

THE HYBRID STRUCTURE OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES: AN EVALUATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TRADITIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT: This article evaluates the "hybrid" institutional structure of development agencies established in Turkey in 2006, within the framework of traditional public administration principles. While traditional public administration is based on principles such as equality, impartiality, public interest, and accountability, development agencies possess a flexible, multi-actor, and market-oriented structure aligned with neoliberal policies. The study compares the current structure and functioning of these agencies with these principles, highlighting institutional and administrative issues. Document analysis and conceptual analysis methods are employed to question whether the agencies aim for local development or marketization. The study offers a comprehensive evaluation of the compatibility of development agencies with the principles of public interest and democratic oversight.

Key Words: National Development Agency, Hybrid Structure, Multi-Level Governance, Hybrid Financing, Regional Development, Development Policy

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ULUSAL KALKINMA AJANSLARININ MELEZ YAPISI: GELENEKSEL KAMU YÖNETİMİ PERSPEKTİFİNDEN BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

ÖZ: Bu makale, Türkiye'de 2006 yılında kurulan kalkınma ajanslarının "melez" kurumsal yapısını, geleneksel kamu yönetimi ilkeleri çerçevesinde değerlendirmektedir. Geleneksel kamu yönetimi; eşitlik, tarafsızlık, kamu yararı ve hesap verebilirlik gibi ilkelere dayanırken, kalkınma ajansları neoliberal politikalar doğrultusunda esnek, çok aktörlü ve piyasa odaklı bir yapıya sahiptir. Çalışmada, ajansların mevcut yapısı ve işleyişi bu ilkelerle karşılaşırılmaktır; kurumsal ve yönetsel sorunlar ortaya konulmaktadır. Yöntem olarak doküman incelemesi ve kavramsal analiz kullanılmış; ajansların yerel kalkınma mı yoksa piyasalaşma mı hedeflediği sorgulanmıştır. Çalışma, kalkınma ajanslarının kamu yararı ve demokratik denetim ilkeleriyle uyumuna dair kapsamlı bir değerlendirme sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ulusal Kalkınma Ajansı, Atipik Yapı, Çok Katmanlı Yönetişim, Hibrit Finansman, Bölgesel Kalkınma, Kalkınma Politikası

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Significance and Purpose of the Study

The traditional approach to public administration is fundamentally based on the principles of equality, impartiality, public interest, accountability, and transparency in the delivery of public services. This paradigm presumes that public institutions operate under a centralized structure and within a hierarchical order. However, since the 1980s, with the increasing influence of neoliberal policies, a profound paradigm shift has occurred in public administration. Concepts such as governance, performance orientation, and collaboration with the private sector have been introduced into the public sphere (Peters, 2001).

One of the most concrete reflections of this transformation in Turkey has been the establishment of National Development Agencies (NDAs) through Law No. 5449, enacted in 2006. Unlike the principles of traditional public administration, development agencies stand out as multi-actor structures that mediate between central and local governments while cooperating with the private sector. In this regard, they are defined as "hybrid" or "atypical" institutions that function within multi-layered governance networks, blending both public and private sector logics through their flexible organizational structures (Lagendijk, Kayasu, & Yaşar, 2009; Ataay, 2005).

This article aims to critically evaluate the hybrid nature of development agencies from the perspective of traditional public administration. Fundamentally, it seeks to address the following questions:

- To what extent are the current structure and functioning of development agencies compatible with the fundamental principles of public administration?
- What are the institutional and administrative problems arising from this structure?
- Within the neoliberal context, do these agencies support local development or do they promote marketization?

Accordingly, this article will outline the existing structure of development agencies and provide assessment through the lens of core public administration principles such as accountability, transparency, public interest, and the implementation of public policies at the local level.

1.2 Methodology and Approach

This study employs document analysis and conceptual analysis methods. The structural characteristics of development agencies in Turkey will be examined through an analysis of legislative documents (Law No. 5449, development plans, and presidential strategy documents) as well as agency activity reports. These structures will then be evaluated in light of traditional public administration principles and critiques from governance literature.

The primary approach adopted is comparative conceptual analysis, where hybrid structures are questioned through comparison with traditional public administration principles.

1.3 Structure of the Article

The article consists of six main sections. The first section, the introduction, presents the study's purpose, significance, methodology, and structure. The second section will address

the structural development, founding philosophy, and practical implementation of development agencies. The third section will recall the fundamental principles of traditional public administration and discuss their applicability within the context of development agencies. The fourth section will critically analyze the hybrid structure of the agencies, evaluating elements such as accountability, public interest, and democratic oversight. The fifth section will be dedicated to general discussions and reform proposals. Finally, the last section will present conclusions and recommendations.

2. Institutional Development and Structural Characteristics of National Development Agencies

2.1 Establishment Process and Legal Foundation

The establishment of development agencies in Turkey was the result of a long institutional preparation and structural transformation process. These agencies were officially established through the enactment of Law No. 5449 on "The Establishment, Coordination, and Duties of Development Agencies" in 2006. However, the background of this initiative is closely related to Turkey's harmonization process with the European Union (EU) (Eryilmaz & Tuncer, 2014), the widespread adoption of neoliberal economic policies, and efforts toward administrative restructuring.

The origins of regional development policies in Turkey date back to the 1960s. In the development plans prepared under the leadership of the State Planning Organization (DPT), reducing regional disparities was set as a significant objective. Nevertheless, these objectives were generally pursued through a centralized approach, with policies directed from Ankara, and with limited participation from local actors (Göymen, 2005; Arslan & Türkmen, 2023). Since the 1990s, however, more participatory, locally oriented, and multi-actor structures have increasingly come to the fore in the field of regional development.

This transformation accelerated with Turkey's acceptance of the EU's regional policy framework, particularly the NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) classification. In 2002, Turkey identified 26 NUTS-2 level regions as part of its EU harmonization efforts, and in 2006, prepared the legal framework for establishing development agencies in these regions. Within this context, Law No. 5449 defines development agencies as special-status entities established to "mobilize local dynamics" and "enhance regional potential" (Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey, 2006).

Although the establishment process of development agencies was coordinated by the central government, the agencies are notable for their autonomous structures. Each agency operates under the general coordination of the Ministry of Industry and Technology (formerly the State Planning Organization and the Ministry of Development) and is structured with bodies such as a Board of Directors, a Development Council, and a Secretariat General (Serka, 2011). This structure positions the agencies outside the classic central administrative hierarchy, creating a unique model based on "governance" principles (Özen, 2005).

2.2 Current Institutional Structure: Multi-Level Governance and Hybrid Financing

The institutional structure of development agencies is designed as a governance model based on collaboration between the public, private, and civil society sectors. Unlike the hierarchical structure of traditional public administration, this governance model envisages multi-centered, network-based, and flexible decision-making processes (Rhodes, 1997). In line

with this governance understanding, agencies consist of three main organs: the Board of Directors, the Development Council, and the Secretariat General.

The Board of Directors is at the center of the decision-making mechanism. This board includes high-level local administrators such as governors, metropolitan mayors, heads of provincial assemblies, and presidents of chambers of commerce and industry. Thus, a direct platform for cooperation between public institutions and local economic actors is created (Yılmaz, 2010; Öztürk, 2024).

The Development Council serves as an advisory body composed of regional stakeholders. Universities, non-governmental organizations, labor unions, and representatives of the private sector participate in this council. Nevertheless, this council does not have binding decision-making authority; it only provides recommendations (Köksal & Köse, 2019). This leads to criticisms that the principle of participation operates only at a formal level.

The Secretariat General acts as the executive organ of the agency. It is responsible for all operational processes and consists of expert staff, who are generally employed under contract rather than as civil servants. Consequently, agency employees are excluded from the scope of Law No. 657 on Civil Servants, subjecting them to a more flexible but less regulated employment regime (Aras, 2021).

The financing structure further reinforces the agencies' "hybrid" nature. Development agencies are funded both from the central budget and from local resources. According to Law No. 5449, provincial special administrations and municipalities are obliged to contribute financially to the agencies. In addition, agencies are supported by allocations from the central budget through the Ministry of Industry and Technology. Some agencies also benefit from EU projects and other external funding sources (Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey, 2006). This financing structure places agencies in a semi-autonomous but highly fragmented and complex financial system.

2.3 Fields of Activity and Role Transformation

Although the fields of activity of development agencies are initially defined by law, they have significantly expanded over time. According to Law No. 5449, the main duties of the agencies are as follows:

- Preparing regional development plans and strategies,
- Enhancing the capacities of local actors,
- Supporting investors through investment support offices,
- Implementing financial support programs,
- Monitoring and evaluating activities (Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey, 2006).

Initially limited to regional planning and capacity-building activities, agencies have increasingly transformed into providers of financial support and even investment-guiding actors. Today, agencies run numerous financial support programs, launch project calls, and directly provide grants in specific priority areas. This transformation fosters project-based competition among local actors. Since their inception, regional development agencies in Turkey have been subject to significant criticism, both positive and negative, due to various concerns (Pehlivan, 2013).

Another dimension of this role transformation is the agencies' gradual evolution into implementing units that primarily serve the strategic objectives of the central authority. In the 11th and 12th Development Plans, agencies are tasked with "coordination" and "localization of strategic goals," indicating that they have shifted from grassroots-driven local development toward becoming tools for implementing central policies at the local level (Presidency of Strategy and Budget, Republic of Turkey, 2022).

In light of these developments, it becomes clear that the activities of development agencies have undergone a significant transformation over time. Unlike traditional development institutions, they have evolved into market-driven, performance-oriented, and externally funded structures. This situation raises the critical question of whether they serve the public interest or market mechanisms.

3. Development Agencies from the Perspective of Traditional Public Administration

Although the institutional structure and operational mechanisms of national development agencies have been shaped by modern public administration concepts, evaluating them through the lens of traditional public administration principles is essential to determine whether fundamental public values have been preserved. In this section, the focus will be on whether development agencies serve the public interest, act in accordance with the principles of transparency and accountability, and how the governance paradigm affects the commercialization of the public domain.

3.1 Fundamental Principles of Traditional Public Administration

Traditional public administration is fundamentally based on the Weberian bureaucracy model. This model is grounded in principles such as legality, hierarchical organization, merit, objectivity, transparency, and accountability. The neutral and effective provision of public services ensures that citizens receive services in accordance with the principle of equality (Akçakaya, 2016).

Within this framework, public administration institutions are obligated to prioritize public interest in their decision-making processes. Furthermore, within a clearly defined structure of authority and responsibility, decision-makers are expected to be subject to monitoring and accountable to the public. Traditional public administration establishes a direct link between "public authority" and "public interest," emphasizing adherence to public ethics over flexibility resembling that of the private sector.

When development agencies are evaluated in light of these principles, it becomes apparent that although they possess public legal personality, their decision-making processes and practices are more aligned with private sector logic. In particular, the heavy representation of private sector actors on the boards of directors may shift the focus from public interest to sectoral or local interests (Sadıç & İşler, 2020).

3.2 Public Interest, Transparency, and Accountability

In traditional public administration, public interest constitutes the primary reference point. Public institutions are expected to prioritize the general welfare of society in every stage, from the allocation of resources to the delivery of services. Thus, transparency in decision-making processes and accountability to the public are fundamental requirements (Eryılmaz, 2010).

In the context of development agencies, the extent to which these principles are upheld remains a controversial issue. Despite their status as public legal entities, agencies operate with flexible and private-sector-like decision-making mechanisms. This flexibility generates a number of challenges concerning transparency and accountability (Sadiç & İşler, 2020).

There has been frequent criticism regarding the selection process for project support programs, the transparency of evaluation criteria, and the public disclosure of decision-making processes. Furthermore, the lack of detail in agency activity reports and the limited public availability of expenditure information restrict the public's ability to monitor and evaluate agency activities (Efe, 2023).

Similar issues arise with regard to accountability. Unlike traditional public institutions, development agencies do not have direct accountability obligations to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Instead, they report to higher bodies such as the relevant Ministry and the Investment Office. This situation undermines democratic oversight and harms the public interest principle by limiting the mechanisms of accountability.

3.3 The Commercialization of the Public Domain and the Governance Paradigm

Following the transformations in public administration after the 1980s, the governance paradigm emerged, redefining the concept of public administration around participation, multi-actor involvement, and flexibility. This paradigm promotes policy-making and implementation through the collaboration of public, private, and civil sectors (Peters, 2010). Development agencies represent institutional examples of this paradigm.

However, the institutionalization of governance in public administration has attracted criticism. Particularly, the regulation of public services according to market principles, the heavy involvement of private sector actors in decision-making processes, and the commercialization of the public domain have resulted in negative consequences (Jessop, 2002). The structure of development agencies can be seen as a reflection of this process.

By promoting entrepreneurship through project support, fostering local capital accumulation, and prioritizing the development of competitive sectors, agencies often sideline the social dimension of development. Although the integration of private sector and civil society organizations into agencies appears positive in terms of participation, this approach has at times weakened public oversight and the protection of public interests (Kaya, 2019).

As a result, development agencies shaped by the governance paradigm have gradually deviated from the principle of public interest, evolving into structures that prioritize economic development and market efficiency. Consequently, the public domain has become increasingly exposed to the influence of private actors, posing serious risks to the legitimacy and democratic character of public administration.

4. A Critical Approach to the Hybrid Structure of National Development Agencies

Development agencies were originally designed to support regional development, mobilize local potential, and strengthen public-private-civil society cooperation. However, over time, both their structural characteristics and operational practices have been the subject of various criticisms (Karasu, 2015). This section evaluates the institutional and managerial problems caused by the hybrid structure of development agencies under four main headings.

4.1 Institutional Ambiguity and Distribution of Responsibilities

National development agencies are characterized by semi-autonomous structures positioned between central and local governments. This positioning creates ambiguity regarding their legal and administrative responsibilities. Although their activities are related to local development, decision-making processes are often dominated by the central government (Özbudun, 2012). For instance, the presence of governors and representatives of central institutions on their boards may limit the agencies' flexibility to address local needs (Sadiç & İşler, 2020).

Institutional ambiguity weakens the mechanisms of accountability. Questions such as who is responsible for which decisions and who is accountable for which projects often remain unanswered. This situation eliminates the "chain of accountability," a fundamental principle of public administration (Hood, 2010).

4.2 Problems of Democratic Legitimacy and Local Participation

Traditional public administration derives its legitimacy from democratic representation mechanisms. However, democratic participation in the decision-making processes of development agencies is quite limited. Although there are advisory bodies such as development councils, their influence on decision-making processes is marginal and largely symbolic (Öztürk, 2024).

Nevertheless, the projects and resource allocations carried out by agencies have a direct impact on local development. Therefore, it is essential to ensure the effective participation of the public, local NGOs, and professional organizations in decision-making processes. In practice, however, agencies are predominantly managed by technocratic elites, and direct links with local citizens remain weak (Öztürk, 2024).

4.3 Reflections of Neoliberal Policies at the Local Level

Development agencies are among the most concrete implementers of the global neoliberal governance paradigm in Turkey. While concepts such as economic growth and competitiveness have become prominent at the local level, traditional public service objectives such as social development, combating inequality, and promoting social solidarity have been relegated to the background (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

The neoliberal governance approach has driven development agencies toward resembling market actors. While they focus on providing project-based funding, attracting investments, and supporting entrepreneurship, the public nature of public services has been weakened, and the boundary between public and private sectors has become increasingly blurred (Jessop, 2002). This shift undermines the principle of public interest and leads to the perception of agencies as investment-friendly structures rather than public service providers.

4.4 Policy Coordination and Fragmentation of Public Policies

As the scope of activities of development agencies expanded, their interaction with various sectoral policies also increased. However, this interaction often lacks coordination. The failure to integrate locally developed projects in fields such as education, health, and environment with national policies results in policy fragmentation (Peters, 2015).

The project-based approach of agencies undermines the principle of continuity and integrity in public services. Particularly regarding sustainable development goals at the local level, this fragmentation poses a significant problem. Furthermore, the absence of

coordination among different agencies, differences in implementation, and lack of harmonization reduce efficiency in the use of resources and lead to the waste of public funds (Sadiç & İşler, 2020).

5. Discussion and Evaluation

The institutionalization process of development agencies in Turkey presents an example of a model shaped not by classical public administration principles, but rather in accordance with neoliberal governance principles. This section elaborates on the inconsistencies between the current structure of development agencies and traditional public administration, while also discussing potential reform proposals and alternative models to address these issues.

5.1 Points of Incompatibility with Traditional Public Administration

The Issue of Democratic Legitimacy: Traditional public administration presumes that public institutions are subject to oversight through democratically elected representatives. However, development agencies are excluded from this principle. Their boards are predominantly composed of central bureaucrats and private sector representatives. Since local populations are not directly represented, the democratic legitimacy of the agencies is weakened (Sadiç & İşler, 2020).

Lack of Accountability: In public administration systems, transparent and traceable accountability mechanisms are essential. The semi-autonomous and multi-actor governance model of development agencies has complicated these mechanisms. Agencies are neither under the effective supervision of central government authorities nor local governments. This weakens the oversight of the use of public resources and raises concerns about transparency (Hood, 2010).

Transparency Issues: The processes related to the financing, evaluation criteria, and outcomes of the projects carried out by the agencies are often not disclosed to the public. Full transparency in procurement and project evaluation processes is lacking, and the participation of civil society in decision-making is very limited (Öztürk, 2024).

Commercialization of the Public Domain: The neoliberal public administration approach seeks to align public services with market principles. In this regard, development agencies prioritize activities such as improving the investment environment and supporting entrepreneurship over providing public services. This approach sidelines traditional public values such as social welfare, justice, and equality (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

Lack of Policy Coordination: A lack of coordination between policies formulated at the central and local levels reduces the effectiveness of development agencies. Their projects are often not fully integrated into national development plans, nor do they fully align with local needs (Peters, 2015).

These inconsistencies reveal that development agencies are positioned as "intermediate forms" or "hybrid structures" within public administration. While this hybrid model provides flexibility in the short term, it creates administrative inconsistency, democratic deficits, and a lack of public responsibility in the long term.

5.2 Reform Proposals and Alternative Models

Clarifying Institutional Boundaries: The duties, powers, and responsibilities of development agencies must be clearly defined. Questions such as which body is responsible

for which decisions, how budgets are created, and how projects are supervised should be answered transparently to ensure accountability.

Strengthening Transparency Mechanisms: All projects and budget expenditures of the agencies should be accessible through public databases. Documents related to decision-making processes, evaluation reports, and performance indicators should be published, and independent audit reports should be shared with the public.

Public Leadership in Regional Development: While encouraging cooperation with the private sector is important, it should not overshadow the public nature of development. The state's leadership in regional development should be based on public interest objectives such as combating inequality, poverty alleviation, and promoting social justice.

A National Coordination Mechanism: To enhance coordination between agencies and central government bodies, a public authority responsible for overseeing regional development policies should be established at the national level. This body should monitor agency activities and ensure that policies reflect regional differences while promoting national cohesion.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The hybrid structure of National Development Agencies (NDAs) in Turkey is a product of public administration reforms shaped by the neoliberal governance paradigm. Throughout this study, the establishment process, structural characteristics, areas of activity, and transformation over time of these agencies have been examined, and the conflicts between their institutional framework and the core principles of traditional public administration have been discussed.

The current structure of national development agencies in Turkey has evolved as an institutional manifestation of neoliberal policies at the local level. In this respect, it diverges from the normative principles of traditional public administration. A reform is inevitable for development agencies to become more democratic, transparent, and citizen-oriented. However, this reform process should not be confined to structural adjustments alone; it must aim for a comprehensive transformation in which the very concept of development is redefined based on the **public interest**. Within this framework, it is crucial to clearly define institutional responsibilities, enhance the auditability of operations, and ensure that performance indicators focus not only on economic outcomes but also on **social impact**. Only through such a transformation can development agencies evolve into institutional structures that prioritize the public good and uphold fundamental public values such as social justice and citizen participation.

The multi-actor and multi-layered governance structure of NDAs, instead of promoting participation in decision-making processes, has led to the diffusion of responsibilities and weakened accountability mechanisms.. In particular, the participation of local stakeholders in decision-making processes often remains symbolic, with private sector and central government actors playing a more dominant role.

The fundamental principles of traditional public administration—accountability, transparency, serving the public interest, and public oversight—are insufficiently reflected within the organizational structure of development agencies. Institutional ambiguity, a multi-source financing model, and a management approach deeply intertwined with the private

sector have led to the shaping of public services based on market mechanisms. This, in turn, has resulted in the neglect of public values such as social justice, equality, and citizens' rights.

The core principles of traditional public administration—such as accountability, transparency, serving the public interest, and public oversight—are not adequately reflected in the organizational structure of development agencies. Institutional ambiguity, a multi-source financing structure, and a management approach intertwined with the private sector have led public services to be shaped by market mechanisms. Consequently, this has caused public administration to overlook values such as social justice and equality.

In this context, it is essential to reconsider the current structure of development agencies. First and foremost, institutional responsibilities should be clearly defined. In addition, the auditability of activities must be enhanced, and performance indicators should focus not only on economic outcomes but also on social impacts. A reform process in which public interest, transparency, and accountability become integral parts of the institutional culture will increase the effectiveness of development agencies.

In conclusion, the current structure of national development agencies in Turkey has evolved as an institutional reflection of neoliberal policies at the local level; in this sense, it differs from the normative principles of traditional public administration. For development agencies to gain a more democratic, transparent, and citizen-oriented structure, reform is inevitable. This reform process should not be limited to structural arrangements alone; instead, it should aim at a comprehensive transformation in which the concept of development is redefined within a public framework. Only in this way can development agencies become institutional structures that operate on the basis of public interest and prioritize social justice and participation.

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