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Development of Rural Areas: The Case of Turkey

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A Research on the Role of Municipalities in Tourism Development of Rural Areas: The Case of Turkey**

Abstract

The local community in the process of association sees the municipalities as leader, strategist, mentor, coordinator, sponsor, and the closest stakeholder institutions to themselves. However, municipalities do not engage enough in organizations that have tourism purposes. Hence, the main purpose of the research is to determine the main reasons for the lack of municipalities' interest in tourism. To that end, the interview method was used in the collection of data in this research as a qualitative study. Between the regions that are in priority for tourism development, research sample has formed by 11 county municipalities in the province of Tokat, Turkey. Research findings are limited to the

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opinions of mayors. The results have shown that the studies of rural county authorities towards the development of tourism are formed due to the individual, short-term, and quick income expectations as well as political concerns for the future. Municipalities want tourism development just for their own areas and stay away from cooperation and partnerships for the creation of a regional tourism destination. Local community stakeholders are slightly included in tourism activities. Inadequacies of financial resources have been shown as a main obstructive reason in participation in tourism activities

Keywords: *Rural Development, Rural Tourism, Municipalities, Turkey.*

Introduction

It is believed that tourism might evolve over a compromise period in rural areas. Furthermore, it has been considered that different perception, requirements, and values of local social actors will closely affect the development of tourism (Verbole, 2000: 479). In this context, many governments around the world are searching for solutions to develop sustainable tourism at the national, provincial, or regional level. They work in a local actor-oriented and stakeholder-

participated way for sustainable tourism and for the encouragement of tourism development (Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Briedenhann, 2007; Tao and Fuying, 2009).

The public sector is seen as a leader, strategist, mentor, coordinator, supporter, and partner in the efforts to create and boost rural tourism (Briedenhann, 2007: 584). Rural tourism that is associated with outdoor activities such as farm life, agriculture industry, and individual services is expected to be controlled by local authorities due to their small-scale sub-structure (Komppula, 2004: 115). It is estimated that local authorities will become more effective in combating problems related to the tourism industry. Particularly, recognition of region's strengths and weaknesses, the creation of local employment opportunities, and intervening in time to the local people's problems are believed to be important factors (Bertucci, 2002: 4). It is expected from local governments to be a pioneer in policy creation and implementation rather than providing financial resources to the development of tourism (Ishikawa and Fukushige, 2007: 461).

Local governments are important institutions in providing funds for rural tourism development, removal of needs to necessary infrastructure for tourism, reconstruction and maintenance of the places that appear attractive to tourists, the employees of tourism sector, vocational support, and

education to entrepreneurs and local public (Wilson et al., 2001: 134). Nonetheless, local governments that have a significant role in the development of tourism do not pay attention to tourism policy and planning. At the local level with many responsibilities, among the priorities of local governments, tourism is in the last ranking (Hall, 1994: 152). Yet, it is an undisputed fact that local governments are the best institutions which can determine the benefit of tourism policies applied to their regions (Jeffries, 2001: 47). In fact, in recent years, more local governments have taken decisions to encourage tourism development as a way to revive the local economy and increase revenues. For successful and useful decisions related to tourism, paying attention to local people's feelings and being sensitive to the environment are necessary. It is recommended to gain the support of local people for implementation of policies developed at the local level. The management expected from public administrators is one that aimed at the region's economic and social development and minimized the negative effects of tourism. Additionally, education and knowledge of local politicians and people related to tourism issues, which include the plans of national tourism management and the advantages and disadvantages of tourism development, are shown among the important responsibilities of local managers (Elliot, 1997: 137).

This research aimed at providing academic support to rural regional local authorities, who have important roles and responsibilities in tourism, on tourism development and sustainable tourism. These following sub-objectives have been adopted besides this main object:

- Contributing the development of tourism with employment increase by geographical expansion at the remote and rural areas, income creation, and cooperation with other sectors,
- To develop perspectives towards how a rural community can carry out tourism activities and how they can be sustainable,
- To contribute to the implemented policies related to tourism in rural areas,
- To provide recommendations to local governments in Turkey in dimensions such as economic development, social networking, cultural pluralism, and political participation, and
- To determine the share of local governments' contribution to the tourism planning process.

Rural Tourism

In the literature, rural tourism is simply defined as “all tourism activities in a rural area” (Lesley, 2001: 15). In the context of the enrichment of rural tourism, from a new perspective, it can be defined as the participation of families

living in rural areas into tourism by providing an additional income. For the rural areas, tourism is viewed as a second activity following the agriculture, thus, it is expected to create new business opportunities for agricultural businesses from the perspective of supply by diversification of tourism demand. Prerequisite for the development of tourism in rural areas is considered as providing a wide well-attended public support (Wilson et al., 2001: 132). Governments, for stopping the declining population in rural areas, in accordance with the demand of the rural environment, are guiding as mentors and conducting incentive policies in tourism (Díaz-Pérez et al., 2008: 175).

In the globalized world, to develop competitive tourism in rural areas, activities due to cultural differences as a result of rural social, political, and economic forces as well as protection of the rural attractions are very important (Goerge et al., 2009: 4). In this process, the creation of community-based tourism is recommended for a sustainable tourism industry (Prentice, 1993; Tosun, 2000; Boyd and Singh, 2003; Tosun, 2006). In terms of community-based tourism, the people living in the destination, governments, tourist organizations, and environmental groups that have quite similar interests of tourism like business organizations are regarded as important stakeholders from sustainable

tourism principles and balanced regional development aspect (Tosun, 2006: 493).

Municipalities

The expected behavior from sustainable tourism in a global world is defined as “the management of cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and to meet economic, social, and aesthetic requirements of life support systems” (WTO, 1998: 21). In this process, the local government within the local actors can profoundly affect the success of local tourism industry and plays a role in the protection of the values, on which the future of the destination is depending. Particularly, by considering the effects of factors on tourism sector such as land use planning and environmental regulation, the intervention of local governments has played a critical role. The interaction between the environment and the host society as well as a significant communication between visitors and tourism businesses can provide the opportunity for the local government to contribute to sustainable tourism (South Australian Tourism Commission and Local Government Association, 2006: 7). Vaughan and colleagues (1999: 118) have pointed out the importance of the local governments’ involvement in the following critical tasks in the tourism industry:

- To act as the basic uniting structure at the strategic planning of the local tourism industry,
- To have their own tourism resources and infrastructure, to introduce and operate them,
- To introduce their own regions as a destination and to indirectly promote tourism products and services of the private sector.

The model of LA-21 shaped around the concept of governance based on criteria such as transparency, accountability, participation, working in harmony, timeliness, and efficiency has been shown as the path to realizing the development of rural tourism (Emrealp, 2005: 13).

Turkey

In Turkey's economy, tourism is an essential sector (Ünlüönen et al., 2007: 236). Due to the continuing trend of tourism development in the future, the objectives of this sector are aimed at putting forward the types of tourism appropriate to competition, implementing policies towards improving the services quality, and giving an active role to strategies for sustainable development (DPT, 2007). In this process, the Tourism Strategy of Turkey-2023 is considered an important planning study for tourism. Through the action plan of Tourism Strategy of Turkey-2023, by putting a roadmap in front of the tourism sector in the production,

management, and implementation processes, its leadership has been accepted as the main purpose. In the framework of the protection-usage balance of Turkey's natural, cultural, and historical values, as an alternative to the coastal tourism, it is aimed to increase the share of Turkey's tourism by developing alternatives such as thermal tourism, winter sports, mountain and nature tourism, world tourism, rural and ecotourism, congress and fair tourism, cruise and yacht tourism, and golf tourism.

In this context, it is expected Turkey to fulfill the goal of 63 million tourists in 2023, \$86 billion tourism income, and \$1,350 expenditure per tourist (The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007). According to the general economic analysis, the tourism sector in Turkey has developed rapidly, but it is concentrated in urban areas and centers of tourist attraction. Each region has its own tourism wealth in rural areas of Turkey, which is thought in their development they do not benefit enough from the tourism sector. It has been believed that rural and developing regions have not shown the success of tourism development and the increase in the number of tourists in the coastal regions of Turkey (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, 2008; Tosun et al., 2003). In this process, rural local governments are expected to support the development of tourism.

The main stakeholders who can support the tourism development in rural areas in Turkey are governorates, municipalities, and provincial units of central government. These authorities involved in tourism activities by their bureaucracy, coordination, local support, infrastructure support, and financial support aspects (Semerciöz et al., 2008: 95). The municipalities constitute the largest share within these institutions. According to the data of 2010, there are 2,950 municipalities (16 metropolitan municipalities, 65 provinces, municipalities, 892 counties, and 1977 town municipality) in Turkey. 61,571,332 people live under the administration of these municipalities (<http://www.tuik.gov.tr>).

Research Method

In this research, it has planned to reveal deficiencies in the interest of the municipalities which are seen as an important factor in the development process of rural areas by the local community towards tourism. With this general purpose in mind, this study has sought answers to the following sub-research questions:

- What are the municipalities' opinions related to rural tourism?
- From the perspective of the municipality, what are the challenges in developing rural tourism?

At the municipal level research, in terms of the development of perspective toward rural tourism, this work explores its topic through a case study. This study is important in terms of providing clues through setting forward the perspectives related to the development of tourism at rural areas in Turkey. One of the major problems in the tourism sector is the inadequacy of cooperation at community-based tourism activities. The present research is also meaningful in the determination of the municipalities' perspectives towards rural tourism and identifying municipalities' position in activities related to developing alternative tourism. With regards to the realization of creative ideas and activities, results of the study are expected to be as a guide intended for the development of tourism in rural areas.

Between the regions that are in priority for tourism development, research sample has formed by 11 county municipalities, which are located in the province of Tokat, Turkey. Brief information about municipalities that comprise the sample of study (municipality name, population, and political parties represented) is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Brief Information of Research Sample

Municipality	Population (2010)	Political Party of the Municipality
Artova	3,086	Opposition Party
Almus	4,820	Government Party
Başçiftlik	13,321	Opposition Party

Erbaa	59,901	Opposition Party
Niksar	33,490	Opposition Party
Pazar	4,975	Opposition Party
Reşadiye	8,673	Opposition Party
Sulusaray	3,408	Opposition Party
Turhal	64,139	Government Party
Yeşilyurt	5,557	Government Party
Zile	35,717	Government Party

The study used the interview method, based on the interview scale of tourism development which is developed by Wilson et al. (2001) and the Negiz and Yıldız (2009), by adding new questions on these scales. A survey is developed which consisted of five questions. Interview scale was done in four-step processes including pre-preparation, coding of qualitative data, interpretation, and reporting of qualitative findings. The survey was applied to the mayors of 11 municipalities in November 2011.

Assessments have been made in accordance with answers of mayors to the survey questions. The criteria such as width, depth, credibility, contrast, and eligibility were considered in preparation of the report.

Research Findings

Assessments and findings that emerged during the research interview were determined as follows:

1) Do you see tourism as a development tool in the process of local development in your region?

All municipalities in the research sample regard tourism as an important tool in local development. They indicated that tourism will revive and diversify the local economy, will increase income and employment at the region, and will protect the local culture and natural attractions.

2) What sort of negativity do you think will cause the development of tourism in your area?

Only 5 mayors (%45) opined about the negativity created by tourism. Other mayors stated that they believe tourism does not have any negative impact. Negative impacts of tourism were listed like social and cultural degeneration, increasing the prices of local goods and services, and increasing the real estate price of the local properties.

3) As a local government, what kind of activities do you do related to the tourism development in your region?

Within the context of local development activities, 8 municipalities (72%) stated that they do not have any activities toward tourism. Meanwhile, 3 municipalities (28%) stated that they restored historic house buildings, prepared the prospectus of the region, and offered information services for the tourist's groups visiting there. None of the municipalities have done a SWOT analysis of tourism towards their areas, they have neither prepared a

development plan nor created community-based tourism-oriented public and private partnerships.

4) What are the barriers that make local participation difficult in tourism as an important development tool?

The insufficiency of financial resources was proclaimed as the first obstacle for the participation, by all municipalities. They believed that revenues of the municipality do not meet the additional costs created by the tourism activities. Among them, 7 municipalities (63%) stated that central government will not provide support to them in tourism development, while 4 municipalities (37%) stated that there is a lack of qualified personnel and sufficient knowledge of tourism development.

5) What are your expectations from the central government and other institutions to increase your participation in tourism activities?

All municipalities have proclaimed that there is an inadequate accumulation of information about the development of tourism. They believed that they do not have qualified employees to lead their tourism activities, and central government departments and universities do not provide a strong contribution to them. It is expected from central governments to be a pioneer in the creation of a model for accommodation or recreational facilities in rural areas related to tourism. It has been thought that the facilities

built as a concrete output can encourage the participation of local people in tourism activities. Moreover, municipalities expect academic support from universities in issues such as tourism planning, tourism education, and tourism management. Municipalities do not believe in close cooperation with other municipalities related to the subject of tourism. Differences in opinions arising from the political parties they represented is perceived as the most important reason to lessen their cooperation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Municipalities in Turkey are important institutions in the planning of the tourism development processes, in the budgeting of tourism, in the mobilization of financial resources, and in ensuring the coordination in the central and local level. The mayor's leadership skills, attitudes, and behaviors formed the participation of these organizations in tourism activities (Öztürk and Ayaz, 2010).

According to the results gained from qualitative analysis of the data, municipalities in Turkey are inadequate firstly, in financial resources, then, in relevant knowledge and tourism activities. Centralized structure of public administration, the status quo, and work habits can cause slowing down of the tourism activities. Interest and pressure groups, as well as short-term and quick profit expectations, reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of the works.

Based on the results obtained from the study, recommendations related to providing greater participation of rural area municipalities to tourism in Turkey are presented as follows.

- A department that is directly related to tourism should be established within the structure of municipalities.
- Under the leadership of the union of municipalities, their personnel in rural areas should be informed about tourism by short-term training activities and trips related to the tourism sector.
- Central government departments should build sample tourism facilities and transfer the operations of these facilities to municipalities to encourage the development of tourism in rural areas.
- Cooperation between universities and municipalities should be increased. During this cooperation processes, joint activities such as SWOT analysis, tourism planning, tourism education, and tourism management should be arranged.
- The importance of destination creation should be told to municipalities, and from the geographical aspect, common tourism destinations covering different municipalities should be developed.

- Financial income should be created from taxes under the name of the accommodation tax taken from tourists staying in accommodation establishments located within the municipal boundaries. The European Union-supported projects should be viewed as important tools in providing financial resources, and municipalities should lead these projects.

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