

**PRODUCT-COUNTRY IMAGES AS STEREOTYPES:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DANISH FOOD  
PRODUCTS IN GERMANY AND TURKEY**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. Stereotype research as known from social psychology and political research has only to a limited extent found its way into the field of product-country images. However, recent studies of country-of-origin or country images have taken up stereotypes and related concepts such as schemas and cognitive structures.
2. In this study, we examine product-country images in terms of stereotypes. In order to explore stereotypes of country and product meaning, we conducted research on the meanings pertaining to Denmark and Danish food products in two selected cultures: Germany and Turkey.
3. Focus group discussions were held in three cities in each of the two countries. The interview guide used in both countries reflects the attempt to combine product images and country images, and to obtain a relatively broad array of meanings and stereotypes pertaining to Denmark and its food products.
4. Germans qualify Danish food products as simple, yet tasty and delicious but also unhealthy due to high fat content and use of additives. Turks think of Danish food products as being of good quality and healthy due to hygienic production standards but also dull and tasteless and not compatible with Turkish food culture.
5. Other studies show that Danish exporters tend to have a more positive idea of Danish products' and Denmark's image on export markets than our results can confirm. Thus, there seems to be a clash between the way Danish exporters think others see us and the actual image on the export market.
6. Product-country images are highly contextualized. Each export market even down to a regional basis has its own criteria and standards for judging national images in international marketing.
7. The German informants generally know Denmark better than the Turkish informants, leading to a higher degree of elaboration in the German stereotypes. Interestingly, however, the greater detail also increases the sources of "error" in the description. Thus, it is impossible to conclude that the German stereotypes are more "correct" than the Turkish ones. This finding is contradictory to the standard assumption in country-of-origin research, that increasing familiarity leads to decreasing use of stereotypes and increasing "objective knowledge" about the country.
8. Finally, our results confirm that a stereotype approach to product-country images does indeed enrich our understanding of consumers' representations of products from other countries, that product and country images do influence each other, and that consumer imagery is an important factor for international economic life.

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## INTRODUCTION

Papadopoulos (1993) found it unfortunate that stereotype research as known from social psychology and political research has not yet found its way into the field of product-country images. However, recent studies of country-of-origin or country images have begun to consider stereotypes and related concepts such as schemas and cognitive structures (Ger 1991; Maheswaran 1994; Shimp, Samiee & Madden 1993). Ger (1991) argues for expanding the concept of country-of-origin to include the image of the country and defines country image as a schema, or a network of interrelated elements that characterises the country, a knowledge structure that synthesises what we know about a country, together with its evaluative significance or schema-triggered affect. She argues that investigating the content of the country-schema, including associations with other countries, will add to an understanding of the role of country image on product evaluations.

To build on these suggestions, and move towards a fresh conceptualisation of product country images, we examine such images in terms of stereotypes. Stereotypes are representations of groups, often used to describe, interpret, evaluate, and predict actions of individuals (Bar-Tal, Graumann, Kruglanski & Stroebe 1989; Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1994). Stereotype effects include distortion of perception – bias in selectivity, accentuation of both differences between, and similarity within categories (in- and out-groups), perceived homogeneity of out-groups, confirmatory bias – tendency of stereotype expectations to confirm themselves, and evaluative bias – evaluative and behavioural discrimination favouring the in-group.

Country-of-origin (CCO) has to be taken in the context of a whole mental representation of a product and its competitors and the contexts of its evaluation. Thus, consistent with Ger (1991) and Poiesz (1989), we view image as a holistic impression with sensory (imagery), cognitive and affective aspects. Image, then, as a mental representation, is a network of meanings stored in the memory, in a particular structure and along with affective, motivational and sensory aspects. This mental representation of a product or a country is linked to the self-representation in forming judgements. Hence, we view product-country images to involve an interrelated and embedded set of stereotypes or mental structures capturing all associations with a product from one place, and the goals, motives, and values of the consumer, and those of his/her socio-cultural group.

Thus the purpose of the study is to develop a stereotype approach to the conceptualisation of the relationship between product and country images, what Papadopoulos (1993) termed Product-Country-Images (PCI). We investigate the image of Danish food products in two markets: Germany and Turkey. Food products are especially interesting for product-country image analysis, since images of food are connected with the producing country as such: its landscapes (or waterscapes) and resources as well as its culture, rituals, and general way of life. Furthermore, we examine if and how stereotypes of Danish food products vary in the two countries of differing proximity to Denmark: Do the ones who are more knowledgeable about, and more experienced with Denmark, Danes, and Danish foods have a different image than those who are not? If so, how do the images differ? What do these differences in images imply for marketing strategy, ie, positioning, targeting, etc.?

The two markets also, at least to a certain extent, reflect the developed-developing country dimension so often investigated in traditional country-of-origin research. The general findings in this area suggest that in developing countries products from developed countries have a comparatively better image than local products (Ger 1992).

For a considerable time the Danish food industries have indirectly used a strategy consistent with what is known as country-of-origin strategy for positioning themselves in the export markets. Even though the predominant philosophy seems to be that, after an introductory phase, a focus on the brand rather than the country-of-origin is preferable (Niss 1996), the widespread use of Danish flags and colours, rural landscapes, vikings, domestic animals (the Karoline Cow) in ads, packaging and promotions indicate the pride in the "Made in/Produce of Denmark" labels. Occasionally helped by governmental or semi-governmental support in the form of trade fair pavilions, general promotional material about Denmark and its (food) industries, the industries' direct and indirect references to the Danish farming and fishing capacities have in large parts of the world made the present image of Denmark basically that of an agricultural nation (Niss 1996). Subsequently, this has led to a certain confidence among the Danish food producing companies, that the "Produce of Denmark" reference invariably evokes positive images.

This is in line with the argument that smaller developed countries often prove very strong on selected dimensions, even if their general image may be relatively weak or unclear. This was true for, eg, Sweden in Heslop and Papadopoulos' study (1993). Therefore, it is probably relatively safe to conclude that some of the stronger images of Denmark in its export markets pertain to its agricultural and fishing sector, or, in other words, the food industry.

Given these substantial efforts to construct an image and to rely upon it in international marketing activities, it is remarkable that there is not much empirical research to support it and to evaluate the existing image construction concerning Danish food products in the export markets. Different studies have discussed the image of Denmark and Danish products in general (Djursaa, 1988). Djursaa, Kragh and Holm Møller (1991) as well as Niss (1996) have investigated Danish companies' use of the country-of-origin selling theme in various contexts as well as their perception of the success derived from this approach. But an empirical analysis of foreign consumers' image of Danish food still remains to be made. This study explores this large gap in the knowledge about Danish food exporting problems and opportunities. Related issues to be addressed will include whether such a presupposed (positive?) agricultural country image does indeed exist as well as explorations of other dimensions of relevance in the image formation.

## **THE STUDY**

In order to explore stereotypes of country and product meaning, research about the meanings pertaining to Denmark and Danish food products was conducted in two selected cultures: Germany and Turkey. These two countries were selected because they reflect several dimensions in the spatiality of the modern, globalised economic system and subsequently very different general contexts for the creation of images. First of all, Germany is a close and large (the largest)

export market for Denmark, implying a relatively high degree of knowledge and it also has an – if not similar then at least – related culture, whereas Turkey is geographically and culturally more distant. Thus, the geographical proximity, cultural contact and familiarity of these countries to and with Denmark are different. Comparison of the emerging images in the two settings will inform us of images of Denmark and Danish foods in countries that are more and less familiar with Denmark.

Three focus group interviews were conducted in each of the two countries. The informants were chosen among women at the age of 20-50 (in Turkey 20-40, due to the relatively low knowledge of foreign products in the older population). The interviews in Germany were held in Hamburg, Cologne and Munich to reflect regional differences in the image of Danish food products, since research indicates that there is a large difference in the knowledge level concerning Danish food products from North to South Germany (Askegaard 1995). Also in Turkey, a regional spreading of the focus groups was chosen, in this case due to the different levels of cosmopolitanism, especially regarding likely familiarity with foreign foods in Istanbul, Ankara and the smaller Izmir. Also, it may be of importance that Izmir is the home of Pinar – the largest Turkish food producer, known for its dairy products.

The interview guide used in both countries reflects the attempt to combine product images and country images, and to obtain a relatively broad array of meanings and stereotypes pertaining to Denmark and its food products.

Twenty-four informants participated in three groups in Germany. All were 20 to 50-year old women with at least one child living at home and all were responsible for the daily household purchases. Whereas most of the northern German informants had been to Denmark, this was the case for fewer in the western/central German group and only one from the southern German group. Thirty-two informants participated in four groups in Turkey: two in Ankara, one in Istanbul and one in Izmir. All informants were from upper-middle and upper socio-economic strata (top 40%), likely to be the target market for foreign products. One Ankara group consisted of four male and four female, 23 to 25-year old students, the others consisted of 20 to 40-year old housewives. Only one participant had been to Denmark, and another had a Danish friend. Many had travelled to Europe or USA. In both countries, the discussions were run by different moderators, videotaped, and lasted about two hours.

Whereas a broad variety of Danish products is found in the German market, of which the informants readily named candy products, cookies, various dairy products, fish products and alcohol (beer and aquavit), there are very few products of Danish origin in Turkey. Many are Turkish-made: licensed Tuborg has been on the market for decades, DanCake for several years, and Peysan's feta cheese is the most recent. There is also a small variety of other imported cheeses, cookies, and Stimorol chewing gum, none of which are widely available.

## RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUPS<sup>1</sup>

In general, the informants from Turkey and southern Germany qualified Denmark as “invisible” on the international scene.

*“We hardly ever hear anything about Denmark in the media” (G, 29)*

It is thus a country rarely heard about and only the northern and central Germans have direct experience with the country. This is not necessarily negative; no news is (perhaps) good news. As one Turkish informant concluded:

*“Everyone would know, had things not been under control, so it appears that everything is under control” (T, 38)*

But in other cases it is interpreted negatively as lack of profiling skills in the international media:

*“Just as we have failed to publicize ourselves, so have they” (T, 40)*

*“You get so many brochures about every other country, just not about Denmark: they don’t advertise enough” (G, 30)*

On the other hand, in spite of the distinct difference in level of knowledge between northern and southern informants in Germany, the general images found were very similar. Thus, the stereotypes of those who have been to Denmark are largely the same as the ones found before a visit to Denmark. Due to this fact, we do not distinguish between different German regions in the following analyses unless explicitly stated.

Although Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara differ with respect to cosmopolitanism, no major differences were found among them concerning their perceptions of Denmark. But there was a difference regarding Danish food products: Less exposure and familiarity, and less interest in Danish foods, especially dairy products, or for that matter in imported foods, in Izmir than among the respondents in the other cities. Spontaneous discussion of Pinar hints that this company may have a much stronger hold and reputation in and around Izmir than other regions. Anyway, as for Germany, the analyses which follow are common to the three Turkish cities.

### Images of Denmark

In Turkey, the respondents agreed that they did not know much about Denmark at all, and stated that they did not remember seeing anything on TV or reading anything about Denmark.

Asking for free associations created an initial silence, then came associations like Scandinavia, Northern Europe, cold winter days, green country, rural landscape and rural way of life, hygienic, clean, pure, natural, developed, prosperous, keen on education and health, free from economic or political problems, stable

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<sup>1</sup> T or G refer to Turks and German informants respectively, an M will indicate if the Turkish informant is male, the number refers to the age of the informant.

country where all present and future needs are guaranteed to be met, secure about their future, well-organised, and peaceful.

*“They all get the same retirement pay and they have great child care”  
(G, 30)*

They imagined small houses rather than high-rise apartment buildings, animal husbandry, green pastures and dairy products. Danes seemed to be isolated from the rest of the world, and living a stable, peaceful, orderly life free from problems. A key perception emerged to be freedom, and free, unrestricted roles for women including liberated (for some, almost loose) sexual behaviour.

*“.. a woman can go to a bar at night, can dance on her own, till morning” (T, 24)*

Several said that, although they didn't know why, they picture Denmark as a traditional place, with tradition- and family-oriented people.

Denmark was regarded to be different from Europe, which to many meant Germany, France, and England. The countries most similar to Denmark were cited to be other Scandinavian countries (similar political systems, welfare states, physical and behavioural characteristics of people, climate). In addition, the Netherlands were cited to be similar (freedom, cheese, beer, animal husbandry, colourful folk costumes), or confused with Denmark (beer and cheese).

The Germans saw Denmark as a flat, rural country with only small towns:

*“There is hardly any city-life there” (G, 29)*

It is predominantly a country for family vacationing in cottages or camping grounds, seeking sports and outdoor leisure activities or cultural experiences:

*“all the families with children that I know of go there again and again”  
(G, 34)*

*“The Andersen castle is wonderful – the Danes have a great cultural heritage” (G, 42)*

It was also considered an ecologically conscious country, where recycling and waste-handling are elaborate.

*“[In environmental matters] they don't discuss for long whether the measures are absolutely necessary, they just take them at once” (G, 28)*

Responsibility, discipline and cleanliness were considered general features of Danish culture.

*“Here, even the homeless are considerate, they dispose of their waste and clean their tables after eating. [...] Everything seems like it has just been cleaned there, nothing is filthy like in Germany” (G, 49)*

It was seen as a social-liberal state dominated by a large middle class and providing an extensive welfare system which may serve as ideal for many other countries. The welfare system, however, was commented to be obtained only through very high taxation.

*“The luxury tax is added to everything there, even to such normal things as fresh milk” (G, 38)*

Like in Turkey, the liberated Danish women were mentioned as was a general liberal political attitude. This little paradise, however, was not considered to be without its snakes. Alcoholism, unemployment, and a relatively high crime rate were mentioned as negative sides.

The only other countries mentioned when asked about similar places were the other Scandinavian countries, especially in relation to the landscape (“flat and close to nature”) and to the political and economic structure. Like in Turkey, Denmark is thus perceived as being outside the central European realm.

## **Image of the Danes**

Both in Turkey and in Germany, Danes were described as blond, blue-eyed, tall, well-built, strong and good looking, and in Turkey a few said “better looking than Germans”. A typical Dane was seen to be a “tall person with a pale complexion, blond hair, light-coloured eyes”, whether male or female. Danes were described to be a peaceful people leading an easy life and enjoying it.

In Germany, the Danish “profound but not fanatic” nationalism was mentioned, and in Turkey Danes were regarded to be afraid of losing their identity, especially with reference to the EU.

*“They all have the national flag in their gardens” (G, 27)*

*“They just have this way of identifying with their country to an incredible degree” (G, 38)*

Other common features mentioned in both countries were non-materialism and casual, practical dress codes. Danes were imagined to dress comfortably and casually, not fashionably, and not to care about clothing, or not to be concerned with matching different items of clothing, although each separate item could be of high quality. And Danes were considered to lead a simple life, stressing inner rather than material values (Germany) and thus have only what they need: useful things, nothing extravagant, nothing luxurious, and no show-off goods (Turkey). For leisure, they were imagined to read books, go to the country or a lake for the weekend (Germans stressed sailing and fishing, the Turks stressed avoiding crowds).

There is one important difference between the two studied populations in their perception of Danes. The Germans, in complete opposition to the dominant Turkish attitude, saw the Danes as very social beings. They like to join their friends in bars and they were seen as active in clubs and organisations. But they are also family-oriented people, who are proud of their homes and gardens.

Turks perceived Danes as living in “an drab society” where “social life is not active,” and to be somewhat “cold people” with no time for friendly relations (but, said several informants, they are not caught up in unnecessary haste). Danes were viewed to be individualistic (yet several mentioned that they are interested in family and in that sense are more conservative than other Europeans). The general image is that of a content but not really happy, calm, peaceful, and stable people, without much emotion.

*“They are happy at a constant optimum level. I don’t think they can be as happy as we can. We can be very unhappy and very happy, they are always in the middle. I don’t think they can feel great excitement – cannot experience a great passionate love” (T, 25)*

*“It is an uncolourful society where ‘normal’ people have ‘normal’ jobs. Their social life is not active they are ‘a little cold’” (T, 36)*

Some mentioned problems such as high suicide rates, drug addiction and heavy drinking.

Although the Turkish informants acknowledged lack of knowledge and exposure, they have many associations, and their perceptions form a unified whole, which indicates the stereotype image they have of Denmark:

1. Sterile, clean and easy constancy, regularity and normality – ie, nothing extraordinary, provoking or attracting attention, curiosity or special interest.
2. Prosperous freedom and tranquillity – rural, pure and natural calm with no surprising highs or lows, no close interpersonal relations.
3. Cold distance, and lack of links to their surrounding world.
4. Unrestricted liberation involved in, and underlying all this.

This image swings from slightly negative over neutral to positive, involving a vague admiration checked with reserve. No strong feelings are involved in the judgement of the Danes.

According to German informants the portrait has the following dimensions:

1. Rural, uncomplicated close-to-nature attitude, stressing inner peace and harmony rather than material wealth
2. Family-oriented culture with tight relations among family members.
3. Highly social attitude showing strict discipline and sense of responsibility in social behaviour. On the other hand, also an egalitarian and very permissive and liberal culture with an open attitude towards different disadvantaged or marginalised groups in society.
4. Especially for southern Germans also an empty, grey and dull place with overly calm and phlegmatic people. (*“Their calm attitude simply gets on my nerves. Sometimes you just want to shake them to make them wake up” (G, 27)*)

## **Image of Danish producers**

In both countries, Danes were seen to produce agricultural, not industrial, goods. In Turkey, only cheese was mentioned by all, and usually uttered first, followed by beer. Other products mentioned were dairy products, cake, cookies, fish products, and forestry products such as wooden toys. As any other Western product, Danish goods were seen to be of high quality and hygienic, but unlike many Western products, not that special.

*“I like to try foreign food items – I have such a tendency. But not towards Danish goods...doesn’t arouse any desire, any excitement, any curiosity. I cannot imagine a Danish food product can offer me something I’ll like – something different, interesting. Had I believed that, I would have bought [some]. After all, it would be hygienic and of good quality, it is European” (T, 34)*

Even the packaging was regarded to be very standard, and undistinctive.

There appeared to be a lot of confusion and misattribution about the country-of-origin of several products. Although most respondents had tried Danish cheese and Tuborg, many didn’t know their Danish origin. Many also knew Lego but again not its Danish origin. One informant mentioned IKEA as an example of high quality Danish woodwork and design. Hence, there does not seem to be a clear image of Danish products, except that they “must be” agricultural and of a relative standard and undistinctive kind.

In Germany, Danes were seen as typically first sector producers with focus on agriculture, fishing and forestry and, as mentioned, only little industry, except from furniture industry. Typical products are Lego, cakes, dairy products, furniture, candles, ceramics, and tissue. The Dane as a producer “work to live and not the other way round”, but he is very careful with the quality of his work, making sure that the quality level corresponds to what s/he would make for him/herself. Danish products were seen as featuring utility and cosiness characteristics, not being used or sought as luxuries or for their show-off value.

## **Image of Danish food products**

In Turkey, cheeses, dairy products, DanCake, beer (Tuborg), and to a much lesser extent fish (Norwegian mackerel is available in Turkey), and cookies and chocolate were foods “recalled” to be Danish. Danish foods were seen to be of good quality, hygienic, healthy, reliable, but nothing special. Although many thought that they were unlikely to taste good for Turks, there were disagreements, and praises of taste too.

Danes themselves were seen to “always eat the same kind of food”, and their tastes in food to be very different from the Turkish: It was a general attitude that Danish food culture was not very elaborate, tasty or tempting, featuring cold meals and simple preparation methods.

*“[They] always eat the same kind of food. Unlike the Turkish or the French, they don’t have a cuisine” (T, M, 24)*

*“I don’t think they cook like we do, they just boil some vegetables to go with meat” (T, 36)*

Most informants had either tried Turkish-made, Danish white cheese or seen it. Several different views and evaluations were offered. Dutch and French cheeses were generally regarded to be of superior quality, and preferred. Danish cheese was regarded to be a healthy and reliable product, and good, but not the best. Here, we can observe how important the usage context is for the suitability of the product. Foreign cheeses may have qualities on their own, but in the context of the Turkish meal these qualities are often not the important ones.

*“I regularly buy Dutch cheese to spread on crackers to serve for friends, or as a stand-by when there’s no food at home, but not as a substitute for Turkish cheese” (T, 32)*

*“[Danish cheese] is much too creamy for the Turkish taste. Ideal white cheese must be hard enough to be cut, must go well with alcohol, whereas those cheese variations do not meet these standards” (T, 30)*

Easily acceptable uses seem to be for special occasions, a convenient and handy (it keeps, whereas many Turkish cheeses won’t) option, as a different variety from time to time, may be in a more Western context, or for children – safe and fun and easy to spread.

In general, there is a sense that foreign foods “are worth trying”. However, this tendency has some impact on the image of Danish products. Although they were judged to be of good quality because they are European, they were considered less tempting than food products from other such countries. This might be interpreted as a result of the lack of direct knowledge of the country and the judgement of Denmark as a cold and relatively unwelcoming place as regards the climate, as unable to generate delicious and tempting food products like those known from the milder, Mediterranean areas or as a reflection of a “nothing special from a not-so-interesting people” attitude.

*“I can use Danish products. I don’t have any negative or positive opinions about them. But I cannot say something ought to be good simply because it is Danish” (T, 36)*

It appears that Danish food products do not have top priority in consumer preferences in terms of perceived quality. Price perceptions placed them between the more expensive competing imports and the cheaper Turkish competitors. The informants’ tendencies would seem to be either to buy something fresh and tasty, and fitting their Turkish taste, or to try a foreign item for the sake of novelty, variety, convenience and modernity, especially if they believe that item has something special, interesting or different to offer – not a common belief regarding Danish foods. Though generally positive, the respondents did not indicate an unconditional a priori trust whereas most Turks do have an a priori trust in, and desire for Western products (Ger 1992).

For the German consumers, the general image of Danish food products was that they are tasty and delicious, but on the other hand also unhealthy, especially due to preservatives, artificial colouring and other additives.

*“The strawberry jam probably never saw a single strawberry in its life. They really make everything so that it lasts.” (G, 29)*

They are liked not because of but in spite of this image since often “desire beats reason” in the choice. Another point which contributed to the doubt about the quality in the consumers’ minds was the choice of distribution outlets. The general opinion is that Danish products can relatively often be found in cheap discount stores, where one does not expect to find quality products.

*“You don’t find them in fine food stores, they are right there where I go shopping every day” (G, 29)*

This, on the other hand, leads to a general image of Danish food products as being price-competitive compared to German products, also due to the package size, criticised, on the other hand, by some German consumers as being too voluminous and not adapted to German cooling and freezing storage capacities.

As in Turkey, consumers were often surprised to discover that brands which were well-known to them are actually Danish. However, a broad range of product categories were associated with Denmark: dairy products (yoghurt, butter, cheese), candy, cookies, beer, aquavit, mayonnaise, shrimps and meat. Danish products are seen as especially good for cold meals, not as typical “cooking ingredients”.

Danish cuisine was regarded as tasty on the one hand, but also simple, heavy and unhealthy with a relatively high fat content and not much variation. It “corresponds to the climate” which is also the reason why fresh fruit and vegetables were not seen to play a major role.

*“The gravy just kills you ... and even cold dishes are always made with mayonnaise” (G, 38)*

*“With their way of cooking, they even ruin fresh fish. They don’t think about health when they cook” (G, 29)*

*“There is an absolute lack of fresh ingredients – to get fresh fruit you have to drive very far and then it is very expensive (G, 28)*

*“They eat rubber bread – they don’t even have rye bread” (G, 47)*

Imported products or dishes from other countries are not perceived as popular in Denmark – the many Italian restaurants and pizzarias were considered to be first and foremost for tourists. Danish food was seen as relatively different, with perhaps a little in common with Dutch, British or North German cuisines, but nothing in common with, eg, French style cooking.

## **SYNTHESIS OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

In order to create an overview of the main findings beyond the verbatim presented above, we have tried to summarise our findings in a set of associative networks. Below are shown the stereotype associations of Denmark, the Danes and the typical Danish industries found in Germany and Turkey in this study.

Figure 1. Stereotype image of Denmark among German informants

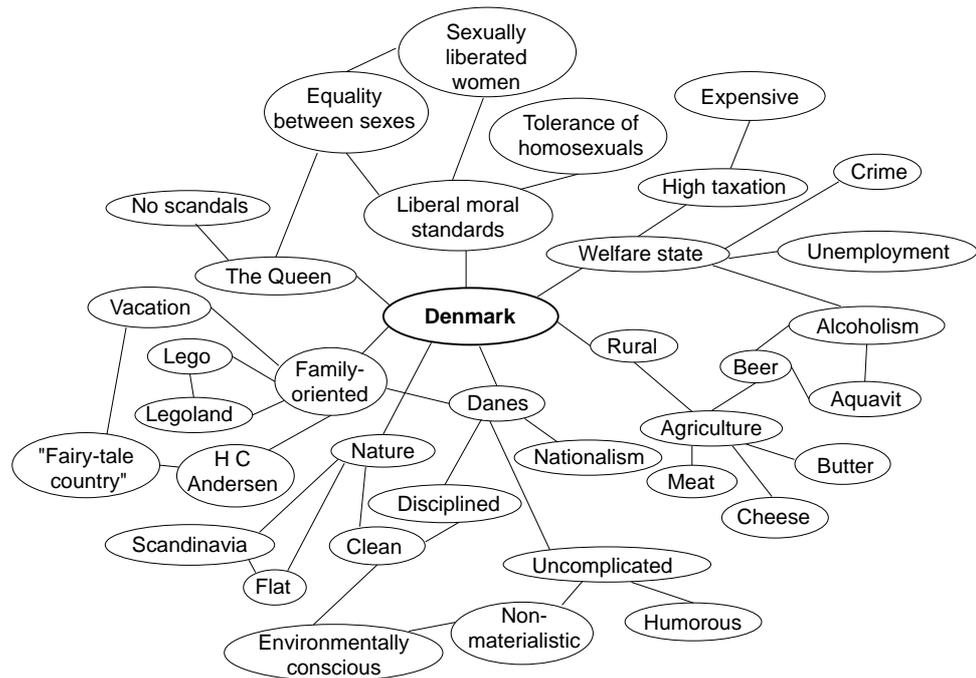
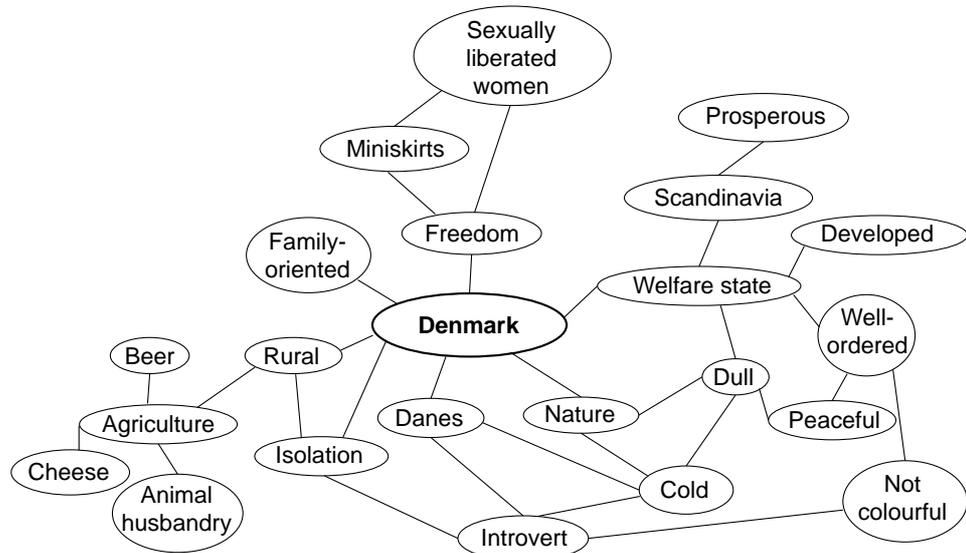
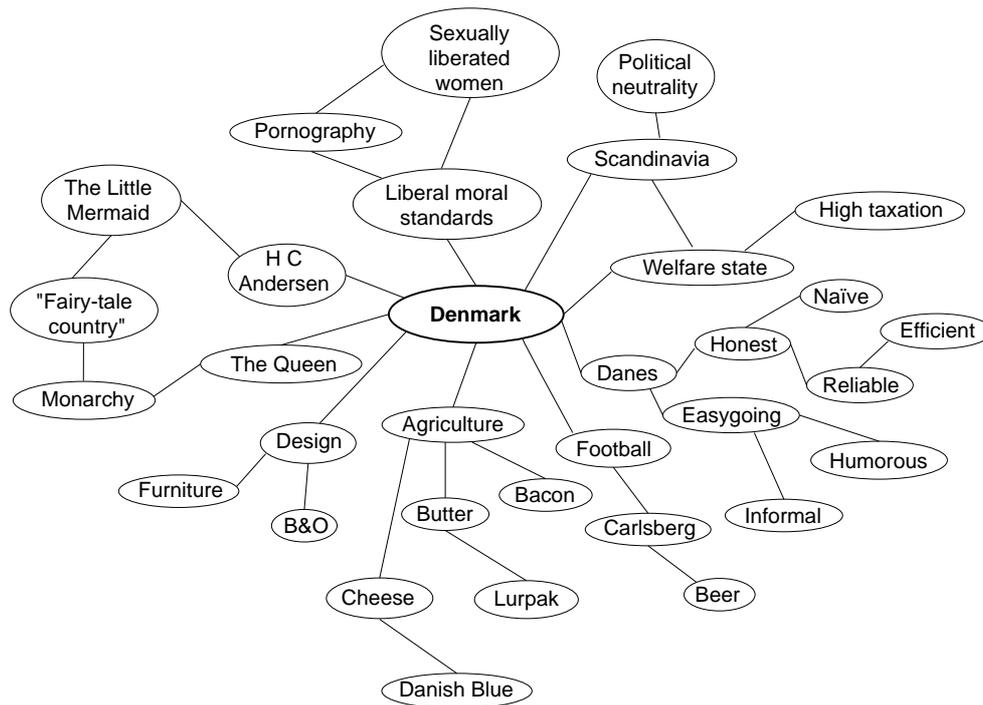


Figure 2. Stereotype image of Denmark among Turkish informants



It is interesting to compare these associative networks to the one in figure 3, where Niss (1996) sums up Denmark's image in export markets based on interviews with Danish exporters. Niss' results are based on a theoretical approach not too dissimilar from the one used in our study, except that personal interviews were used for data collection rather than focus groups. Both the absence/presence of negative elements and the recontextualisation of common elements render these associative networks different, obviously more in the case of Turkey than of Germany.

Figure 3. Image of Denmark according to Danish exporters (Niss 1996 p.16)



As far as the image of the food products is concerned, the implicit hypothesis of the product-country image approach that there is a connection and a direct effect from country image to product image, this does not exclude the fact that the effect will sometimes work also in the other direction. Although we do believe that the food-related images definitely reinforce the country stereotypes, we did not encounter any explicit formulations of such a linkage. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate certain of the more dominant aspects in the mentioned food product images and their links to the overall image of Denmark and the Danes.

Figure 4. The image of Danish food products in Turkey and some linkages to the general image of Denmark

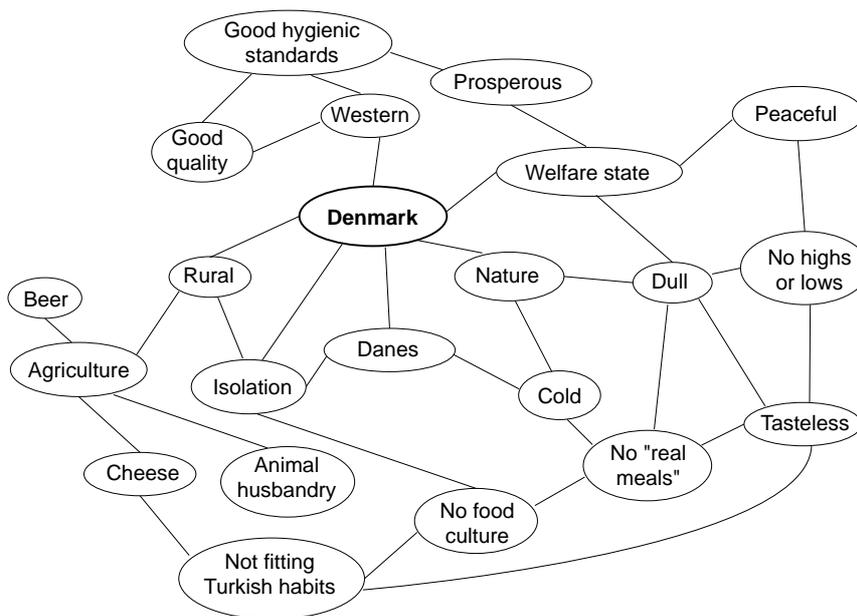
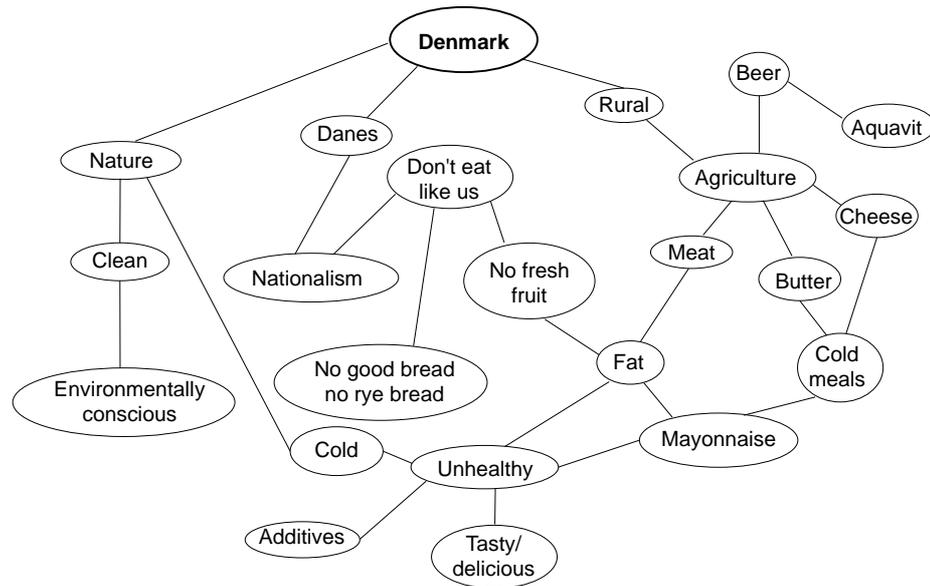


Figure 5. The image of Danish food products in Germany and some linkages to the general image of Denmark



In table 1 we present the quintessential stereotype portraits of Danish food in the two countries, based on figures 4 and 5.

Table 1. Quintessential stereotype portraits of Danish food in the two countries

GERMANY	TURKEY
Tasty and delicious	Good quality
Unhealthy because of additives	Healthy due to hygiene and cleanliness
Unhealthy because of fat content	Dull and tasteless
Simple	Not fitting into Turkish food habits

Following figures 4 and 5 and table 1, the PCI is obviously contextualized – Germans use German criteria and standards for judging and Turks use Turkish criteria. Moreover, these contexts may be regarded as being two: One pertaining to the local market conditions – Germany has its “Reinheitsgebot” leading to an “unhealthy” image of Danish products because of additives; Turkey has problems with hygiene among local producers, leading to a “healthy” image because of perceived Danish hygienic standards. Another context pertains to local usage patterns, where there seems to be an effect in both cultures, the Germans referring to Danish products as simple and useful especially for cold meals, the Turks believing that Danish food products do not fit their tastes or habits.

Stereotypes about the country, about its people, and about all of its products influence the image of a particular product from that country. We may better understand how a Danish food product is regarded and if we examine how others see Denmark and the Danes. The Germans “excuse the unhealthy character” of Danish foods with the climate. And, in terms of image, it appears that it would be difficult for Danish foods to compete with Turkish foods or other foreign foods based on taste or prestige/quality. If the country and its citizens are “nothing special”, its products are also likely to be “nothing special”. However, Turkish consumers, although not very excited and not immediately and warmly interested, seem to be open to give them a try, as a novelty, for variety, something to be bought occasionally, and as a convenience item. The indifference as well as the openness seems to stem from perceptions about both Denmark and Danes, and Danish food products.

Concluding this study we would like to underline four main general findings of interest also beyond the limits of the immediate study.

1. Danish (and possibly other) exporters cannot rely on their own assumptions, they have to study the existing product-country image in each target country. Specifically, they tend to ascribe a too positive image of themselves and their home country to the minds of their target persons on foreign markets.
2. Increasing familiarity with the country-of-origin does lead to a more elaborate PCI in the sense that the stereotype portrait is more detailed, contains more elements and linkages. A bit surprisingly, perhaps, the more elaborate description does not lead to a more accurate (in “objective” terms) description. Since self-categorisation is also involved in stereotyping – people use stereotypes of others also to define themselves as a group – the associations are likely to reveal as much about the categorising as the categorised people. Validity of a stereotype is about “the match between social categories and intergroup realities” (Oakes et al. 1994, p. 194) The German stereotype thus tells us about a more elaborate intergroup (Danish-German) reality but is not more accurate concerning Denmark or the Danes as such. This is seen in the relative lack of accuracy in the description (“no rye bread”, “no fresh fruit”), where at least the rye bread can be taken as a “key symbol” (Ortner 1973) for German culture, a category Germans are used to defining themselves with as opposed to other central European cultures, and consequently, there may be a tendency to overlook this as a feature of other cultures.
3. Product-country images are thus highly contextual and will differ according to culture, contact, and familiarity. Hence, they cannot be studied with a purely ethnic approach. This calls for a much more culture-sensitive approach than what has traditionally been used in country-of-origin research.
4. Our results show that PCIs are most useful when defined and operationalised as overlapping images of a country, its products in general, and its specific products of interest.

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