance *horon* on music of local instruments *tulum* and *kemençe.* The dance in the festivals continues all day till evening without interruption and even sometimes lasts till midnight. During the festival, bullfight is also conducted in some *yaylas* in the highlands of Eastern Black Sea Region.



Photo 8-9. Local market in the Kumbet Yayla festival space in the province of Giresun (©M.Somuncu)

Every year festivals are celebrated in the majority of *yaylas* of the region (Kızılarmak, 2006: 24). However, Sis Dagi Yayla, Kadirga Yayla, Ayder Yayla, Kumbet Yayla, Hıdırnebi Yayla and Kafkasör Yayla festivals are most popular among these (Photo 5-6-7-8-9). Yayla festivals are not only traditional entertainment for local people for years but also catch the attraction of tourists. In recent years, tourism companies have organized special tours for their customers to participate in the festivals of this region (Somuncu, 1989; 2010; Somuncu and Yılmaz, 2006; Zaman, 2010: 215). Local businessmen in Ayder Yayla explained:

"The festival allows the increase in the number of tourists in Ayder Yayla. This is good in terms of increasing our revenue. However, it is very crowded during the festival. The number of tourists is almost more than the local people" (D.G. 2010).

"Hotels and guest houses in Ayder Yayla have about 2500 beds. Especially in the last years all hotels and guest houses have been filled by tourists during the festival" (M.Y.2010).

7. Festivals Losing Their Traditional Substance in the Region

Yayla festivals in the region have become traditional rural activities that have been performing for hundreds of years. However, the traditional nature of these festivals has started to change during last years (Şişman, 2010: 553; Zaman, 2010: 216). As the *yaylas* were advertised to the public and various roads were built to provide access to them in order to create demand for local tourism activities, *yayla festivals* began to attract much interest. *Yayla festivals*, held by a limited number of local people who walk from their villages to perform traditional dances, now attract tens of thousands of people who travel for great distances, from different cities and countries. As a result, thousands of vehicles pile into the festival spaces (Photo 7-10-11). Damage done by people and vehicles surpassing the local carrying capacity in a single day is immense. Overcrowding, noise, exhaust emissions, littering, provisional tents and prefabricated huts set up for a day exert too much pressure on the ground, damage the local flora, and disturb local wildlife (Özden et al., 2004), (Photo 12-13).



Photo 10-11. Kadirga Yayla Festival space in the province of Gumushane (©Mehmet Somuncu)



Photo 12-13. Litter remaining after the Kadirga Yayla Festival: a heavy burden on the environment (©Mehmet Somuncu)

On the other hand, the popular culture has affected the traditional *yayla* festivals (Somuncu, 2016: 252). For example, in some *yayla* festivals famous pop stars, singers and folk musicians

performed in the concerts that were arranged on big stages set up in the festival area (Mynet Magazin, 2010; Olay53.com., 2010; Pazar53, 2010; Şişman, 2010: 553; Zaman, 2010:215). *Yayla festivals* have transformed into a meeting place for the villagers and their close friends and relatives to meet and enjoy. Besides, the festivals celebrated in big *yaylas* like Kadirga Yayla, Sis Dagi, Kumbet Yayla and Ayder Yayla have also a positive impact on development of domestic tourism (Somuncu, 2016:252; Zaman, 2010:215). The following opinions have been reported related to this condition in the interviews conducted during research.

> *"A popular yayla festival has begun with much rush. Although this festival is based on old customs but traditional cultural values have started to become more popular and modern. In Trabzon almost fifty yayla festivals are being celebrated but out of them only seven or eight are purely traditional"(İ.K. 2010).*

According to some representatives of local administrative authorities of Eastern Black Sea Region the festivals held in *yaylas* of rural areas have actually become a tourism product. Therefore, the local administration has taken some steps to advertise and market this tourism product (Somuncu, 2016: 253). Views and thoughts of these executives about some of the festivals are as follows:

> *"(…) We are helping in arrangements of these yayla festivals. We are trying to be helpful for development of tourism. We are working for the projects to encourage tourism"(İ.K. 2010).*

> *"(…) Yayla festivals are celebrated in Kadirga, Kazıkbeli and Dörtkonak yaylas of our province. Erikbeli Yayla has become a tourism center. We make advertisement about the yaylas where festivals are celebrated. We prepare advertising material like brochures, booklets and CD's for this purpose. We also participate in international exhibitions" (T.Y. 2010).*

The festivals held in the *yaylas* have become a major attraction for tourists. While rural tourism that is based on these *yayla festivals* has increased the income resources but at the same time has given rise to various environmental, social and cultural problems. One of these problems is the issue of solid waste that has a direct relationship with these festivals (Photo 12-13). Some of the interviewed people stated that the festivals have caused negative impact on environment.

> *"(…) Yayla festivals are creating a lot of pollution"(T.K. 2010).*

> *"(…) There are serious troubles related to these festivals. Environmental damage is greater" (T.D. 2010).*

> *"(…) must not be allowed so many people to enter in yaylas. There must be some restriction on entrance of vehicles and people" (T.D. 2010).*

> *"(…) We celebrate festival here during summer. During the time of festival almost 10 to 15 thousands vehicles enter here. One end of the vehicles queue remains at the entrance of Ayder Yayla while the other end remains at Galer Düzü and even at Aşağı Ceymakçur. There must not be such infamy. Festival started at Ayder yayla first where some concert is arranged. After that very next day bullfighting is conducted at Galer Düzü" (Y.S.Y. 2010).*

It is true that *yayla festivals* provide economic benefits to the local rural population in terms of tourism. However, the crowding of large number of people, coming from nearby cities and big

metropolitans like Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, also creates disturbances for local population of the area. These disturbing conditions also point out some environmental issues. The municipal representative explained:

> *"(…) This year, before the festival, as municipality have made efforts to improve the road between Ayder and Galer Düzü. However, this situation has caused different reactions in people. For example, with the improvement of the road the visitor can go easily to the higher parts of yayla. On the other hand the minibus drivers criticised this because of downfall in their customers. Similarly, the owners of small businesses in the Ayder Yayla also oppose this project due to same reasons. The residents of Kavron Yayla, except some tradesmen, also criticised this project because of foreseen increase in number of visitors to the yayla that will create disturbances for them with noise pollution and crowding. And some of the people give indirect response to the municipality by saying "We get rid of anxiety if all the roads are made of asphalt" (İ.L.M. 2010).*

There are different views of stakeholders about the festival in the yaylas. Assessment made by a local public authority representative on this issue is very significant and remarkable.

> *"(…) Traditional culture is being changed in the yaylas. Varieties of traditional products are also changing. Traditional architecture is changing. People are increasing in number in yaylas because of easy transportation. The situation will change completely with total withdrawal of elderly population from there. Structural maintenance arrangements must be made in a modern way" (İ.K. 2010).*

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research is to assess and understand the folk music, dance and festivals, that all together are integrated and form a part of the rural culture of the mountainous regions of the eastern Black Sea. The findings of the research show that traditional *yayla festivals* of Eastern Black Sea Region, where local dances are played on folk music, are still continued. However, both the change in function of yaylas and transformation of *yayla festivals* into tourism product has threatened the unique cultural heritage in terms of degradation and extinction.

Community festivals and special events have grown rapidly in number throughout the Eastern Black Sea Region and Turkey during the past decade. Local festivals are increasingly being used as instruments of tourism promotion to sustain the regional economy. The economic gains from festivals can be substantial because festivals provide interesting activities and spending venues for both local people and tourists. Festivals, in essence, are an indispensable feature of cultural tourism. Therefore, festivals have frequently been labeled as cultural events. They are occasions that (re)interpret various symbolic elements of the social existence of a group or community, with the effect of recreating social relations and the symbolic foundations underpinning everyday life.

Festival tourism usually refers to events and gatherings that are staged outside the normal program of activities. The *yayla festival* tourism experience acquired through attending festivals has become an important part of rural tourism in the Eastern Black Sea Region and is viewed as being a powerful communication tool that is operated by various tourism stakeholders.

Since 1990s, development of tourism in the *yaylas* has provided new sources of income to rural population of this region. In contrast to these positive developments, growth of tourism in the highlands of the Eastern Black Sea region has also generated several problems regarding protection of cultural heritage of the area. Therefore, *yayla festivals* should be planned in such a manner as to minimize damage to the environment and not spoil the local socio-cultural structure. The number of

non-local visitors should be limited during *yayla festivals* and other recreational activities to respect an area's carrying capacity. The balance between protection cultural heritage and tourism development can be established through sustainable tourism. Therefore, it is necessary for all stakeholders, especially government agencies, local authorities, NGOs, local communities and tourism companies to realize the matter seriously and work together.

Acknowledgements
This study supported by the projects: "A Study on Assessment of Changes in Land Use and Function of Mountain Pastures in the Eastern Black Sea Region" (SOBAG/109K079) financed by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK).

Endnote
In order to respect the privacy of the respondents, instead of revealing their full names, initials have been used.

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