



CONTRIBUTION OF FOREIGN FUNDED PROJECTS TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW OF MUNICIPALITIES IN TÜRKİYE

Akif ÇARKCI^{1*}
İskender GÜNEŞ²

Abstract

Local governments are recognized as the most accessible entities providing local services to the public, holding a critical role in local development and transformation. This study examines how municipalities, as the most successful and powerful forms of local government, can effectively address local needs within the context of a globalizing world while operating under financial constraints. The primary research question investigates how externally financed initiatives can enhance the institutional capacity and service quality of Turkish municipalities.

This research uses a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. It analyzes case studies of municipalities that have benefited from external funding and surveys and financial analyses of municipalities involved in externally funded projects. The findings reveal that these projects significantly contribute to the strategic management and urban planning processes of municipalities, enabling them to implement global development tools, enhance human resources, and improve service quality despite limited financial resources. The study highlights the importance of clear project goals, understanding the municipality's structure, and alignment with strategic objectives for successful project implementation, emphasizing the need for strategic management and capacity building for local governments.

Keywords: External assistance, Project, Municipality, Local government, Development.

JEL Codes: F35, O22, H7, R58

YABANCI KAYNAKLI PROJELERİN YEREL KALKINMAYA KATKISI: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ BELEDİYELERE GENEL BİR BAKIŞ

Öz

Yerel yönetimler, halka yerel hizmetler sunan en erişilebilir kuruluşlar olarak kabul edilmekte ve yerel kalkınma ve dönüşümde kritik bir rol üstlenmektedir. Bu çalışma, yerel yönetimin en başarılı ve güçlü biçimi olan belediyelerin, mali kısıtlamalar altında faaliyet gösterirken küreselleşen bir dünya bağlamında yerel ihtiyaçları nasıl etkili bir şekilde karşılayabileceğini incelemektedir. Birincil araştırma sorusu, dış finansmanlı girişimlerin Türk belediyelerinin kurumsal kapasitesini ve hizmet kalitesini nasıl artırabileceğini araştırmaktadır.

Bu araştırma, nitel ve nicel verileri birleştiren karma bir yöntem yaklaşımı kullanmaktadır. Dış finansmandan yararlanan belediyelerin vaka çalışmaları ve dış finansmanlı projelerde yer alan belediyelerin anketleri ve mali analizleri analize edilmektedir. Bulgular, bu projelerin belediyelerin stratejik yönetim ve kentsel planlama süreçlerine önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunu, küresel kalkınma araçlarını uygulamalarını, insan kaynaklarını geliştirmelerini ve sınırlı mali kaynaklara rağmen hizmet kalitesini artırmalarını sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, başarılı bir proje uygulaması için net proje hedefleri, belediyenin yapısının anlaşılması ve stratejik hedeflerle uyumun önemini vurgulamakta ve yerel yönetimler için stratejik yönetim ve kapasite geliştirme ihtiyacına dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dış yardım, Proje, Belediye, Yerel yönetim, Kalkınma

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¹ Doç. Dr., Düzce Üniversitesi, 0000-0001-6522-7140

* **Sorumlu Yazar** (Corresponding Author): akif.carkci@gmail.com

² Dr., Esenyurt Üniversitesi, 0000-0003-4829-3220

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Introduction

Over the past 250 years, the concept of 'development' has grown significantly, resulting in increased interest and works across various disciplines. This diversity in ideas and studies has contributed to a rich body of knowledge in art, literature, science, and other fields, deepening and diversifying the concept of development (Cypher, J.M. and Dietz, J.L., 2004, p. 73). Today, local administrations are also included in the rich field of interest of the increasingly diversified development in proportion to the power they possess.

In the post-Cold War period, Keynesian economists had an optimistic view of the role of the national state but did not fully understand the structural challenges facing developing countries. It is understood that the experience of this period has forced experts to make judgements about the relationship between the success of economic reconstruction and the role of the national state, using examples from Europe, Japan and the Marshall Plan. (Cypher, J.M. and Dietz, J.L., 2004, p. 71). Globalization has profoundly transformed the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres, bringing local values and actors to the forefront. Traditional national or international development models have often proven insufficient in addressing complex and context-specific challenges. In response, a growing emphasis on local development has emerged, empowering communities to take ownership of their own processes and priorities. Multilateral organizations such as the European Union, the accelerating pace of globalization, and the diffusion of international norms have collectively encouraged local authorities to transcend their conventional role as mere service providers. Instead, they are increasingly recognized as pivotal actors in domains such as social integration, environmental governance, sustainable development, and local diplomacy.

In this transformation process, the World Bank does not perceive local development merely as a tool for economic growth, but rather as a multi-stakeholder governance model grounded in the active participation of local actors. In this context, local development is defined as the outcome of cooperation among local public authorities, various administrative units, and stakeholders; and the emphasis is placed on the inclusive nature of this cooperation, which contributes to enhancing regional competitiveness. The World Bank's approach suggests that sustainable development can be achieved by mobilizing local resources, knowledge, and institutional capacity. Accordingly, local governments are encouraged to move beyond their traditional role as service providers and to become active agents in the development process ((Worldbank and Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2004, p. 1). As a result of the prioritization of local development, different views have been put forward and evaluations have been made in order to understand this model. Accordingly, it has been emphasized that the priorities of local development should include values such as human orientation, egalitarianism and inclusiveness, multidimensionality including economic, social, political and cultural processes (Göymen, 2004, p. 5). The emergence of local development as a prioritized agenda item has led to a diversification of perspectives, each attempting to conceptualize and evaluate the model in relation to evolving global dynamics and localized needs. The emphasis on values such as human orientation, egalitarianism, and inclusiveness highlights a normative turn in development thinking—moving away from purely growth-centric models toward frameworks that center on human well-being and participatory processes. Moreover, the recognition of the multidimensional nature of local development—encompassing economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions—underscores the complexity of localized transformation. This reflects a departure from one-size-fits-all development strategies and points toward context-sensitive approaches that account for local specificities, power relations, and cultural contexts. Such a perspective aligns with contemporary paradigms such as sustainable development, rights-based approaches, and inclusive governance. In sum, the discourse around local development has evolved into a multifaceted domain where normative principles and empirical realities intersect, requiring an interdisciplinary lens to fully grasp its implications.

In this process, it is seen that externally supported projects offer important opportunities to municipalities by increasing the resources of municipalities as a local government element, improving service quality and supporting sustainable local development. Municipalities receive funding from national and international organizations for externally funded projects, crucial for local development. The European Union, World Bank, Türkiye's development agencies, and international aid organizations like UNDP, UNICEF, and UN-Habitat support these projects. Understanding these agencies' funding and support programs is essential for selecting the best agency for municipal services.

1. Literature Review

It can be challenging for towns to carry out all service functions internally. The best way out of this difficult situation is to outsource municipal functions. If a municipality decides to use outsourcing in its services, it should accurately identify the department to which it applies outsourcing and have enough understanding of outsourcing (Lafaive, 2000, p. 3). Given the increasing complexity and scope of public service delivery, it is often challenging for municipalities to internally manage all functions effectively. In such cases, outsourcing emerges as a viable strategy to enhance operational efficiency and service quality. However, when a municipality opts to utilize outsourcing mechanisms, it is essential that it clearly identifies the specific departments or service areas where outsourcing will be applied. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of the principles, implications, and management of outsourcing is crucial to ensure successful implementation and oversight.

Businesses can benefit from operating on an external supplier, but implementing foreign funding may have negative impacts on overall performance. Some potential drawbacks include misidentification of core competences, legal gaps in contracts, risk of insufficient cost reductions, increasing supplier dependency over time, selecting unqualified suppliers, losing control over supplier companies, losing enterprise knowledge and capabilities, negatively impacting personnel, and risking the loss of critical capabilities over time. Additionally, a critical function may fail due to performing a critical function with foreign funding, leading to a crisis. These drawbacks should be considered when implementing Official Development Assistance (ODA) in businesses (Lankford and Parsa, 1999, p. 310-312).

The demand for infrastructure services in Türkiye, like in many other countries, is growing due to urbanization, although inhabitants have access to essential services such as drinking water, waste water treatment, solid waste disposal, and urban transportation. However, the financial status of municipalities impedes the timely and efficient implementation of essential services. In the event of inadequate share holder ownership, municipalities are introducing financing alternatives to complete major infrastructure projects (Tozar, 2005, p. 14).

Türkiye's constitutional foundation for local governance is established under Article 127 of the 1982 Constitution, defining local administrations as entities responsible for addressing the collective needs of provinces, municipalities, and villages. (İnaç and Ünal, 2015, p. 7). This decentralized structure consists of provincial administrations, municipalities, village administrations, and special provincial administrations, forming a decentralized structure. Local governments are tasked with fostering participatory governance and mobilizing resources to enhance socio-economic welfare, aligning with the objectives of Local Economic Development (LED). LED aims to revitalize local economies by leveraging regional assets, creating employment opportunities, and mitigating poverty through collaborative governance. In Türkiye, this approach is operationalized through partnerships between constitutional local entities and international stake holders like the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), and the Netherlands Development Finance Institution (FMO). These institutions provide critical support for projects aligning with Türkiye's sustainable development

goals, such as environmental resilience, social inclusion, and economic diversification.

Foreign-funded projects, often facilitated by international non-governmental organizations, have become important instruments for promoting democratic governance, intercultural dialogue, and community-based development. These projects enrich the landscape of local development by introducing diversified funding sources and innovative approaches, necessitating a careful balance between global standards and local priorities. In Türkiye, municipalities play a key role in adapting and implementing such projects at the local level, particularly in fields such as sustainable energy, participatory budgeting, and urban transformation. Legal authorization for such collaborations is provided by Municipal Law No. 5393, which enables local governments to establish partnerships with international organizations and access external resources for critical areas including infrastructure, education, and environmental management. While these projects offer significant opportunities, their implementation can occasionally be shaped by structural and operational challenges. Issues such as administrative procedures, capacity constraints, and intercultural coordination may require additional attention to ensure effective outcomes. In some cases, public discussions around foreign funding reflect concerns rooted in the importance of transparency, national interest, and community engagement. These perspectives underline the need for clear communication, inclusive planning, and robust oversight mechanisms. Despite these considerations, the contributions of foreign-funded projects—particularly in strengthening institutional capacity, supporting local entrepreneurship, and improving public service delivery—demonstrate their potential to create long-term value. For municipalities, the focus remains on building strategic collaborations that enhance local development while aligning with national goals and community needs.

Case studies from Turkish municipalities reveal the tangible impacts of foreign funding on local development efforts, such as the İzmir Zero Waste Project funded by the EU, Ankara Metro Expansion, and the EU-Türkiye Town Twinning Program. These examples underscore Türkiye's commitment to aligning with international sustainability frameworks, such as the UN-Habitat's City Prosperity Index. In conclusion, foreign-funded projects are essential for advancing local development in Türkiye, providing municipalities with the tools to confront socio-economic obstacles while aligning with global sustainability imperatives. The effectiveness of these projects depends heavily on sound governance practices, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptable policy frameworks.

2. Methodology

This study aims to analyze the contributions of externally funded projects to municipalities considering the information provided above, was gathered from a variety of sources, including academic sources, project executing institutions, embassies, international and national funders. The information acquired was analyzed by analyzing the information on external help received by certain towns, as well as documentation pertaining to project development, execution, and results. The research findings suggest that externally sponsored initiatives can have a major impact on towns. These programs can help towns build capacity, enhance service quality, and contribute to local development. This study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Qualitative research approaches were employed to acquire a better understanding of how externally aided initiatives affect municipalities. Quantitative research methodologies were employed to assess the prevalence and extent of externally aided initiatives. The study's findings demonstrate that externally sponsored programs may have a major impact on towns. These initiatives can assist towns in expanding their capacity, improving service quality, and contributing to local development. Within the restrictions of the research, the study concentrated on a small number of towns and the effects of externally sponsored initiatives on them.

3. Local Development Orientated Institutes

Local Economic Development is a worldwide concept that aims to revitalize local economies, create job opportunities, reduce unemployment, and battle poverty. Policies and concepts that take into account the region's potential and requirements must be developed with the participation of competent local administrations. This concept seeks to improve social welfare and rejuvenate the local economy, which necessitates the collaboration of successful local governments (Darıcı, B. 2007, p. 218).

In line with these objectives, it is necessary to take into consideration the contributions of embassies that support local development at the state level. In this respect, through their embassies; Germany (Economy and Economic Cooperation/ Culture and Education), Australia (Direct Grants Programme) Japan (JICA), Canada (Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives), UK (Cooperation Fund/Unit in Europe Funds), Netherlands (MATRA) offer grants and scholarships for local governments, NGOs and entrepreneurs (DOĞAKA, 2024). In addition, the institutions that support the projects if they will contribute to the local economy are; Finland Industrial Partnership Fund, UNDP GEF Small Support Programme, Netherlands Development Finance Institution, Spanish Development Finance Institution COFIDES, Swedish Development Fund, Japan Chamber Aid, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, Global Environment Programme, Social Development and Participatory Economic Partnership Institution/The Société de Promotion et de Participation pour la Coopération Economique (PROPARCO), International Finance Corporation IFC (DOĞAKA, 2024), (TBB, 2017, p. 26-27). Besides, it is also known that there are many local and foreign non-governmental organizations that position themselves to support local development. Although not all of them can be included within the limitations of the study, it is possible to list some of these organizations as follows; Urgent Action Fund, Open Society Foundations, Mediterranean Women Fund, Family Care Foundation, United States Institute for Peace, The German Marshall Fund of USA, Anna Lindh Foundation, European Cultural Foundation, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Chrest Foundation, Christensen Foundation, CIVICUS World Alliance For Citizen Participation, The International Initiative on Exploitative Child Labour, The Global Fund for Children, Whitley Fund For Nature, Institute Electrical And Electronics Engineers, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Emerging Market Foundation, Ther Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Heinrich BöllStiftung, King Boudouin Foundation, Global Dialogue, Global Heritage Fund, OAK Foundation, Prince Claus Fund, Robert Bosch Stiftung, The Rufford Small Grants Foundation, The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, The Sigrid Rausing Trust, Toyota Fund For Europe, Centre For International Private Enterprise(TBB, 2017, p. 20-25).

4. Local Development and the Position of Municipalities

Concrete projects, past and present, provide important examples of strengthening democracy and governance at the local level. These projects advance local democracy by contributing to the development of local governments and communities. Moreover, they allow to set the agenda for future local politics and local democracy and to further mainstream participatory democracy. The diversity of these concrete projects represents a great wealth (Şehitoğlu, R.&Çarkçı, A., 2022, p. 257). For example, local sustainable energy projects, education programs, and community-based budgeting initiatives are crucial for environmental sustainability and the local economy. They promote local engagement in public expenditure and policymaking, strengthening democracy and enhancing participatory governance.

Local development aims to strengthen the economy, support local enterprises, and increase economic potential, creating new employment opportunities, reducing unemployment rates, and increasing income levels. It also aims to reduce poverty and eliminate social inequalities by improving social and economic welfare. Strengthening local democracy and promoting

participatory management are crucial for a healthier economic and social structure (Sakınç, 2013, p. 26).

The sustained implementation of foreign-funded projects holds considerable potential for enhancing governance at the local level and fostering participatory democracy. By increasing the capacity of local communities to design and implement policies that are responsive to their specific needs, such initiatives contribute directly to the institutionalization of sustainable development practices. These efforts not only strengthen local administrative capabilities but also promote inclusive decision-making and citizen engagement, which are foundational to democratic local governance.

However, in the context of Türkiye, an ongoing debate centers on the perceived limitations of local governments in relation to development and employment generation. Certain administrative perspectives continue to view these functions as the exclusive domain of central government institutions, thereby framing local authorities primarily as service providers rather than as active agents of socio-economic transformation. This perception may constrain the full potential of municipalities, particularly in leveraging external resources and engaging in long-term development planning. Scholarly and policy-oriented research could provide valuable insights into this administrative stance, examining its roots, discourse, and implications for decentralization and local autonomy. If unaddressed, such a perspective may pose a significant challenge to efforts aimed at empowering municipalities and building resilient, locally-driven development strategies. Therefore, advancing a more integrated and developmental understanding of local governance—one that embraces the economic and social roles of municipalities—remains a critical step for Türkiye's broader democratization.

4.1. Challenges and Benefits of the Implementation of Externally Supported Projects

Externally funded projects support municipalities for specific purposes can be challenging due to resources and administrative processes. Municipalities must develop project-specific strategies and communicate effectively with other organizations. Short-term projects can increase community motivation and trust, while medium and long-term projects may require more time. (Worldbank and Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2004, p. 7). In both cases, it is important that projects are supported by specific individuals or stakeholder groups for successful completion. Externally supported projects manage resources, meet commitments, and provide critical skills, enabling effective advancement. However, they can cause problems for communities, including financial difficulties, handling complex projects, engaging international groups, political disagreements, sustainability concerns, and language and cultural barriers. Good planning and management can help address these risks, while outsourcing projects may be compromised by outdated technology or access issues.

Municipal initiatives worldwide and in Türkiye help local governments build capacity, reinforce institutions, and adopt new techniques, enhancing service quality, increasing public access, boosting the economy, providing job opportunities, and addressing social issues. Türkiye is experiencing a surge in interest in externally funded projects due to EU accession and financial support. Some other municipal projects are funded by various sources, including the EU, international organizations like World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and non-governmental organizations.

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is an EU initiative that encourages young people aged 17-30 to volunteer, work, or network in societal projects. The program covers expenses like travel, accommodation, food, and insurance, providing learning experience and allowing young people to explore different cultures. The ESC aims to develop young people's ability to respond to societal needs and address challenges. Volunteers contribute to local communities by bringing new ideas

and a multicultural perspective to their projects. Upon completion, volunteers receive a certificate certifying their participation (ESC, 2023).

The COSME Programme, an EU initiative aimed at enhancing SMEs' competitiveness and fostering sustainable growth, requires careful consideration of key aspects when addressing local municipalities. (COSME, 2023). The COSME Program is a European initiative aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by improving access to finance and enhancing the business environment. It helps municipalities access finance through local banks, enabling businesses to grow and create jobs. The program simplifies regulations, improves tax policies, and supports businesses, boosting local economies, living standards, and employment opportunities. The European Union is implementing Fiscalis 2020, a program aimed at enhancing fiscal and economic cooperation by focusing on tax and fiscal experts in the public sector. The program encourages sharing good tax practices and supports municipalities in candidate countries to update their tax policies and administration to EU norms.

The City Prosperity Index (CPI) is an UN-Habitat-developed tool used to assess the sustainability of cities. It measures factors such as productivity, infrastructure development, quality of life, equality and social participation, environmental sustainability, and governance and legislation. These dimensions help assess a city's welfare and sustainability, contributing significantly to its development. The CPI allows for comparisons between cities, monitoring changes, and guiding policymakers for urban development, ultimately making cities more livable and sustainable. This externally supported project contributes significantly to the development of cities (Loose S& Suzanne Maguire, 2020). UN-Habitat's 'Data-Based Project Management for Cities' initiative promotes sustainable urban development by addressing data gaps, strengthening institutional capacity, and building trust among stakeholders. It aims to improve decision-making processes, enhance urban development, and contribute to a sustainable future. (Loose S& Suzanne Maguire, 2020). UN-Habitat has launched the 2023 World Habitat Awards, recognizing innovative and sustainable housing projects. The awards, presented to completed or implemented projects, offer gold, silver, and bronze awards, with Gold Award winners receiving £10,000 and sharing solutions (World Habitat, 2023).

Horizon Europe, a €100 billion research and innovation initiative proposed by the European Commission in 2018, is crucial for city development. A provisional agreement was reached between the European Parliament and Council in 2019, which was approved by the European Parliament. In December 2020, the EU institutions reached a political agreement, financing Horizon Europe with €95.5 billion at current prices, and €5.4 billion from the EU's Next Generation Recovery Fund (Avrupa Komisyonu, 2024). Horizon Europe provides financing for large projects in infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, education, and health. It helps local authorities contribute to the European Union's scientific and technological objectives, improving quality of life, stimulating economic growth, and creating job opportunities.

The European Commission's Horizon Europe Program's 'Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission' aims to establish 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030, contributing to all European cities' climate neutrality by 2050. The Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, a part of the Horizon Europe Program, aims to address climate change and digital transformation in municipalities with a population of at least 50,000. However, larger cities with over 100,000 populations are crucial for emission reduction. Additionally, candidates must be motivated to achieve a zero-emission goal by 2030, demonstrating their dedication and potential for success (TBB, 2024). These conditions contribute to the proper implementation of the mission and the accomplishment of the intended results by ensuring that the towns applying for the call have a particular size and objectives.

The EU Mission Label, created to encourage cities to become carbon neutral by 2030, has been

awarded to 23 cities as part of the EU Mission for Climate Neutral and Smart Cities. The first ten cities, including Ioannina, Kalamata, Kozani, Thessaloniki, Heidelberg, Leuven, Espoo, Lahti, Lappeenranta, Tampere, Turku, Barcelona, Seville, Pecs, Malmö, Guimaraes, Lisbon, Florence, Parma, Marseille, Lyon, Limassol, and Izmir, are making progress (Avrupa Komisyonu, 2024).

Giving this distinction to cities emphasizes their readiness and commitment to being carbon neutral. Furthermore, improved access to public and private funding can assist these communities in achieving their sustainability goals. This is anticipated to inspire cities to play a more active role in combating climate change and taking significant steps toward a greener, more sustainable future. The EU will continue supporting programs assisting cities achieve their goals, including fresh funds from the European Investment Bank (EIB). The Commission and EIB have agreed to supplement EIB's financial consulting services for Mission Cities, providing services like European Local Energy Assistance (ELENA) and Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) via a single point of contact. This agreement is intended to be implemented as part of the planned modification to the Horizon Europe Work Programme in 2024. These efforts show that support and collaboration will continue to grow to help communities achieve their lofty goals (Avrupa Komisyonu, 2024).

Catalytic Grants (CATF) are funding provided by the Cities Alliance, a global alliance of cities, to assist programs aimed at reducing poverty. These subsidies are intended exclusively for cities, municipalities, organizations, and governments. Project subjects include city development methods, impoverished neighbourhood development initiatives, and long-term income programs. The awards range between \$50,000 and \$250,000 USD, and they must be backed by a City Alliance member. Cities Alliance provides grants for sustainable development and anti-poverty efforts in countries like Egypt, Morocco, and Azerbaijan. These grants support projects such as the development of poor neighborhoods and planned urbanization. Examples include the \$130,000 project support in Islamiliye, Egypt, \$490,000 in Morocco, and \$500,000 in Azerbaijan. The Cities Alliance works in Africa (50%), Asia (20%), Middle East and North Africa (20%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (10%). The projects cover capacity building, national urban policies, infrastructure, local strategies, and citizen participation (Cities Alliance, 2017 Annual Report, 2017).

Türkiye's municipal initiatives receiving foreign funding span various sectors, including environment, social services, culture, arts, education, and health. To apply, towns must develop detailed project proposals, budgets, and financial planning. High competition for externally financed initiatives necessitates careful proposal development.

5. Examples of Externally Supported Projects Offered to Municipalities in Türkiye

Türkiye's municipalities receive externally funded projects financed by international organizations, governments and non-governmental organizations. As of 2015, there are 30 metropolitan municipalities, 51 provincial municipalities, 519 metropolitan district municipalities, 400 district municipalities, 396 town municipalities, totalling 1396 municipalities in Türkiye. Article 60 of the Municipal Law No. 5393, which is one of the laws on municipalities in Türkiye, specifies that the municipality may spend on joint services and projects with domestic and foreign public and private sectors and non-governmental organizations, while Article 74 of the same law states that the authority to carry out joint activities and service projects, including membership, with international organizations and organizations operating on issues related to the municipality's field of duty is subject to the decision of the municipal council. (Durukal et al. 2015)

Related with this law Turkish towns have received external support in the form of grants, cash, or legal initiatives in recent years, enabling them to participate in international projects supporting local culture, arts, and environment, as well as developing projects on environmental protection, sustainability, tourism, health services, infrastructure, education, social assistance, cultural

activities, environmental protection, tourism, and health services and education. Countries like Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Japan and the United States of America provide technical assistance, training and capacity building to local governments in Türkiye. Within the context of the study's constraints, some of these supports include externally funded initiatives announced or executed in 2024. Some of these initiatives, which municipalities in Türkiye can profit from, are listed below. Table 1 has been prepared based on insights and information drawn from multiple sources, including CoR (2024), The Net Zero Cities (2024), CBC.AB.GOV.TR (2024), JICA (2024), European Commission (2024), European Innovation Council (2024), and JICA and UMT (2024).

Table 1. *Externally Funded Projects Türkiye Participated in 2024*

External Support	Beneficiary	Supporting Organisation
Young Elected Politician Program 2024	Young Elected Politicians	European Committee of the Regions
The Twinning Learning Programme	Any city within EU Member States and Horizon Europe Associated Countries	European Union's Green Deal
Cross-Border Cooperation in the Black Sea Basin	Turkish Cities in the Black Sea Basin	Interreg NEXT
Municipal Solid Waste Management Practice	Local Governments' Organizations, or Private Sectors who are Entrusted Solid Waste Management	JICA
EU Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism	EU Member States and Single Market Programme countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine), with demographic population between 25,000 – 100,000	European Commission
The European Capital of Innovation Awards	Towns and Cities With a Population of More Than 50,000 and Less Than 250,000 Inhabitants	European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency
European Enterprise Promotion Awards	EU countries, as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine, Iceland and the United Kingdom	Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
Local Authorities Building for Waste Management, Pollution Control, and Disaster Management and Response	Japan's experience and knowledge on disaster prevention and waste management issues for mayors, deputy mayors, district mayors, and other local government officials in Türkiye.	JICA and the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (UMT)

Source: Generated by authors

Externally funded projects in Türkiye, funded by international organizations, governments, and civil society organizations, are implemented in various sectors such as environment, infrastructure, social services, culture, arts, education, and health. Examples include zero waste projects in Izmir, a metro project in Ankara, UNDP capacity building in Istanbul, urban renewal projects in Adana, and improvements in urban transport in Bursa. These projects aid local governments in enhancing services and enhancing social welfare. Germany supported urban renewal projects in Adana and France contributed to improving urban transport in Bursa. These projects help local governments to improve their services and increase social welfare.

The EU is also seeking proposals for the Town Twinning between Türkiye and the EU-II: Twinning for a Green Future Grant Scheme, aiming to enhance cooperation between Turkish and EU local authorities. The scheme, with a €2.5 million budget, will provide €60,000 to €100,000 in grant support for joint projects in climate change and environmental areas (TBB, 2021).

On the other hand, the EU and World Bank provide financial support to Türkiye, granting grants to local governments in areas such as environment, infrastructure, social services, culture, arts,

education, and health. The EU has supported the Izmir Zero Waste Project, aiming to improve waste management, while the World Bank has provided loans to Ankara Metropolitan Municipality for the 'Ankara Metro' project, which plans to expand the city's metro network and construct new lines. The UN Development Program (UNDP) has been working in Türkiye since 1986, implementing over 80 programs across the country, particularly in Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, Inclusive and Democratic Governance, Climate Change, and Environment, with a focus on the Southeastern Anatolia Region for over 20 years (UNDP). The World Bank has also approved additional financing for Türkiye's Sustainable Cities Program to improve infrastructure, environmental protection, disaster preparedness, and social services. The European Union's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) focuses on strengthening rule of law, democratic reforms, governance, environmental issues, competitiveness, and inclusive growth. The IPA III period 2021-2027 promotes regional and cross-border cooperation, crucial for EU accession. Türkiye can participate in EU programmes like Erasmus, Horizon Europe, European Solidarity Programme, Civil Protection Mechanism, Creative Europe, and Customs and Taxation. (IKSV, 2021).

The UNDP and EU are jointly supporting Türkiye's local governments in capacity building and institutional management through a reform project. This project, which includes phases LAR I, LAR II, and LAR III, aims to strengthen local governments' capacities and promote participation and set to run from 2018-2020, has a budget of EUR 5.4 million. The first phase focuses on improving services and strengthening democratic processes, while the second phase focuses on administrative efficiency and participatory decision-making. UNDP invested over \$30,656,000 in capacity building activities for four municipalities in 2014, resulting in 39 projects, 71 vehicles, and increased solid waste management capacity (UNDP). France is also supporting local administrations in Türkiye with infrastructure and services projects. The European Union (EU) is financing a project to improve water and sanitation infrastructure in the southern Turkish provinces of Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Mardin, Mersin, Malatya, Hatay, and Adıyaman. The project, supported by local governments and İbank officials, was signed on 6 July 2021 in Ankara. The French Development Agency will support 19 out of 40 projects in eight provinces, totaling 277 million euros (AFD). In addition, it is seen in the Bursa Metropolitan Municipality Assembly decision numbered 1991/132 that Japan made a grant of \$860.000 to Bursa Metropolitan Municipality through the World Bank within the framework of Bursa Urban Development Project (Bursa Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 1997).

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and IKEA Türkiye are collaborating to protect and promote children's rights in Türkiye. The 'Child Friendly Cities Project', implemented between 2014 and 2015, aims to support municipalities in Türkiye in developing child-friendly policies, programs, and spaces. The project, in collaboration with the World Academy for Local Government and Democracy Foundation (WALD), Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (UMT), and United Cities and Local Governments Middle East and West Asia (UCLG-MEWA), aims to improve the quality of life for children in cities. The project was implemented in Mersin and Manisa Metropolitan Municipalities, Bitlis, Giresun, Kırklareli/Lüleburgaz, Yüreğir, Ankara/Mamak, Erzurum/İspir, İzmir/Bornova, and Şanlıurfa/Eyyübiye Municipalities. The project focuses on children's education, health, and protection needs, while raising public awareness. The project's results aim to contribute to better living conditions for children in cities and the development of cities that better meet their needs. (WALD, 2015). The Ministry of National Education, UNICEF, and Pendik Municipality have established a temporary school in Pendik for 235 Syrian children, who are unregistered and do not have Turkish nationality. The school offers Turkish and Arabic classes up to grade 9, a significant initiative supporting Syrian refugee education (Pendik Belediyesi, 2015). UNICEF is also interested in the Mersin Yenışehir Municipality's Early Childhood Education Project and the International Early Childhood

Development Non-Governmental Organisations Platform (EÇG-P) Congress, which focuses on From Science to Policy. The project, which has benefited hundreds of children and families for two years, was introduced at the international congress held between 18-21 November 2021 (Yenişehir Belediyesi, 2021).

In addition, UNICEF also organizes joint studies and visits with various municipalities. One of these is the visit of the representatives of the Children's Assembly of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality to the UNICEF Türkiye Children and Youth Unit (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, 2013). UNICEF officials, examined the work carried out by the children's center run by Bursa Metropolitan Municipality within the framework of the Internal Migration Integration Project (IGEP), were interested in the work carried out by municipalities on a subject that falls within their field of expertise and cited this center as an example for other cities (Bursa Metropolitan, 2009). UNICEF uses Article 77 of Municipal Law No. 5393 as the basis for project work with municipalities in Türkiye. This law allows municipalities to promote voluntary participation in various areas, including health, education, sports, environment, social services, libraries, parks, traffic, and cultural services. It aims to foster community solidarity and service provision to disadvantaged groups like the elderly, women, children, disabled, and the poor. Municipalities can combat child labor through prevention, education, and protection projects, collaborating with organizations and raising community awareness, resulting in positive changes (ÇSGB, 2017, p. 49).

At this phase Türkiye's rapidly growing cities face challenges like infrastructure needs, environmental sustainability, disaster preparedness, and social service development. The World Bank provides financing and financial support for sustainability and resilience (Dünya Bankası, 2019). The World Bank has allocated EUR 500 million to Türkiye's Sustainable Cities Program, aiming to promote economic, financial, environmental, and social sustainability in cities. The funds will fund infrastructure projects, improve quality of life, and enhance disaster resilience. The initiative encourages public-private sector collaboration, promoting faster project completion and improved services. The First Sustainable Cities Project (SCP-1) and Second Sustainable Cities Project (SCP-2) have helped improve infrastructure, environmental sustainability, disaster preparedness, and social services in Türkiye's cities.

The World Health Organisation's Healthy Cities Project is an externally supported initiative aimed at encouraging local governments to contribute to health development and develop policies that positively impact human health. The project supports capacity building efforts and promotes a health-oriented perspective in policy making and implementation. The WHO European Healthy Cities Network combines European cities to discuss health-related issues, share best practices, and develop projects. It hosts an annual Business and Technical Meetings in June, allowing progress monitoring and planning (Çankaya Belediyesi, 2023). Within the framework of the Healthy Cities Project established under the umbrella of WHO, the Union of Healthy Cities of Türkiye was established in Türkiye. The Union of Healthy Cities is a union established to promote the development and dissemination of the Healthy Cities Movement in Türkiye. This union was established on 2 December 2004 with the initiative of 10 founding municipalities (Bursa, Yalova, Van, Kadıköy, Afyonkarahisar, Tepebaşı, Çankaya, Ürgüp, Ordu, Kırıkkale) and with the decision of the Council of Ministers numbered 2004/8226 within the framework of the Law No. 5355 on Local Administration Unions. It was officially published in the Official Gazette dated 22 December 2004. Türkiye's Healthy Cities Network of 1400 cities and municipalities in 5 regions, is part of the European Union. Türkiye is one of 27 countries and 100 cities/municipalities in the network. The Healthy Cities Alliance promotes healthier cities and public health by integrating health policies into urban planning and management, encouraging best practices exchange, and supporting health-oriented projects (Türkiye Sağlıklı Kentler Birliği, 2025).

Japan's 'Grants for Local Projects Programme (GGP)' is a grant programme for development initiatives in developing countries with limited resources. On 11 September 2000, Japan and Türkiye signed an agreement for the implementation of this initiative in Türkiye. The Grant Scheme for Local Projects (GGP) is a Japanese government development assistance program that provides non-refundable financial support to development-oriented projects in underdeveloped and developing countries since 1989. The program has been implemented in over 140 countries and regions, aiming to meet humanitarian needs and contribute to local development. Projects must be completed within one year and are supervised by the Japanese Embassy. In Türkiye, Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions receive the most funding. The Grant Scheme for Local Projects (GGP) is a financial assistance program launched in Türkiye for civil society organizations and municipalities. Applicants must have their own budget and work for a non-profit organization. Projects can receive up to \$90,000 in funding. The program aims to support local development efforts of these organizations, ensuring they can effectively implement and sustain development projects at the local level (Japonya Büyükelçiliği, 2023). Table 2 has been prepared based on insights and information derived from the Japan Embassy in Türkiye and the Local Grant Assistance Program.

Table 2. *Current Projects Supported in Türkiye under the Grant Scheme for Local Projects*

Project Application Date	Project Name	Project Owner Organisation	Project Province	(\$) Grant Amount
2021	Renovation of Atatürk Primary School in Gercüş	Gercüş Municipality	Batman	89.524
2021	Search and Rescue Vehicle Provision Project in Genç	Genç Municipality	Bingöl	90.516
2021	Provision of Transport Vehicle for Disabled Persons in Çankırı	Cankiri Municipality	Çankırı	46.744
2021	Provision of Transport Vehicle for Disabled Persons in Alanya	Alanya Municipality	Antalya	74.281
2021	Provision of Patient Transport Vehicle in Karataş	Karatas Municipality	Adana	60.378
2021	Provision of Mobile Health Screening Vehicle in Tarsus	Tarsus Municipality	Mersin	85.652
2020	Provision of Mobile Oral and Dental Health Vehicle in Bergama	Bergama Municipality	İzmir	81.700
2020	Provision of Patient Transport Vehicle in Sogutlu Project	Sogutlu Municipality	Sakarya	54.565
2020	Transport Vehicle Supply Project for Disabled Persons in Trabzon	Trabzon Metropolitan Municipality	Trabzon	58.270
2020	Search and Rescue Vehicle Provision Project in Çiftlikköy	Ciftlikkoy Municipality	Yalova	89.700
2020	Provision of Vocational Training Centre for Women in Laçın	Laçın Municipality	Çorum	89.283
2020	Provision of Mobile Health Screening Vehicle in Çekerek	Cekerek Municipality	Yozgat	88.700
2020	Provision of Mobile Breast Cancer Screening Vehicle in Bor	Bor Municipality	Niğde	89.900
2020	Provision of Vocational Training Workshop for Women in Fatsa	Fatsa Municipality	Ordu	68.545
2020	Provision of Mobile Gynaecology and Health Screening Vehicle in Eyyübiye	Eyyubiye Municipality	Şanlıurfa	86.675
2019	Provision of Patient Transport Vehicle Project	Ankara Metropolitan Municipality	Ankara	57.545
2019	Transport Vehicle Project for Disabled Individuals	Malatya Metropolitan Municipality	Malatya	88.250
2019	Transport Vehicle Project for Disabled and Elderly People	Nevşehir Municipality	Nevşehir	44.400
2019	Transport Vehicle Project for Disabled Individuals	Osmaniye Municipality	Osmaniye	56.173
2019	Bolvadin Search and Rescue Vehicle Project	Bolvadin Municipality	Afyon	89.650
2019	Seydişehir Mobile Health Screening Vehicle Project	Seydisehir Municipality	Konya	74.810
Total		1.565.261		

Source: Generated by authors

An Integrated Assessment of Grant-Supported Local Projects in Türkiye (2019–2021)

Türkiye's *Grant Scheme for Local Projects (GGP)* between 2019 and 2021 has supported a wide range of initiatives across the country, primarily through municipal governments. These grants were strategically distributed to address locally identified service gaps and to improve the quality of life through practical, service-based interventions. Projects were implemented in both metropolitan and rural municipalities, underscoring a commitment to territorial equity.

Thematic and Functional Focus

The dominant themes that emerge from the funded projects include public health, social inclusion, accessibility, and disaster preparedness:

In 2021, municipalities such as Gercüş, Genç, Çankırı, Alanya, Karataş, and Tarsus implemented projects ranging from the renovation of educational facilities to the provision of search and rescue vehicles and transport services for disabled individuals.

The 2020 cycle expanded thematically, including mobile oral and dental health units (e.g., in Bergama), breast cancer and gynecology screening vehicles (e.g., in Bor and Eyyübiye), and vocational training centers for women (e.g., in Laçın and Fatsa). These projects, spread across municipalities from İzmir to Şanlıurfa, demonstrate a deliberate effort to address both health inequalities and gender-based disparities in local service provision.

The inclusion of search and rescue vehicles in municipalities like Çiftlikköy and Bolvadin reflects increasing attention to local-level disaster risk reduction in the face of Türkiye's vulnerability to natural hazards, especially earthquakes.

Implementation and Financial Profile

The grant amounts ranged from approximately \$44,000 to \$90,000 per project, with an overall funding envelope of \$1.56 million. The majority of projects centered on the procurement of equipment and vehicles—mobile health units, patient transport vans, and emergency response vehicles—pointing to an emphasis on immediate service delivery and infrastructure needs rather than long-term systemic transformation.

Notably, the diversity of recipient municipalities—ranging from metropolitan centers like Ankara and İzmir to smaller towns like Çekerek, Laçın, and Söğütlü—indicates an intentional approach to geographic and socioeconomic inclusivity in project selection.

Strategic Reflections and Policy Relevance

From a governance perspective, these projects reveal several strategic orientations:

1. **Short-Term, High-Impact Interventions:** Most projects aim to produce tangible service delivery outcomes in the short term, especially in underserved or rural areas.
2. **Socially Inclusive Priorities:** A significant number of projects target vulnerable groups—particularly the elderly, women, and disabled individuals—indicating a growing alignment with inclusive local development paradigms.
3. **Public Health as a Core Concern:** The prevalence of mobile screening and transport projects underlines the role of municipalities in promoting preventive health and reducing spatial inequalities in healthcare access.
4. **Underdeveloped Areas of Innovation and Capacity Building:** Despite the operational effectiveness of equipment procurement, there remains limited emphasis on institutional capacity-building, digital governance, and sustainable innovation, which are crucial for long-term development resilience.

The GGP-supported local projects have made important strides in expanding municipal service capacity, enhancing social inclusiveness, and strengthening local governance. However, for these projects to have sustainable, transformative impact, future iterations should incorporate components such as policy innovation, institutional learning, and community participation. This would allow municipalities not only to deliver services more effectively but also to act as catalysts of local development in alignment with both national priorities and international norms such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the past, Türkiye has received \$2,374,371 in grants from Japan's "Local Projects Grant Programme" (GGP) since 2006, covering various projects such as Vocational Training Centers for Women, Mobile Health Centres, Women's Skill Development Centers, Multi-Purpose Community Centers, and Education Centers. These grants total \$809,110, with Diyarbakır Tepe Municipality receiving \$76,060 in 2012, Ağrı Taşlıçay receiving \$66,175 in 2012, Hilvan receiving \$106,203 in 2010, and Van Gürpınar receiving \$93,889 in 2009. According to these statistics, municipalities in Türkiye have received a total of \$2,374,371 in grants from Japan's "Local Projects Grant Programme" (GEKA, 2014, p. 87).

The Australian Embassy's Direct Assistance Programme (DAP) supports small grant projects to address long-term humanitarian issues, focusing on disadvantaged groups like women and children. Eligible applicants include institutions, organizations, and non-governmental organizations. DAP funds range from AUD 3,000 to AUD 10,000 and supports public health, education, infrastructure, rural development, and environmental benefits. Australia's safeguards policy requires online applications with detailed budgets and technical feasibility. Some examples of organizations and projects in Türkiye that have received support under this fund are Sarıyer Municipality Women Entrepreneurs Support Workshop, Denizli Governorship Project: Freeing Project - Children with Visual Disabilities, Trabzon Life Women's Centre (Australian Embassy Türkiye, 2023), (GEKA, 2014: 80).

The Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) is a program that supports small-scale, high-impact initiatives in less developed countries, aligning with Global Affairs Canada's thematic interests. The program focuses on initiatives planned and developed by local partners in the target country. The Canadian embassy or high commission is involved in selecting and approving these projects. The CFLI aims to enhance participation and cooperation among local actors in recipient countries, particularly in civil society sectors, and enhance bilateral links between Canada and host countries. The financial support is capped at between 20,000 and 40,000 Canadian dollars (Nevşehir Üniversitesi, 2022).

The 'Women in Political Leadership' training programme, in collaboration with the International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), aims to empower women in elected positions in local or regional governments in many countries, including Türkiye, by 2025. The programme aims to strengthen local democracy, promote justice, participation, transparency, and accountability, and support women politicians as effective role models. It also aims to promote the participation of underrepresented groups in decision-making processes (ICLD, 2023).

The programme aims to enhance leadership skills, increase political participation, and create a network for women in similar positions. It also focuses on communication and advocacy competences in inclusive governance. Participants receive advanced training in communication, strategic planning, and leadership through a three-day study visit to a Swedish municipality or region. The program is suitable for elected women politicians in Türkiye, with all costs financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (ICLD, 2023).

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the role and outcomes of externally funded local projects in Türkiye, particularly in the context of municipal capacities and local development. The research was guided by several key questions: How do foreign-funded projects contribute to the institutional and service delivery capacities of municipalities in Türkiye? What are the recurring thematic priorities among supported projects? What challenges and opportunities do these projects present, especially in terms of local ownership?

The findings suggest that externally funded projects, when well-aligned with local needs and institutional priorities, serve as vital instruments for enhancing the service delivery effectiveness, organizational learning, and developmental role of municipalities. Given the resource limitations many local governments face, such projects provide not only financial assistance but also technical support, visibility, and motivation for performance improvement.

This study set out to investigate the role, outcomes, and sustainability of externally funded projects implemented by local governments in Türkiye. Within the context of increasing demands on municipalities and constrained financial and administrative capacities, foreign-funded initiatives have gained importance as instruments to support service delivery, institutional development, and strategic transformation at the local level. Guided by the core questions of how these projects contribute to municipal capacities, what thematic priorities dominate, and what challenges emerge in their implementation, the research offers a multidimensional assessment of foreign-funded local initiatives between 2019 and 2021.

The findings indicate that externally funded projects—when effectively aligned with local needs and institutional priorities—serve not only as financial resources, but also as catalysts for capacity building, innovation, and improved public visibility. They offer municipalities access to technical expertise, foster organizational learning, and provide motivation for improving service performance. Case analyses reveal that the most frequently supported projects center around health services, transportation for disadvantaged groups, disaster preparedness, and vocational education—reflecting both immediate community needs and the service-based orientation of many municipal administrations.

However, while the operational value of such projects is indisputable, their transformational potential remains limited in many instances. This is due, in part, to an institutional mindset within the public sector that still views municipalities primarily as service delivery agents rather than as active actors of development and employment generation. Despite the legal authority granted by Municipal Law No. 5393 to engage in international partnerships, a cautious or even skeptical perception toward foreign funding persists in certain segments of Türkiye's bureaucracy and public discourse. These perceptions can hinder the effective use of external resources and undermine project sustainability.

The study also emphasizes the importance of embedding externally funded projects within the strategic vision of municipalities. Successful project outcomes depend heavily on institutional readiness, including robust organizational structures, skilled human resources, and clearly defined strategic objectives. Municipalities need to incorporate foreign-funded initiatives into their broader planning processes to ensure consistency, integration, and impact. Strengthening technological infrastructure, improving financial literacy, and fostering participatory governance are crucial for creating the necessary environment for sustainable development.

Moreover, the long-term sustainability of externally funded projects must become a focal point of local governance. Research shows that many grant-based initiatives lose their effectiveness once external funding ends, particularly if they lack strong institutional anchoring or mechanisms for local ownership. To address this, municipalities should develop clear exit strategies, explore co-

financing models, and institutionalize successful pilot projects into mainstream service delivery. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be built into the project lifecycle to assess both short-term outputs and long-term developmental outcomes, thereby enhancing accountability and learning.

In conclusion, externally funded projects present a critical opportunity for municipalities in Türkiye to transcend resource constraints, improve service quality, and strengthen their developmental roles. Yet, these opportunities can only be fully realized through a combination of strategic alignment, institutional preparedness, and multi-level coordination. Effective integration of such projects into local governance frameworks, coupled with efforts to cultivate a more informed and constructive public and administrative perception of foreign-funded initiatives, will determine whether these interventions remain isolated or evolve into pillars of resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking local governance.

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