

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRO-TOURISM: EXAMPLES FROM TÜRKİYE

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Abstract. *Sustainable rural development aims to provide an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development in rural areas and agro-tourism aims to evaluate the tourism potential of agricultural rural areas to make economic gains for the local people through tourism activities. Agricultural tourism integrates agricultural activities with tourism in rural areas and enables tourists to communicate with locals and experience agriculture-themed experiences. Tourism activities such as the sale of locally produced agricultural products that tourists are interested in, the organization of agricultural tours to show the production stages and accommodation revitalize the rural economy. This supports sustainable rural development. The culture, lifestyle, customs and traditions of the local people living in the countryside are introduced to the tourists and their cultural exchange takes place during agricultural tourism. In this way, interest in products that symbolize culture arises and economic benefits emerge. Agritourism, in particular, supports organic agriculture without the use of pesticides, operates in accordance with environmental sustainability principles such as sustainable agricultural practices and nature protection. This ensures the protection of natural resources in rural areas without harming the environment. In short, rural areas can become touristic attractions thanks to agricultural tourism. With the development of agricultural activities and other services in agricultural regions where tourists show great interest, new job opportunities arise, that is, economic, social and infrastructural development can be realized. From this point of view, it can be said that there is a reciprocal relationship between the understanding of sustainable rural development and agricultural tourism. Agritourism, while solving the economic, social and environmental problems in rural areas, also ensures that agriculture continues in a sustainable way. This contributes to the economy of the locals and sustainable development in rural areas. In this study, examples of sustainable rural development and agricultural tourism practices in Turkey are also discussed.*

Keywords: *Agro-Tourism, Local People, Rural Development, Social Protection, Sustainability.*

JEL: *Q01, R0, Z30, Z32*

UDC: *338.486 (560)*

Introduction. Today, development does not only have an economic aspect, but also means changing and developing the socio-cultural structure in accordance with its originality. The aim of ensuring sustainability is becoming more important

day by day, along with the goals of protecting and promoting biological diversity. The concept of "Sustainable Development" gained momentum, especially with the declaration of the "Call for Our Common Future" (Brundtland Report) in the early 80s, and became one of the main agenda items of both the United Nations and the European Union. Thus, the concept of rural development is to ensure that natural resources are protected and sustained in order to ensure the continuity of rural life, and to increase the welfare level of people living in rural areas, as well as to ensure that these people live in better conditions (Acar, 2008). Sustainable rural development aims to provide an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development in rural areas.

In order to ensure sustainable rural development in a particular region, the first priority is to protect biodiversity. An approach that prioritizes this situation and the economic benefit of the local community is agro-tourism. Agro-tourism term is used to refer to festivals, museum visits and all cultural tourism activities in rural areas, it is more likely to include accommodation in a farm, camp or hostel, educational excursions, eating and drinking, rational activities and activities directly linked to the rural environment, using rural product. It is also defined as the set of activities related to the sale of products and handicrafts on the farm (Roberts & Hall, 2003: 15).

Warming, drought and loss of clarity of seasons due to global warming in recent years have caused a significant contraction in agricultural production. The ability of the agricultural sector to keep up with changing conditions and maintain its value within a country's economy depends on many sectors, as well as the tourism sector. Meeting tourists' food and beverage needs necessitates a constant input-output relationship between tourism and agriculture (Çıkm, Çeken & Uçar, 2009). Looking at this interdependence between the tourism and agricultural sectors, one can say that sustainable rural development can be achieved by revitalizing and prioritizing agro-tourism in the countryside, which gives importance to local biodiversity and prioritizes local economic benefit. In terms of its geographical features, Turkey is a favorable country for the development of both agriculture and tourism. From this perspective, this study deals with the issue of sustainable tourism development and agro-tourism from the perspective of Türkiye.

Sustainable Rural Development. Sustainable development is an approach based on the environment and social continuity as an alternative to the understanding brought by the industrial revolution that prioritizes only economic benefit. The concept of sustainable development was first realized with the report titled "Limits to Growth" published by the Club of Rome. This report focuses on the dangers that await humankind in the 21st century (Meadows & Meadows, 1972). The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development - Agenda 21, held in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and called the 'Earth Summit', defines the principles on which the balance suggested to be established for the ecological environment and development will be built. Agenda 21, which is considered as an environmental manifesto with these qualities, is very important because it makes the necessary mechanisms and processes of the balance to be established between the ecological environment and development accepted and politically committed by the United Nations and country

governments. The summit concluded that the concept of sustainable development was an attainable goal for all the people of the world, regardless of whether they were at the local, national, regional or international level. It also recognized that integrating and balancing economic, social and environmental concerns in meeting human needs is vital for sustaining human life on the planet and that such an integrated approach is possible (Rio, 1992).

The generally accepted definition of the concept of Sustainable Development, proposed in the report presented by the Brundtland commission, is the statement "meeting today's needs and expectations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and expectations" (WCED, 1987). Economic development and ecosystem are considered as two resources that feed each other. Naturally, sustainable development is only possible with a sustainable ecosystem (Akgül, 2010). From this perspective, the concept of sustainable rural development includes factors such as people, environment, natural resources, income increase, and means increasing the standard of living in rural areas so that people can have a sustainable life through the sustainable use of resources.

Agro-Tourism. Agro-tourism, which emerged as a contrast to a partially unconscious and consumption-oriented type of tourism such as mass tourism, is also evaluated within the scope of sustainability. The conscious use of resources, the desire to transfer them to future generations, and the fact that tourism is not evaluated only with its economic returns are among the biggest indicators that agro-tourism favors sustainability. Agriculture and tourism complement each other in terms of their common characteristics. Agro-tourism is defined as the combination of agricultural activities with a tourism experience in a natural environment (Willams et al., 2001: 2). When the world tourism literature is examined, it is seen that the concepts of rural tourism, agro-tourism, ecotourism, farm tourism are used interchangeably. The reason for this is the lack of a common view within the scope of rural tourism (Ahmadova & Akovab, 2016: 16; Berard & Marchenay, 2006: 111; Petroman et al., 2016: 85). In the simplest terms, one can say that agrotourism is the tourism services provided by people living in rural areas. The relationship between the two sectors, people's longing for natural life and the increasing consumption of resources have led to the emergence of agro-tourism, which integrates agriculture and tourism and brings them together (Civelek, Dalgın & Çeken, 2014).

The term agro is the abbreviation for agriculture and brings to mind the farm, farmer and nature. However, this type of tourism requires using rural agricultural products, accommodation and participating in touristic activities such as festivals, training and excursions in rural areas. The culture, lifestyle, customs and traditions of the local people living in the countryside are introduced to the tourists and their cultural exchange takes place during agricultural tourism. In this respect, it is aimed to protect the rural environment and the geographical texture and product diversity of the region. According to Sznajder, Prezborska and Scrimgeour (2009 (2009: 15) the main factors affecting the development of agro-tourism in rural areas are:

- Urbanization (migretion from rural to cities
- Low agricultural income,

- Distribution of the income obtained as a result of agro-tourism activities to those living in rural areas,
- Rural infrastructure and urbanization level,
- Policies of local governments.

Agro-tourism plays an effective role in helping farmers diversify their activities and make economic contributions, thus ensuring that they stay in rural areas and do not migrate. Tourists who participate in agricultural activities on a completely voluntary basis produce and collect agricultural products themselves. Thus, agricultural experiences are added to their tourism experiences and they participate in production. While agro-tourism ensures the preservation of cultural differences and local texture, it provides urban guests with a holiday opportunity in touch with nature and where they can get to know different local cultures.

Methodology. In the study, the tourism sector in Turkey was tried to be evaluated in terms of sustainable rural development and agro-tourism. The research was designed within the scope of the survey model. Survey models are defined as research approaches that aim to describe the past or present situation as it exists (Karasar, 2014: 77). For this purpose, Turkey tourism database and Agro-tourism related database were compiled and analyzed from secondary sources. The first example of Agro-tourism in Turkey was TA-TU-TA (Agricultural - tourism - exchange). TATUTA project is to develop agricultural tourism in ecological farms and exchange voluntary knowledge and experience. The aim is to develop ecological agriculture and add a different dimension to tourism by increasing the number of producers rather than consumers. The structure, which can be accessed online via TATUTA WWOOF, is run by Turkey/TATUTA Wheat Association (WWOOF Türkiye, 2023). Additionally, TATUTA Agro-tourism businesses are supported by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and GEF (Global Environment Fund).

Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) is a worldwide movement to link visitors with organic farmers, promote a cultural and educational exchange, and build a global community conscious of ecological farming and sustainability practices. Wheat Association Türkiye strive to create awareness and understanding of ecological living in individuals and in society as a whole by strengthening the ties between urban and rural areas through our national and international projects, our networks and collaborations, and our events.

Another area being looked at to collect data on Turkey's sustainable rural development is IPARD. The European Union established IPARD (the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Rural Development) to prioritize sustainable rural development and aims to support policy development for the implementation and management of the common agricultural policy, rural development policy and related policies in member and candidate countries. As a candidate country, Turkey is also included in IPARD and supports sustainable rural development with support programs jointly financed by both Türkiye and the European Commission. IPARD aims to provide information about the LEADER Measure, an innovative approach developed to enable local communities to participate in their own local development

processes, and the successful practices of the National Rural Network in Türkiye (IPARD,2023).

Data. In the context of this study, when we look at the Hosts within the scope of TATUTA in Turkey, it is seen that a total of 65 businesses (see figure 1) are operating within the range of Ta-Tu-Ta in a total of 37 different Turkish city's provinces with very favorable rural areas (WWOOF Türkiye, 2023). In the network spread across all geographical regions of Turkey, most of the host farms are located in the Aegean and Black Sea regions.

Figure 1: TATUTA Hosts in Türkiye



Source: TATUTA/WWOOF Türkiye, 2023.

Visitors, that is, “volunteers”, spend at least half of the day helping with work on one of the host farms or settlements, while learning about ecological life and sustainable agriculture, and their accommodation and food needs are met. All of this happens without any exchange of money between the host and the volunteer. TATUTA farms in Turkey hosts an average of 600 people and volunteers work on farms, exchange knowledge and experience, and experience rural life. When looking at the classifications of the TATUTA businesses in question; It can be seen that they are classified as small farm, eco-lodge, traditional village house, house and garden and nature-friendly tourism farm. When we look at the duration of stay of tourists at TATUTA Farms, it is seen that the majority of them (56.4%) stay between 1 and 7 days (Uzulmez & İştin, 2019: 607).

The provinces supported by IPARD in Turkey in terms of sustainable rural development are listed below.

Figure 2: Supported Provinces Map



Source: IPARD, 2023.

As it can be seen from the map IPARD supported projects from 39 Turkish cities in Türkiye. Considering the projects for sustainable rural development, their periods and the contributions (in Euros) received by the projects, it is seen that there has been a significant development especially between 2011 and 2015 (see table 1).

Call Period	Call Dates	Application Acceptance Date	Total Support Budget
1. call	01 July 2011	01 -26 August 2011	91.388.000
2. call	04 July 2011	05 September-06 October 2011	100.894.560
3. call	17 October 2011	19 December 2011- 16 January 2012	106.020.000
4. call	19 December 2011	01-29 February 2012	74.774.800
5. call	01 March 2012	15 March-13 April 2012	164.737.344
6. call	15 May 2012	18 June-16 July 2012	124.430.542
7. call	24 August 2012	01-31 October 2012	120.267.485
8. call	23 November 2012	17 December 2012-15 January 2013	295.134.385
9. call	23 January 2013	15 February-26 March 2013	236.482.591
10. call	19 April 2013	26 April -6 May 2013	195.910.610
11. call	26 August 2013	30 September 2013-8 November 2013	512.713.338
12. call	15 January 2014	10 February-21 March 2014	488.772.128
13. call	10 November 2014	12 January-10 February 2015	187.826.012
14. call	17 April 2015	11 May - 5 June 2015	121.000.000
15. call	8 October 2015	19 October – 04November 2015	37.500.000

Source: Agriculture and Rural Development Support Institution of Türkiye (TKDK, 2023).

It is seen that 2.857.797.000 Euros were allocated by IPARD to the projects carried out for the rural development of Türkiye between 2011-2015 and the projects continued uninterruptedly. Some of the projects that stand out when looking at the National Rural Networks in Turkey are; Gülanta Project, Obasya Tourism Development Cooperative and Samsun North Dairy Farm and Boutique Hotel Projects

All studies on rose and lavender plants in Turkey have been collected under the name GÜLANTA, and the study on this subject was started in the countryside of Isparta province, where roses and lavender naturally come to the fore through nature.

Manisa Obasya Tourism Development Cooperative

The cooperative aims to highlight the Aigai Ancient City, Turkmen Waterfall, Monumental Trees and many other natural beauties in the region.

Samsun Kuzey Dairy Farm and Boutique Hotel Project

Northern Dairy Farm Project; It is a professional business established in 2015 with a grant of 1.2 Million TL and a total investment of 2.9 Million TL as a result of the support of T Agriculture and Rural Development Support Institution of Türkiye (TKDK).

Results. In order for rural development to be sustainable, it is necessary to use rural assets without deterioration and to raise the standard of living for people living in rural areas to have a sustainable life. To increase living standards, people need to earn income from both agriculture and other areas related to agriculture in rural. Agro-tourism is an alternative that provides income to the local community and requires conditions such as organic and local agricultural production. In this context, it can be said that agricultural tourism is an area that supports and necessitates rural development. With the development of agricultural activities and other services in agricultural regions where tourists show great interest, new job opportunities arise, that is, economic, social and infrastructural development can be realized. From this point of view, it can be said that there is a reciprocal relationship between the understanding of sustainable rural development and agro-tourism. Agro-tourism, while solving the economic, social and environmental problems in rural areas, also ensures that agriculture continues in a sustainable way. This contributes to economy of the locals and sustainable development in rural areas. In this study, examples of sustainable rural development and agricultural tourism practices in Türkiye are examined.

According to the findings of the study there are businesses engaged in agro-tourism in seven regions of Turkey. Both Turkey and international organizations such as the European Union support various projects for the development of agro-tourism in rural areas in Turkey, and applications such as the TATUTA also support this efforts. In terms of rural tourism, there are also some responsibilities that fall on businesses interested in agro tourism. There are certain points that businesses that engage in this activity must fulfill in order to be successful and even to ensure sustainable development. These include steps such as creating an idea, creating a business plan, being aware and evaluating land resources, being ready for risk management, product development and creating a customer profile.

Although the national government supports the tourism sector with various incentives for tourism purposes, it should encourage the private sector more towards agro-tourism, especially with the idea that they can spread tourism activities throughout the year. The national government and other tourism stakeholders can educate and encourage farmers and local people to expand and increase the number of TATUTA farms to develop agro-tourism. Looking at the data, it is seen that very

low numbers of tourists stay at TATUTA farms and participate in tourism activities. The number of tourists visiting TATUTA farms and other agro-tourism activities can be increased with advertisements and promotions. Especially the increased interest of tourists will increase the supply. It is also important for TATUTA farms to participate in marketing and promotional activities (such as tourism fairs) in order to gain market share.

The study has some limitations. First of all, secondary data was used due to the subject of the study, the limitation of time, and the large research area. In future studies, the issue can be further clarified through secondary data as well as interviews with relevant stakeholders and tourists who experience agro-tourism.

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