



“We Are Not Rural”: Different Discourses of Rurality in Türkiye

“Biz Kırsal Değiliz”: Türkiye'de Farklı Kırsallık Söylemleri

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ABSTRACT

Defining rural areas and distinguishing them from urban areas is becoming increasingly challenging, as the criteria for what constitutes "rural" and the complexities of rural-urban relationships are evolving in post-industrial communities. This paper explores the concept of rurality from both positivist and socio-cultural perspectives, drawing on empirical research conducted between 2014 and 2017 on Bozcaada, a small Turkish island.

Previous studies on rurality in Turkey have predominantly adopted a positivist approach. Although these studies have categorized Bozcaada as a rural settlement, it is officially designated as an urban district within administrative boundaries. Therefore, this paper adopts a socio-cultural approach to define rurality, with a particular focus on how this unique situation influences residents' perceptions of rurality on the island, as revealed through in-depth interviews.

During fieldwork, a majority of interviewees stated that Bozcaada is not a rural place. However, the characteristics they attributed to Bozcaada while describing the island were predominantly rural in nature. The residents' reluctance to label Bozcaada as rural may stem from the lay discourse of rurality in Türkiye, which is often associated with notions of backwardness and underdevelopment.

Keywords: Rurality, Definition of Rural, Perception of Rurality

ÖZET

Post-endüstriyel toplumlarda "kırsal"ı neyin oluşturduğuna ilişkin kriterler ve kırsal-kentsel ilişkilerin karmaşıklığı geliştikçe, kırsal alanları tanımlamak ve bunları kentsel alanlardan ayırmak giderek zorlaşıyor. Bu makale, küçük bir Türk adası olan Bozcaada'da 2014 ve 2017 yılları arasında yürütülen ampirik araştırmalardan yararlanarak kırsallık kavramını hem pozitivist hem de sosyo-kültürel perspektiflerden incelemektedir.

Türkiye'de kırsallık üzerine yapılan önceki çalışmalarda ağırlıklı olarak pozitivist bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Bu çalışmalar Bozcaada'yı kırsal yerleşim olarak sınıflandırsa da resmi olarak idari sınırlar içerisinde kentsel bir ilçe olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu nedenle, bu makale kırsallığı tanımlamak için sosyo-kültürel bir yaklaşımı benimsemekte ve bu benzersiz durumun, derinlemesine görüşmelerle ortaya konduğu üzere, adada yaşayanların kırsallık algılarını nasıl etkilediğine özellikle odaklanmaktadır.

Saha çalışması sırasında görüşülen kişilerin çoğunluğu Bozcaada'nın kırsal bir yer olmadığını belirtmiştir. Ancak adayı anlatırken Bozcaada'ya atfettikleri özellikler ağırlıklı olarak kırsal nitelikteydi. Bölge sakinlerinin Bozcaada'yı kırsal olarak etiketleme konusundaki isteksizliği, Türkiye'de çoğunlukla geri kalmışlık ve az gelişmişlik kavramlarıyla ilişkilendirilen yaygın kırsallık söyleminden kaynaklanıyor olabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kırsallık, Kır Tanımı, Kırsallık Algısı

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INTRODUCTION

As relations and networks between the urban and the rural are becoming more and more complex every day, making a comprehensive definition for the rural and the urban becomes even more argumentative. Defining rural areas by the presence of agricultural production and typical landscape characteristics or simply as non-urban space do not comply with today's complex reality (Labrianidis, 2006). During the last couple of decades, rural areas have started to take larger part in modern leisure industry with the concept of tourism, regardless of whether it is in form of mass tourism or small-scale recreation (de Noronha Vaz, Morgan and Nijkamp, 2006).

Criteria for what constitutes rural and urban areas that had been formulated in the time of industrialization are no longer sufficient to describe contemporary settlement systems, especially in post-industrialized countries (Brown and Cromartie, 2004). In particular, population mobility and migration patterns, within and between the two, are one of the most visible indicators of this change over time. For example, this can be observed on Cloke (1977) and Cloke and Edwards (1986). Even though Cloke (1977) used the same criteria to form "index of rurality" with their second study (Cloke and Edwards, 1986) which updated the index with 1971 census data, variables which differentiated rural areas from urban areas were different from the earlier study. During high concentration into the urban areas, population decline and net out migration rates were primary rural attributes (Cloke, 1977). However, this was not the case after the rural-urban population change and net migration had reverse in favour of peripheral areas (Brown and Cromartie, 2004).

How we define rural has a critical importance on understanding local dynamics of a place, identifying its potentials and risks and addressing its needs by applying appropriate policies. This is crucial for the settlements that have a complex structure like Bozcaada, which is going through strong changes in the local economy and the social structure (Okumus, 2018).

First part of the paper looks at three traditional approaches to define the rural and where these approaches clash and contribute to each other. The second part of the paper considers the diversity of rural definitions around the world and within the international bodies. The third part examines how the rural is defined in Turkish context while the final part focuses on the case study through examining lay discourses on the rurality of Bozcaada, a small island in Türkiye.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR DEFINING THE RURAL

Three most traditional approaches of defining the rural are positivist approach, political-economy approach and social representational approach (Halfacree, 1993). Positivist approach seeks to objectively define the rural and distinct it from the urban by searching for functional attributes which can be proven statistically. This approach is still widely in use for classification of settlements by countries and international bodies as it allows to make a comparison. However, positivist approach to defining the rural can be practical to describe the characteristics of specific rural area or rural communities but it fails to explain how these characteristics shapes the realities of rural life (Cloke, 2006; Woods, 2011).

Political-economy approach to define the rural localities focuses on the structure of the farming as a capitalist industry, which follows the similar process for capital accumulation as it's urban counterparts, and examines community social relations through class analysis (Woods, 2011). Besides, all social and economic changes taking place within rural areas and shaping the contemporary rural space are caused by the factors which are beyond the boundaries of the rural.

Therefore, rural places are 'localities' where national and international political economy operates in a spatial basis, and researchers were advised to "do away with rural" (Hoggart, 1990).

"The broad category 'rural' is obfuscatory, whether the aim is description or theoretical evaluation, since intra-rural differences can be enormous and rural-urban similarities can be sharp." (Hoggart, 1990, p. 245).

In contrast with positivist and political-economy approaches, the cultural turn in social science and the introduction of post-structuralist theories brought out a new framework for exploring the rural. Post-structuralist approach to the rural argues that there is no objective truth. Instead, individuals and institutions construct their own realities to make sense of the world. Based on the work of Moscovici (1988), Halfacree (1993) argued that the rural can be define as 'social representation of space' while Mormont (1990) referred the rural as 'a category of thought' emphasizing that the rural is first imagined and represented, than takes a material form to conform the expectation which has been embodied. This experience of the rural is fed back into the collective imagination and refines the idea of rural again and creates a dynamic process with the idea of the rural is produced and reproduced (Mormont, 1990; Woods, 2011).

Social-representational approach has shift the attention of social researchers from structural characteristics and dynamics of the rural to representation of the rural through 'lay discourses' (Halfacree, 1993). One of the popular and powerful representation of the rural is that of the 'rural idyll' which associates the rural with beauty, tranquillity, peace and strong sense of community "... where people know not just their next door neighbours but everyone else in the village" (Halfacree and Boyle, 1998).

In practice there are many different rural idylls based on different cultural and moral values and historical backgrounds. The manifestation of rural idylls varies by region and nation. For example, in Britain, rural idyll is associated with 'romanticized and nostalgic' memories of pre-industrial era of England (Woods, 2011), while in Germany, the rural is subordinated to 'peasant' and 'periphery' which refers to backwardness (Halfacree, 2004). As Brown and Cromartie (2004) said people's idea of what a rural community is often formed at a distance, by how it is being represented through literature, art and music, "not through actual experience" (Brown and Cromartie, 2004, p. 272).

Diversity of representational rural space has detached 'the rural' from the referent to geographical space since the idea of the rural may have a little correspondence to the actual realities of the rural space and rural life (Halfacree, 1993). The key point here is the fact that the popularity of these virtual ruralities may even cause the distortion of the actual rural space to fit it into the image. As Cloke (2006) suggests that the representation of rurality of the past through various ways might have formed our understanding of "real" rurality which then we pass on.

"If at some time in the past some 'real' form of rurality was responsible for cultural mapping of rurality, it may now be the case that cultural mappings precede and direct the recognition of rural space, presenting us with some kind of virtual rurality" (Cloke, 2006, p. 22).

In the light of these different understanding and consequently defining the rural, a framework for connecting social representation of the rural, rural localities and the lived experiences of the rural has been proposed by Halfacree (2006). His 'three-fold model of rural space' approach to defining the rural, which he describes imaginative, material and practiced, ties the political-economy based and social-representational approaches:

"We must note how the material space of the rural locality only exists through the practices of structural processes, and how the ideational space of rural social representations only exists through the practices of discursive interaction" (Halfacree, 2006, p. 48).

Three-fold model of rural space comprises three intermeshed facets which collectively make up the totality of rural space (Halfacree, 2006, p. 51):

- *Rural localities* inscribed through relatively distinctive spatial practices. These practices may be linked to either production or consumption activities.
- *Formal representation of the rural* such as those expressed by capitalist interests or politicians. Crucially, these representations refer to the way the rural is framed within the capitalist production processes; specifically, how the rural is commodified in exchange value terms. Procedures of signification and legitimation are vital here.

- *Everyday lives of the rural*, which are inevitably incoherent and fractured. These incorporate individual and social elements ('culture') in their cognitive interpretation and negotiation. Formal representations of the rural strive to dominate these experiences, as they will rural localities.

Although these three facets compose rural space together, they are not harmonious. Tensions exist in terms of permanence, due to the autonomous logic of each facet. Besides, these tensions create the dynamism of rural space which enables the opportunities for rural restructuring (Woods, 2011).

To sum up, the rural is neither only the size of a settlement or a production process. On the contrary, rural areas are complex economic, natural and cultural locations which cannot be characterised by one-dimensional criteria such as population density or agricultural production. Moreover, it is a constructed reality which is once imagined by individuals, then represented onto reality and refines the idea of rural in collective imagination. Therefore, perception of rurality varies depending on cultural and historical backgrounds of nations as well as individuals and has undeniable power on nations' rural policies. Therefore, the paper agrees with Halfacree's explanation of rural space that it can only be understood and explained by considering three dimensions: people's real experience, representation of the rural and spatial locality of the rural.

FORMAL REPRESENTATION OF RURALITY

Although, each country has their own definitions for the rural, based on its peculiar conditions, population size is the most commonly used criterion as it is easily obtainable. Other common criteria are density, sectoral employment and administrative boundaries in national level. For the sake of comparability of countries and regions, researchers and organizations such as OECD and EU have developed several typologies mainly based on demographic indicators. Rural indicators have been set for classification of rural areas includes the rate of population gain and loss, the level of population density and settlement size, local economic structure and landscape.

The OECD (1996) created rural definition in two different levels: regional level and local community level. At local community level which represents NUTS5 level², communities with less than 150 people per square kilometre are considered to be rural. At regional level which is equal to NUTS3, the OECD uses the degree of rurality depending on the share of rural communities in the region. Regions are clustered into three types: predominantly rural regions with more than 50 per cent rural communities, significantly rural regions with between 15 per cent and 50 per cent rural communities and predominantly urban regions with less than 15 per cent rural communities within the regional borders.

EUROSTAT classified EU regions into three types based on the degree of urbanization rather than rurality in NUTS5 level. Densely populated zones are a group of continuous municipalities with each one has at least 500 inhabitants per square kilometre and at least 50,000 populations in total. Intermediate zones are a group of municipalities inhabiting at least 100 people per square kilometre with 50,000 total population or being an adjacent to a densely populated zone. Group of municipalities which have not been classified into as either densely populated zone or intermediate zone are called sparsely populated zones (EUROSTAT, 2018).

Because of the fact that forming a universally applicable rural definition is not possible, purposive definitions have become in use especially for policy maker, service providers and local or regional administrations. Each planning activity or policy area, such as transportation, physical planning, economic development policies, health and education services, requires a classification which will be useful for its aim and objectives. Therefore, definitions for the rural become more ambivalent as the groups who use it become more diverse (Öğdül, 2010).

² NUTS (The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) is a geocode standard for referencing the subdivisions of countries for statistical purposes.

In brief, definitions of the rural vary depending on the purpose of the study and the institutions and actions demanding them. Nevertheless, all of rural definitions need to be revised over the time as places, their population, and their demography and the migration patterns changes. Therefore, it is more appropriate to have multiple categories and degree of rurality rather than dual rural-urban distinction.

RURAL-URBAN DEFINITIONS IN TÜRKİYE

Although Türkiye does not have a comprehensive rural definition, rural areas tend to be defined as areas other than urban. Distinction between rural and urban in Türkiye based on population size and administrative units, however, population thresholds differ by related acts of the law, policies and aims of statistical analysis (Table 1).

The Law no.442 (The Village Law, 1924) with aim of classifying administrative units defines settlements with less than 2,000 people as village, between 2,000 and 20,000 inhabitants as small town and over 20,000 people as city. Although this act does not explicitly state what is rural, villages are considered to be rural while small town and cities as urban on the basis of service distribution.

The Law no.5393 (The Municipality Law, 2005) which determines criteria for municipality formation states that settlements with at least 5,000 people can form a local municipality. It is also stated that if a settlement has its own local municipality, it is urban area. Therefore, according to this act, it can be said that areas with less than 5,000 inhabitants are rural.

In National Development Plans, which are produced as a general guidance for following five years, considers areas with 20,000 and more population as urban areas. Although the plan defines rural areas as areas staying of out of urban areas, it also highlights the necessity of more precise definition (The Report of Rural Development Ad Hoc Commission, 2019).

Table 1. Population thresholds for rural and urban settlements by different laws and policy documents.

Thresholds	The Village Law 1984	The Municipality Law 2005	National Development Plan	National Rural Development Strategy 2005
Urban	≥2000	≥5000	≥20.000	≥20.000
Rural	≤2000	-	-	-

In the recent strategy document (The National Rural Development Strategy 2014-2020, 2015), rural areas are considered as the settlements with less than 20,000 inhabitants in order to be compatible with national development plans. However, it also acknowledges the fact that it is difficult to provide a concrete definition for rural areas as the cultural, social, demographic, economic, environmental and spatial diversity inherent in rural areas have gained new meanings with changing circumstances.

Rurality Studies in Türkiye

Academic studies examining Türkiye's rurality have mostly taken socio-economic development index³ as criteria for classification of settlements instead of their rural characters or degree of rurality.

Gülümser et al. (2007) used multidimensional classification with 15 indicators under five main factor, which are underdevelopment, demography, urbanization, higher education and industrialization, in order to compare Türkiye's rurality with the EU countries. Results of this study showed that Türkiye

³ Socio-economic development index has been developed by State Planning Organization in 1960's in order to classify provinces and districts according to their need for economic development support and to provide instruments and incentives for development in 'priority regions for development', which coincided with the mainly rural parts of the country.

had the highest rurality score among 26 countries due to high level of income distribution inequality and the presence of less-favoured areas.

In a later study, Gülümser et al. (2009) mapped out Türkiye's rural structure on the basis of 17 selected indicators under five main factor which are urban attractiveness, urban labour force, rural attractiveness, agriculture and technology in addition to application of OECD and EU's method to classify rural areas in NUTS3 level. There were three main conclusions of this study: first, Türkiye is dominantly rural within the country as well as amongst EU countries. Second, Türkiye protects it's characteristic of being rural in terms of traditional meaning of rural. Lastly, Türkiye is not anymore dominantly rural in term of new rural definition and rural characteristics, which takes rural places as a part of modern leisure activities and tourism.

Öğdül (2010) reassessed rural and urban definitions in context of Türkiye by applying factor analysis in NUTS4 level with indicators under six main groups; agricultural production, non-agricultural production, employment, demography, education, the flow of money, people and goods. As a result of the analysis, settlements were classified into three groups: dominantly urban districts; transitional districts and dominantly rural districts.

THE CASE STUDY: BOZCAADA

Bozcaada is a Turkish island in the northern Aegean Sea and covers an area of 37.6 km². It is four nautical miles away from the mainland and connected to it by ferryboats departing from "Geyikli Port" (Figure 1). The registered population on the island is 2,643 according to the 2015 census. However, the population increases by almost five times and exceeds 10,000 people during the high tourism season, which covers a three-month period from mid-June until mid-September. During the other nine months of the year, the population dramatically decreases down to between 500 and 700 people.

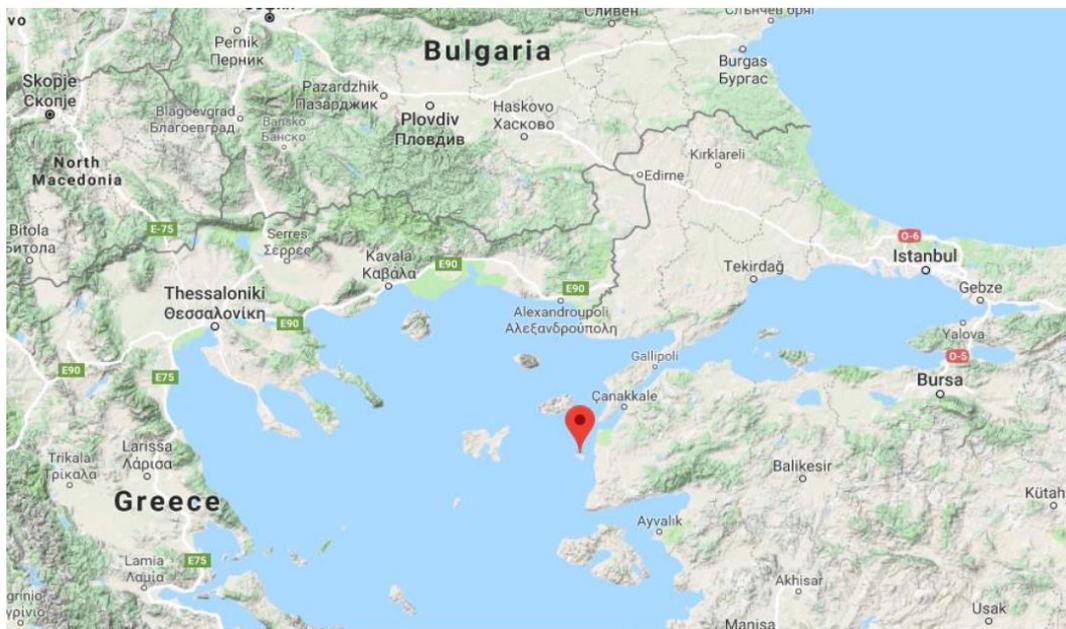


Figure 1. Location map of Bozcaada (Source: Google Maps)

Throughout history, the island's economy was based on viniculture and fishing alongside maritime commerce. Today, maritime commerce has completely disappeared on the island. Although fishing is still being practiced, the number of fishermen and the volume of produce have significantly decreased (Akpınar, Saygın and Karakaya, 2011). Currently vineyards cover one-third of the island's land and 80 per cent of the total agricultural land on the island. Although the island's vineyards are

still in place, it is not the main economic resource of the local households anymore. Beginning from the late 1990s domestic tourism as an economic activity have been progressively increasing its importance in Bozcaada's local economy due to economic struggles in agriculture and increase popularity of the island. During the last decade, Bozcaada became one of the most prominent domestic tourist destinations for the residents of Türkiye. Although viniculture is still one of the characteristics of the island, it is only carried out by a number of boutique local wineries on the island. The local economy of the island is now predominantly based on tourism. Almost every household on the island is directly or indirectly involved in tourism (Okumus, 2018).

Considering that in the Turkish context, the definition of the rural is based on population size and administrative boundaries, Bozcaada could have been classified as a rural area due to its population size and density as well as what 1 suggested in their comprehensive study. In terms of administrative boundaries, it is designated as a district municipality with a locally elected mayor and an assigned governor, making Bozcaada an urban settlement. The rationale behind its designation as a district municipality, even though it does not meet the requirements for this, may be explained by the Treaty of Lausanne⁴ in 1923. This treaty exempted two Turkish islands, Bozcaada and Gökçeada, on the Aegean Sea, from population exchange with Greece and stipulated that they would be governed with a degree of autonomy (Durmuş, 2006). The only way to give them some autonomy but still keep them within the national administrative structure would have been to make them local municipalities. Therefore, these two islands were designated as district municipalities in order to implement the edicts of the Treaty of Lausanne.

As presented earlier, there are two Turkish academic studies examining rurality in province and district levels by applying factor analysis method to statistical data. In Ögdül's study (2010) where she analysis the data of agricultural production, non-agricultural production, employment, demography, education, the flow of money, people and goods in NUTS4 (district) level, Bozcaada has been identified as a 'dominantly rural district'. In Gülümser et al.'s study (2009) where they mapped out rurality in NUTS3 (province) level based on EU and OECD's rural indicators, the province (Çanakkale), where Bozcaada locates in, was identified as 'averagely rural' in traditional perspective; 'predominantly rural' according to OECD's methodology; and 'sparsely populated zone' in EU's classification. These both positivist approaches to defining the rural and the classification of settlements suggest that Bozcaada has strong rural characteristics.

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative empirical research undertaken by the author during a doctoral project which explores the socio-economic and cultural transitions on the island over the last three decades. The data used for this paper derives from a multi-phased fieldwork undertaken between June 2015 and April 2016. There are three distinctive groups among the local residents of the island. First group is the islanders who had lived on the island for many generations. Second group is the former seasonal workers who used to come to the island for seasonal agricultural jobs and construction jobs from nearby villages, then settled on the island in the 80s and 90s. Third group is the newcomers who moved to the island from metropolitan cities, mainly Istanbul. Out of 39 total interviews for the extended doctoral research, 26 in-depth interviews that has been used for the formation of this paper were with the current residents of the island; ten islanders, seven former labourers and nine newcomers.

After the initial data collection some tools of the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1997) such as open coding, theoretical sampling and constant comparisons were used for analysis.

⁴ This was the peace treaty signed to settle the conflict that had existed between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies of the First World War. With this treaty, the borders of Republic of Türkiye were defined and its sovereignty was recognised.

The coding process was started as the voice-recorded interviews were being transcribed. At the end, total of 179 open codes were generated under 16 categories.

For anonymity of the interviewees codes are used in this paper which also represents their duration of residency on the island and place of origin. For example, “ISL” stands for the islander, “LX” stands for the locals who moved to the island from other rural areas in the vicinity and “NC1” and “NC2” stands for the newcomers who moved to the island from metropolitan cities in the last two decades with different motivations. The earlier is used for the ones who moved on the island to retire in the late 90s and early 2000s and the latter is used for who moved in the late 2000s and 2010s after the domination of tourism as a local economic activity.

Rurality of Bozcaada - Lay Discourses

Bozcaada’s rurality through the perceptions of the local residents was a part of the broader interviews undertaken for a doctoral research exploring the local socio-economic and socio-cultural changes on the island alongside the substantial shift on the local economy from viniculture to domestic tourism. During these interviews, start of conversation on rurality was initiated by asking participants whether they would classify the island as an urban or a rural settlement and why they would do so. Although this was followed by more questions depending on the participants’ answer and state of the conversation, the initial answers of the participants varied distinctively. There were six different answers emerged from the interviews (Figure 2). Four of which were the most reflected discourses: urban; not rural; not urban; used to be rural.

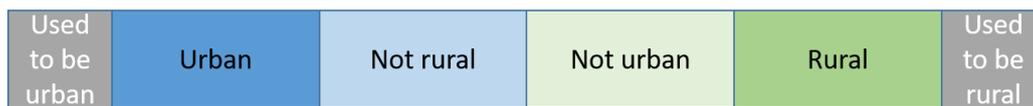


Figure 2. Varied perception of the local residents on rurality

Urban

The most of the participants’ perception of rurality were limited with the administrative classifications of settlements. The majority stated that they would say the island is an urban settlement since it has a municipality and some fundamental urban services such as schools and a health centre. As the general perception of rurality on the country is still based on underdeveloped remote villages lacking basic civil services, a local governance and municipal services are considered as urban features which also coincides with the formal representation of the island. However, some participants’ perception of rurality of the island went beyond the administrative boundaries.

Not rural

Some of the participants, who choose to describe the island’s rurality with something other than administrative boundaries, put forward the socio-cultural characteristics and local relations on the island to justify Bozcaada as an urban settlement as oppose to rural. For instance, two newcomers who are former urban dwellers settled on the island in the early 2010s stressed that Bozcaada is not rural as it has more “welcoming” and “educated” community than other rural settlements or villages. One argued that rural places/societies tend to be conservative and hard to be integrated in, while the other suggested that education levels in rural areas tend to be lower; therefore, Bozcaada cannot be identified as a rural place:

“The rural would be conservative, it is not conservative here. In fact, conservatives are not welcome here. Therefore, we cannot say Bozcaada is rural, as if it is a village in Bayramic (a nearby place with a group of mountain villages). There is a huge difference between moving in and making an appearance in Bayramic and in Bozcaada. In here, people would welcome you right away, very easily. In there, they would not do that, even you have lived there for 20 years.” (NC2-A)

“Bozcaada has one of the most educated districts of Türkiye. It is above the average, including big cities. There are many people with university degrees here, not only wealthy families. People give importance to education here. You don’t usually see this in rural places.” (NC2-B)

Not urban

Some participants who had not have an urban dwelling experience earlier wished to call it non-urban by paying attention on socio-cultural relations amongst the local dwellers. The first interviewee quoted below who has rural origin stressed that the island exhibits “a rural life”, although, it differs from the rest of the rural areas in the country, mainly the central and eastern regions. Another interviewee who were born and grew up on Bozcaada referred the island as a kind of “small town” in terms of spatial structure but rural in terms of social structure.

“The life here is like in a coastal village, a fishing village. If you ask whether it is urban or rural, I would say rural for sure. Because it fits in it better. We cannot say urban. But it doesn’t fit in those moorlands (referring to rural Anatolia), the life is different here.” (LX-A)

“I would say Bozcaada is a small town as a settlement. But in terms of human relationships it is exactly a village. There is a warm, unspoiled relationship here between us. We, I mean real locals, (referring to the oldest group of residents) have never been spoiled. Everybody knows everybody and helps each other.” (ISL-A)

Used to be rural or urban?

Another interesting point that was raised by some interviewees was the fact that the island’s rurality has change over time alongside the local economic change. This would be expected in an area where the number of newcomers and tourist rapidly increasing (Cloke and Thrift, 1987; Walker and Fortmann, 2003). However, what calls attention here is which side of the rural-urban dichotomy the island is going towards. The quotes below present quite opposite view on this matter. The first quote suggests that the island used to be rural by referring common husbandry activities of the local population of the time, while the others emphasised that the island used to have urban characteristics but not anymore due to change in profiles of the local community.

“When I came here it was the thing that attracted to me: villagers on horses with baskets on the sides, very rural. There used to be, for instance, pırpır (small agricultural vehicle used also for transportation of goods and people locally) on the streets. Those didn’t bother me at all, I even liked it. But also there were also sheep and chickens wondering around the streets here. There are all gone now, which is much better.” (NC1-E)

“25 years ago you wouldn’t feel as you live in a rural place here. You would feel as you are in a city. For instance, you could take your wife and go to a tavern. It used to be very civilized (as opposed to conservative). Now, there might be some issues. The relations used to be like urban relations, quite formal and civilized... people here were landowners who were educated in Istanbul etc. The workers were usually coming from villages on the mainland. Then, after tourism, they (workers) started to have B&Bs, hotel and restaurants. So, they turned into tourism professionals from workers. But they kept their rural habits.” (NC1-B)

“It is partially rural due to people who came from Bayramiç (a nearby place with a group of mountain villages). I don’t think they are bad people. But they are mountain villagers. Probably they never wonder the type of tree they pass by every day. This is a characteristic of peasant communities.” (NC1-A)

All three participants quoted above are first generation newcomers who moved to the island in the late 90s from Istanbul when tourism was not yet an income-generating economic activity on the island. Currently all of them are directly involved in the local tourism sector and are referred as people who triggered the emergence of professional tourism businesses on the island. Their views on the changing rurality of Bozcaada -although they differ from each other on the direction- reveals significant hints about their perception of rurality in general.

This is also particularly important considering that the other two social groups either did not comment on the change or emphasised that social characteristics of the island “have never been

spoiled" (ISL-A). The reason for that might be coming from socio-cultural differences between these three main sections of the local community.

Rural

Although the perception of the local residents differed on whether Bozcaada is an urban or a rural settlement, none of the participants call it rural confidently in the first instance. Only some participants who grasped the island "something other than urban" preferred to label it rural after some thought as they anticipate the rural-urban dichotomy.

CONCLUSION

Rural definitions in Turkey tend to be based on population size. Indeed, it is usually the urban areas that are defined, and all the rest that cannot fit within urban definitions are labelled as rural. Nevertheless, it is also acknowledged in late development strategies and policies that rural areas are very diverse to provide one overarching definition. However, while they are avoiding giving a concrete definition, they describe the rural by identifying 'general rural characteristics,' which also reveals the lay discourse of the rural in Turkey.

In addition to the administrative field, academics also tend to describe the rural through underdevelopment. Rural studies in Turkey have mainly pointed out regional disparities as an issue in territorial analysis and in the urban-rural definition. Although the need for more elaborate studies at smaller levels has been expressed by a few studies, attempts to assess the rurality of areas are substantially based on the analysis of quantitative data.

Bozcaada is classified as an urban area on the administrative level. However, two comprehensive quantitative studies have found that the island falls into the category of strongly rural areas. According to EU and OECD classification systems, Bozcaada again fits into the description of the rural. The population size, which is the main criterion to distinguish rural and urban areas in Turkey, is also not sufficient to assign Bozcaada as a district municipality. Therefore, Bozcaada is actually a municipal area classified as urban, which may be merely due to the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne.

The local community's perceptions of rurality largely coincide with the formal representation of the rural in Turkey based on administrative boundaries and legal classification of settlements. The word 'rural' was mostly associated with backwardness, underdevelopment, lack of education, and conservatism by the interviewees, especially those with urban origins. However, local people who have lived on the island for generations and those who come from relatively rural areas in the vicinity of the island think that it has more rural characteristics as opposed to the others, especially in terms of social relations. The fact that 'rural' was perceived negatively by urbanites might be a reflection of Turkey's mass rural-to-urban migration in the '80s and the '90s.

On the other hand, the fact that the island has been inhabited by Turks and Greeks for centuries, and the local population still tries to protect this amalgam culture after the departure of Greeks, puts the island in an interesting place: neither urban nor rural. However, this roots back to people's perception of rural communities, especially when compared with rural communities in middle and eastern Anatolia, which constitute a considerable part of the country.

In the Turkish context, the rural and rurality are notions strongly related to predominantly agricultural space and the farming community. Due to the fact that development is still considered equal to urbanization, the rural is associated with words such as underdeveloped, backward, and primitive. This 'lay discourse' of rurality is represented in people's perception of the rural and feeds the collective imagination again, as Mormont (1990) suggested. Having residents of Bozcaada not preferring to describe it as a rural area, even though the attributes they stated when they were talking about the island are rural, may be due to this negative perception of rural localities.

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