

The Role of Organic Agriculture Potential in the Rural Development of Turkey: The Case of Gökçeada¹

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Abstract

Organic agriculture in Turkey has been put into the agenda in accordance with the external demands since 1980. These demands initially started with traditional products such as raisin and fig and then the number of requested products has increased rapidly. Including the transition process, approximately 24.354 farmers produced about 665.550 tons organic products from 251.899 hectares field in Turkey. Imbros, turning into an organic island, is a region over which significant projects are implemented. With a total of 101 varieties of organic products, Gökçeada has a potential of up to 50% of the number of varieties in Turkey. On the other hand, 390 producers carry out organic agricultural activities in the island. Imbros has 1.35% of the organic agriculture land and 1.47% of the production of Turkey. The present study was conducted to assess the positive effects of organic agriculture on rural poverty alleviation, environment and tourism potential of the region through field studies conducted on the island. The present findings revealed that policy and strategy recommendations for the development of organic agriculture of Gökçeada should continue. In this study, the institutional structure of organic agriculture in Turkey and Gökçeada, government policies towards organic agriculture, the importance of the organic agriculture in terms of the projects conducted and rural development will be examined. Results of the study revealed that Imbros going to have rural development strategies about future.

Keywords: organic agriculture, rural development, Gökçeada

Introduction

Together with rapid increase in world population and accelerated developments in technology, worldwide environmental pollution and risks exerted by this pollution over soil and water resources have brought about alternative production approaches in agriculture.

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Reflection of public concerns about human and environmental health over agriculture have emerged the organic agricultural practices. Since then, organic agriculture market of the world is ever-widening and organic agriculture trade is getting more significant in each day (Everest B., Egesel B., Tan S.2010).

In Turkey, organic agriculture have put into agenda along with the external demands since 1980. Such demands have initially started up with risen and fig-like traditional products and then the number of products demanded by international markets has increased rapidly. According to statistics of the year 2012, there are 204 different organic products and 54.635 producers in Turkey. The annual organic production was 1.750.127 tons from 702.909 hectare organic farming lands (Anonymous, 2014).Gökçeada, turning into an organic island, is a region over which significant projects are implemented. The Island with 101 different organic products has a potential about 50% of total number of organic products of the country. On the other hand, there are 390 producers in the Island dealing with organic agriculture. Gökçeada has 1.35% total organic farming lands and 1.47% of organic production of Turkey (Everest B., Egesel B., Tan S. 2010).

Gökçeada, previously known as Imbros, became a Local Administration with a special status together with “Bozcaada” by a law issued in 1927. The law made Bozcaada and Gökçeada the districts of Çanakkale Province. Today, the special status of Gökçeada and Bozcaada was reorganized and a law amendment to increase the incomes was passed to a commission of Turkish Parliament. To improve the rural development potential of Gökçeada, an integrated development plan should be made and the programs including environment-friendly organic farming implementations and participation of local people should be developed. On the other hand, “organic farming potential” which was indicated as a strong point in Long-Term Rural Development Strategy, “increasing the demands for organic products”, “increasing trend in rural tourism”, which were indicated as opportunities in the same strategy document, are supporting issues to be considered in such integrated projects (National Development Strategy, State Planning Organization, 2006)

Organizational structure of organic agriculture in Gökçeada, implemented state policies and projects are highly significant issues for the rural development of the Island. Beside olive, fruit, cereal and industrial crops, livestock production and forage crops are also common in Gökçeada (Municipality of Gökçeada,2014).

Along with the above provided information, it can be stated that organic agriculture was the key issue especially for the rural development programs. In the first section of the present study, Gökçeada, again turning into an organic Island, with several projects already implemented was selected as pilot assessment area of the study. In the second section, organic agriculture and integrated policies were assessed within a rural development perspective. In the third section, public participation in sustainability of rural development policies were assessed and finally in forth section, conclusions and recommendations were provided along with the objectives of the study.

Organic Agriculture and Integrated Policies within a Rural Development Perspective

According to “Declaration on Social Progress and Development”, improvement, social development and economic development are inter-related issues and they together point out an integrated development strategy covering various aspects of the society. The declaration assigns each government with the tasks and responsibilities of providing social development and welfare of their societies, taking social development measures as a part of comprehensive development plans, encouraging, coordinating and integrating all national efforts along with this objective and initiating mandatory alterations in social structure(Declaration on Social Progress and Development, Art.8).The primary target of the declaration is to minimize or totally eliminate the differences between social development levels of the nations and set forth the benefiting nation states from their own potentials. It is the first document pointing out significance of the implementation of this process as an integrated part of government policies. Accordingly, establishment of social peace will only be realized through social development and improvement. It was also pointed out in the document that public administrations assigned with the above-specified tasks should also point out the significance of social development plans to improve the life standard of their societies.

Beside UN declaration, “Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development” of 1995 pointed out that economic and social development of local societies should be accepted with a full respect to their ethnicity, traditions and social values to provide a sustainable development (Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development Art.26).

With the Millennium Report of the United Nations in the year 2000, “Millennium Development Goals” were created about “alleviation of poverty”, “environmental sustainability” and especially poverty of rural sections was pointed out in these goals.

Following this process, nations and governments have to reorganize their rural development policies in accordance with “Millennium Development Goals”. However, it was seen that the implementations carried out up to now were not sufficient. United Nations Development Program have been carrying out “Organic Agriculture Cluster Project” correlated with Millennium Development Goals under the heading of poverty alleviation in GAP (Southeastern Anatolian Project) region in conjunction with Turkish Ministry of Development (UNDP). Social development targeted in international arena will only be possible through implementation of strategies through alleviating poverty in rural sections with national policies, providing rural development and environmental sustainability with integrated programs.

Organic agriculture alleviates rural poverty and creates positive impacts on environment. Ecotourism is an interesting branch of tourism covering nature tourism and organic production activities. As the entire natural products with a label of organic product are defined as organic product, some ecotourism activities can also be defined as nature tourism. Bimonte in a “Workshop on Strategic Planning for Local Development”, stated that “The tourists coming to Italy for nature tourism had higher environmental consciousness levels, higher income levels than the ones coming for sea tourism and they were visitors with a continuous tourism capacity and not effected from economic crises” (Participatory Strategic Planning for Local Development, 2005). From this point forth, it can be stated that the experiences of various parts of the world may serve a role model for “organic agriculture-ecotourism” integrated rural development policies to be established in Gökçeada. Furthermore, the people interested in “nature tourism” are also interested in consuming local and natural products and accommodating in places with local characteristics. Such a case is highly encouraging issue for local economy.

Creation of “eco-markets” and “ecological products” marketable outside the Gökçeada in national and international markets will also support the integrated policies. Gökçeada has a sufficient potential about naming organic products of the region with the geography. Together with historical identity, a “demand for organic products” meeting the criteria of “Imbrasos”, the concept of Abundance Island in epics and making an overwhelming impression may be created.

Home lodgings are also common in Gökçeada as an income source for local people. Such lodgings are operated by local people of “YeniBademli” and “Uğurlu” villages (Municipality of Gökçeada, 2014). With regard to integrated rural development activities, interests of local people dealing with organic agriculture also with lodging business will provide a support for rural development will preserve the environment and natural resources and will also comply with the issues stated in outcomes of 1992 Rio Summit as “to preserve cultures of local people” and “to benefit from local information”.

Besides, culture tourism activities associated with ecotourism activities should also be integrated into development plans since the Island has also a cultural potential. From past to present, the efforts of Gökçeada and Çanakkale-originated people, still keeping their cultural and family ties, should also be incorporated into such plans. Besides providing sustainability of natural resources of Gökçeada for sustainability of rural development of the region, policies bringing historical texture of the region forward should be developed.

While famous mortar coffee of Zeytinli village of Gökçeada and sales of agricultural and livestock products over pergolas in Eşelek village are indicating the production and trade of organic products, Mother Marry Activities of Tepeköy in which mostly Greek people are living during the summer months express the culture tourism dimension and Gökçeada surfing school expresses sports and training tourism dimension. Integrated economic activities such as “sports, health, training and culture tourism” able to be implemented together with organic agriculture activities have provided sufficient experience to region to develop an integrated rural development program. Strategic position of Gökçeada from mythology to today have brought the Island into a significant place.

Public Participation in Providing the Sustainability of Rural Development Policies

In National Rural Development Strategy, increasing “participation, appropriation and collaboration” consciousness are placed among the priorities to improve the rural development. Therefore in national development strategy, institutionalization of local initiatives and active participation of local actors should be supported (National Development Strategy, State Planning Organization, 2006).

Public participation is a greatly significant issue in providing rural and social development. As it was stated by Barnet, Representative of Barcelona Union of Municipalities, in 2005 in a workshop organized by Pendik Municipality, “if there isn’t a participatory culture in the society, it is highly difficult to create it in a night and public participation in decision making processes requires a learning process” (Participatory Strategic Planning for Local Development, 2005)

City councils are participation mechanism spreading community participation over larger sections. The works decided in city councils or the works supported by the city councils may ease the implementations provided that they are also supported by local councils. The representatives of non-governmental organizations, trade chambers, district and village mukhtars, public organizations and institutions of city councils may provide a wider support for the projects to be passed by the council. Çanakkale is an active province with regard to civil society and civilian initiatives. The province has benefited from international experiences and passed its potential to participatory and collaborative mechanism.

However, “active participation” experience of Çanakkale is far older. “Çanakkale Town Council” has participated into a pilot international project about participatory management implementations. In this way, the province had its place in local administration governance implementations of Turkey and provided supports for the development of regulations of the article related to City Councils article of 5393-numbered Municipality Law (Göymen; 2010). By the year 2013, the population of the municipality of Gökçeada is 6454 and that constitutes 73.1% of total population of the Island. The total population is 8830. In this case, the population is below 5000 and thus the Island is tied to 5393-numbered Municipality Law and is responsible for participation through city councils. The population of Çanakkale Province is 502.308 by the year 2013. Since the population is over 50.000, the province has to have strategic plans (Governor’s Office of Çanakkale, 2014). According to 5393-numbered Municipality Law, creation of the vision of Gökçeada is the responsibility of townsmen. So, creation of a “common sense” and taking “common steps” are required to create and develop the vision of Gökçeada, to provide a sustainable development and to develop collaborative, participatory and environment-friendly townmanship for an overall rural development.

Within the scope of Gökçeada Agricultural Development Project, the efforts of DPT (State Planning Organization), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Defense are ongoing to make Gökçeada an “Organic Island”. The definition of Gökçeada as an “Organic Island” is somehow related to very little pesticide and herbicide use over the agricultural lands of the Island (Turkey (Everest B., Egesel B., Tan S. 2010). Everest et al., 2010). The first step was taken with the initiation of the project by central administration. The second step is the support of the project by city council. 29 March 2014 elections for local administrations are a good opportunity. According to City Council Regulations, city council should re-gather, form the executive committees and form the sub-working groups after each election. Non-governmental organizations and civilian initiatives of Çanakkale should support such works. For instance, “Ecological Life Initiative” and ÇAYEK have been organizing activities gathering environment-friendly producers together since 2012 (ÇAYEK). Group members gather in every two weeks, they communicate via social media and organize organic agriculture and ecotourism activities. ÇAYEK should also participate into working groups.

Sustainability is a critical issue for the preservation of resources. Besides, such works require long-term plans and resistance against interventions. Organic agriculture practices are not such activities that can be tried for couple years, ended up and restarted. While integrated rural development targets are providing project sustainability, they should also ease the sustainability. Therefore, polluting industries and mining facilities should be removed from development policies of Gökçeada and ecotourism, integrated solid waste management, organic product labeling and marketing, ecological and sportive trainings and scientific researches should be developed for integrated rural development of the Island.

Since the population of Gökçeada is way lower than 50.000, the municipality does not have to make strategic plans. However, Çanakkale Provincial Special Administration has to make a strategic plan covering Gökçeada. But the Island should have a strategic plan along the way of being an “Organic Island” since there are no obstacles in front of it. Nevertheless, the process of definition of a city vision does not require the existence of a strategic plan. Even so, proposing “Organic Agriculture and Integrated Approaches in Rural Development” to the vision of Gökçeada will be a significant issue for the future of Island. The people informed about Organic Island will also provide support through preferring a “greener life”.

Insistence of Gökçeada on Organic Island Mission and creation of a vision accordingly will provide a “green consumption” and “green manifestations” as it was stated in “Manifestation of Green Marketing” book of Grant. Especially public pressure may result in bringing various new regulations for green preference (Grant; 2007). In brief, actualization of participatory mechanisms for the sustainability of rural development policies has already been reflected to legislations. Thus, from now on, townsmen have tasks and responsibilities to create and preserve the vision of their town.

Conclusion

With geographical structure and nation-wide strategic significance, Gökçeada has highly significant culture and tourism potential. Organic agriculture practices, started with olive cultivation to use such a potential, should be widespread over all areas and these works should be supported by rural tourism activities to make the Island ultimately a center of attraction. When the issue is considered within the perspective of participatory policies of public administration, it is clear to see the significance of public participation into the project and such participation is a vital issue for the development of Gökçeada with organic agriculture. Accordingly, city vision of Gökçeada and relevant strategies should be identified in accordance with an “Organic Island” set-up.

Along with the specified targets, a collaboration should be established among public, private and civilian sectors; central government and local administrations should act accordingly; “Organic Island” idea should be a basic and engrossing factor in integrated rural development of Gökçeada which is at very low levels with regard to development index of Ecological Agricultural Potential of Turkey; opportunities should be provided to benefit from natural and historical potentials of the Island and urban participatory mechanisms should be operated. In this way, local people will easily adapt the development efforts and initiations and their active participation in all these efforts will then be possible.

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