



AGROTOURISM AS A TOOL FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN TURKEY

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АГРОТУРИЗМЪТ КАТО ИНСТРУМЕНТ ЗА РАЗВИТИЕТО НА СЕЛСКОТО СТОПАНСТВО В ТУРЦИЯ

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ABSTRACT: Agriculture and tourism are leading industries in Turkey. The agricultural sector in Turkey faces a number of important challenges. The number of population lived in rural areas and employed in the agriculture has decreased during the last decades. There is a need to create new sources of income and employment for rural residents. This article argues whether or not agrotourism makes an effective contribution to rural development. It is concluded that the diversification option is a complex one with many constraints and public sector plays a critical role in promoting agrotourism development. Recommendations for stimulating the development of agrotourism are put forward.

Key words: Turkey; agriculture; rural development; agrotourism

Introduction

Turkey is located at the junction of Europe and Asia, occupying an area of 769 604 sq. km. In 1999, the European Union (EU) formally accepted Turkey as a candidate for membership. EU accession has become the driving force for economic and political reform. Turkey is a large country in terms of population, and has a large agricultural sector, measured by production value and agricultural GDP (Grethe, 2005, p 129). Although the country has made substantial progress in social and economic perspectives, Turkey is still accepted as a developing country with purchasing power parity GDP per capita at about \$10,404 in 2013 (UNDP, 2014). According to the “Human Development Index (HDI)” in 2013, which consisted of rankings of per capita income at purchasing power parity, life expectancy and education, Turkey ranked 69th on the list of 175 countries (UNDP, 2014).

Population is estimated as 74,9 million in 2013, an increase 31.6 million since 1975 (European Commission, 2014). The ratio of urban to rural population in Turkey has changed consistently over the years. The number of people lived in the urban areas had increased to 60.3% in 2004 while only 10.0% lived in the cities in 1970 (SPO, 2007). Although the agricultural population is declining over the years as a result of migration from poor rural areas to wealthier urban areas and loss of local jobs, a substantial amount

of the population is still involved in agriculture. Agriculture is still the major employment source in the rural areas. Akpınar *et al* (2004, p 473) note that rural population in most of the developing countries is gradually diminishing and the agricultural lands are losing productivity, resulting in several problems such as deforestation, migration and poverty, which may affect rural population.

On the other hand, tourism has proved to be a major contributor to economic growth and employment in Turkey, providing a quarter of export earnings and 5 percent of GNP. Tourism in Turkey has, until recently, been concentrated into specialist beach resort areas. However, Turkey’s coastlines become increasingly congested and environmental problems emerged. Therefore, in recent years, alternative forms of tourism have been developed in order to achieve a more balanced and a sustainable development. In this respect, agrotourism as an alternative activity in the rural development is gaining prominence. There is an increasing interest in experiencing the activities of the farm or ranch for agricultural tourism in the world. Moreover, there is a steadily increasing demand for agricultural tourism and recreation in Turkey (Akpınar *et al*, 2004, p 474).

The development and promotion of agrotourism as a means of addressing socio-economic problems of rural areas in general and the agricultural sector in particular, may also

help in protecting ecosystems, rural heritage, sustaining small-sized enterprises and creating opportunities for rural residents to financially sustain a rural life (Ramsey and Schaumleffel, 2006).

The aim of this paper is to identify whether or not agrotourism offers an opportunity for rural development in Turkey. In doing this, emphasis is placed on an integrative development of agriculture and tourism. This means, tourism cannot be developed without supporting for agriculture. As Fleischer and Tchetchik (2005) claim that agriculture production benefits tourism production. Therefore, the support for agriculture indirectly assists tourist activities. It is inevitable that there must and should be links to agriculture and tourism. Agriculture is a source of tourism and recreation as well.

Few studies regarding agrotourism in Turkey can be found in the literature. Therefore, the paper makes a start at filling this. As agrotourism is a relatively new concept in Turkey, this study aims to explore potential issues and challenges in agrotourism development.

Agricultural sector in Turkey

Agriculture has played a dominant role in the Turkish economy. The agricultural sector contributed 11.4% of GDP (TURKSTAT, 2007). However, the share of agriculture in GDP was 20% in 1980 and 17.5% in 1990 (SPO, 2006). The agricultural sector had the largest employment in 1980, creating 9.0 million jobs or half of the total but agricultural employment is declining both in absolute and relative terms. The number of people employed in agriculture at present is about 6.0 million, accounting for 27.3% of the workforce (TUIK, 2007). When the share of the population employed in agriculture and the share of GDP generated by agriculture are compared, it appears that agricultural productivity is very low.

Although the share of agricultural exports has been declining, the agricultural sector is still playing a significant role in the economy. Crops are the most important products with about 70% of the total value of agricultural production (EPC, 2006). Cereals are both import and export products in Turkish agriculture. Various types of fruit and vegetables are the leading sub-sectors of the agriculture in Turkey and represent about half of the agricultural exports.

Agricultural productivity has been consistently falling over the decade due to important structural deficiencies, a lack of grass root farmer

organisations, marketing problems, inefficient open-market pricing and fluctuations in interest rates (Dobos and Karaali, 2003, p 439). At present, Turkey has lost self-sufficiency in food production.

Agricultural land constitutes 36.0% of all land in Turkey as a whole. However, the rapid population growth rate has been threatening agricultural land (Tanrivermis, 2003). Size of parcels and their holdings also constitute a significant problem in Turkish agriculture. The size of parcels and the average farm are significantly smaller when they are compared with EU countries' level. Farms are small, fragmented and dominantly family-owned and lack the capital for expansion.

The population living outside larger towns and cities are relatively poor. Average income per employed household member in Turkish agriculture is less than 40% of the level for non-agricultural workers (Oskam *et al*, 2004). Also in Turkey, the contribution of women to agricultural production is very important. Women constitute almost half of the agricultural work force. However, a major part of these women work as unpaid family labour.

The CAP and rural development

Agricultural and regional development is a high priority for the European Union (EU). In recent years the EU has broadened the scope of its regional and agricultural policies to support rural areas. The EU has a particular model of agriculture to meet the requirements of the population. European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the vehicle that delivers this. Currently, CAP is affecting rural areas significantly.

The integration of the agriculture in Turkey is a major concern for the EU as well. First, with the accession of Turkey, the agricultural area of the EU is expected to increase 39 million ha (+23%) (Delegation of the European Commission to Turkey, 2006). Second, the considerable share of the agricultural population in the overall work force is another significant challenge. Third, agro-food enterprises in Turkey are much less competitive than those in the EU. In spite of its huge agricultural potential, Turkey needs to upgrade its quality scale. As a EU candidate country, Turkey is required to make structural changes in agriculture and harmonise its legislation with EU legislation and implement EU regulations. A sustainable rural development policy needs to be established. Currently, the new Rural

Development Plan in Turkey is being prepared with the collaboration of the European Commission.

Kantelhardt (2006) emphasised that CAP reform offers a great challenges both agriculture and rural areas and fosters the multifunctional role of agriculture. The EU is aiming to achieve a balanced economic growth and technological improvement, and the creation of new jobs in the agricultural sector and in rural areas. Rural/agrotourism is considered as a crucial tool to decrease mass-out-migration and economic decline (Hegarty and Przezborska, 2005).

EU Agricultural Council adopted strategic guidelines for rural development on 20 February 2006 (European Commission, 2007b). The recent Rural Development Policy (2007-2013) will be built around following three key axis:

- Improving the competitiveness for agricultural and forestry sectors
- Improving the environment and countryside
- Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy

A fourth implementation axis called 'Leader axis' introduces local development initiatives through bottom-up approaches to rural development. The Leader support has been an important factor in the investment decision for agrotourism operators. Overall, the rural development policy includes a variety of activities such as supporting rural communities, protecting the environment and encouraging tourism. It may be expected that the new programming period will have significant effects on rural areas. In particular, Axis three represents a crucial step forward in improving the competitiveness, sustainable development and diversification of the rural economy. Under axis three, a range of tourism opportunities is offered for rural areas. According to European Commission (2007b), tourism can build on cultural and natural heritage and offer opportunities for on-farm diversification outside agriculture as well as development of micro-business in the broader rural economy in many regions.

Agrotourism

Concepts-Definitions and Examples

Agrotourism (also known as agricultural tourism, agritourism, farm tourism or agritainment) combines elements of two complex industries-agriculture and tourism.

Rural tourism and agrotourism are often used interchangeably (Hegarty and Przezborska, 2005; Pulina *et al.*, 2006)). Rural tourism may be defined as a concept which may include all tourist activity devised and managed by local people in rural areas. Agrotourism as a particular form of rural tourism is a concept which includes all different forms of tourism directly related to agrarian activities or off-farm diversification (Davidson, 1992). Among all types of rural tourism, agrotourism may be accepted as the most localised one in the agricultural and mountainous areas. In other words, agrotourism is a source of complementarity between agriculture and tourism. Agrotourism activity aims to attract people to visit agricultural operations and to increase farm income. It also incorporates visits to agrotourism farms for the purposes of on-site retail purchases, agricultural lodging, entertainment, and educational experiences (Gregory *et al.*, 2006).

Within the context of agricultural tourism there are a range of agrotourism opportunities. Wicks and Merrett (2003) divide potential agrotourism activities into three broad categories as crops, livestock and machinery and facilities and land use. Common examples of agrotourism activities in this study include outdoor recreation (hunting and fishing, wildlife photography, corn maze, hiking, biking, fruit picking, etc.), agricultural education (agricultural museums, living history farms, school tours, wineries, courses in organics, help work the ranch, cooking demonstrations, etc.), agricultural entertainment (agricultural festivals, fairs, children activities, horse riding, tractor pulls, etc.), agricultural lodging (rural bed and breakfast, country inn, camping, etc.) and farm retail (roadside stand, farm market, u-pick farms, etc.).

Benefits

Agrotourism may provide both benefits and costs to the rural areas of Turkey. The possible benefits of agrotourism are vast. It may supplement and diversify income. It provides rural people with new employment opportunities. It cash flows can assist job retention. Job creation and retention can take place in transport and retailing as well as in farms. It may help preserving agricultural lands and sustain heritage. It can also assist forestry by diversifying income sources for forest communities. It may be a vehicle which helps focusing on community's assets. It gives farms an opportunity to market products directly

to consumers. It also increases opportunities for social and cultural contact and exchange among people in the rural and urban areas. It increases the awareness of agricultural issues by the urban and rural communities. It also provides educational opportunities as well as meeting the demand by visitors. Moreover, through agrotourism work can be maintained at home rather than working off the farm.

Agrotourism enterprises are usually family-based enterprises. Women in these enterprises play a key role. In this context, agrotourism may offer a crucial opportunity for rural women in Turkey. Women can combine their domestic tasks with agrotourism business and get an extra income for their family budget. It can also assist arts and crafts, both by recognising their importance, and by purchasing craft products produced by rural women. Through agrotourism, the power of women within the family and the community can be strengthened. Tendency of women in rural areas in Turkey to participate tourism activities can be increased as a consequence of increase in their income, education level and social interaction with visitors. Women can also educate visitors/guests who consumed their products. Overall, small-scale farming and preservation of the rural environment can be maintained as well as strengthening and stabilising the rural economic base.

The differences between rural and urban areas in terms of the existence of infrastructure and superstructure such as education, health and social services may be significantly decreased as a consequence of appropriate policies encouraging agrotourism. Agrotourism may also help reducing out-migration of younger and better educated members of rural communities.

On the other hand, agriculture provides food, nutrition and recreation to the population. Turkish cuisine may also be a factor in the agrotourism equation. If local agricultural products combine with the culinary services, demand for products by rural people can be increased. This also encourages further demand for produce. Moreover, as long as local food products appear on the menus of regional and national hotel and restaurants, visitors may want to view the methods of production and preparation, etc.

Challenges

However, it is apparent that certain barriers exist to develop agrotourism. Rural communities may receive increasing costs due to excessive

demands, increased costs of living for local residents and environmental damage although these challenges may not be all evident in every situation. Rural/agrotourism operate within sensitive natural environments. If the rural areas are not managed well, the peace, quiet and authentic nature of the countryside can be seriously damaged (OECD, 1994). Moreover, way of life of the rural residents, their cultures and their identities can be affected negatively.

Sharpley (2002) argues that rural/agrotourism contributes relatively little extra to farm incomes. He also states that seasonality factor may limit the potential economic returns. On the other hand, Ramsey and Schaumleffel (2006) claim that agrotourism systems can reverse negative economic trends in rural areas but it may not have the potential to create a massive amount of jobs for rural people.

Land use and regulations may also be limiting factors. Lack of finance and experience is major challenge as well. In many cases the returns from agrotourism may not be sufficient to cover even the initial investment (Sharpley, 2002). Agrotourism enterprises may be claimed to require some different set of managerial skills and human resources. The product quality and services provided by agrotourism farms should meet visitors/guests demand and expectations. Finally, it is also evident that a number of large tour operators prefer to focus on primarily on the mass markets rather than agrotourism market.

The Ecological TaTuTa Project

The agrotourism project named 'Eco-Agrotourism and Voluntary Knowledge and Skills Exchange on Organic Farms' in Turkey, launched by the Bugday Association (a non-governmental organisation), is designed to offer visitors the experience of life on an organic-farm, the teaching models of organic production, creating an exchange of ecological knowledge, models and experience among visitors, farmers and other individuals concerned. At present, within the context of this project (this system is known as TaTuTa), there are about 62 ecological agrotourism farms located throughout the country. The project seeks to protect and conserve environment, preserves traditional lifestyle of rural people, increase the awareness of air, soil and water quality, strengthen environmentally friendly production and consumption models, increase biological diversity and facilitate the

socio-economic regeneration of rural communities in Turkey (Ekolojik TaTuTa Charter, 2007).

However, it must be noted that the majority of these farms suffer from low occupancy levels and ineffective marketing and promotion efforts. The Bugday Association for Supporting Ecological Living publishes an annual 'TaTuTa Farm Guide' since 2005 for distribution to the trade and general public but further marketing, financial and technical assistance should be provided with the assistance of the public and private sector. Further efforts need to be made to develop and promote agrotourism activities from the perspectives of supply and demand.

Conclusions

In this paper an analysis of agrotourism as a particular form of rural tourism has been carried out. Results of this study indicate that public sector has a critical role to promote agrotourism development and it may not always be a solution to the problems facing rural areas.

Agriculture in Turkey is still an important sector for Turkey in terms of providing economic growth, creating job opportunities and rural development. For the governments, the main goal is to ensure a stable income and living standards for the people in rural areas. According to European Commission (2003), the competitiveness of the agriculture sector is one of the major political and economic challenges for the future. Due to the lack of education of people working in agriculture, the high levels of women labour and their positioning in the countryside movement of agricultural labour to other sectors including tourism is facing difficulties.

Akpinar *et al* (2004) point out that preserving and developing agricultural lands, creating new job opportunities in agricultural and non-agricultural sector and ensuring the contribution of agricultural output to standards of living of rural people in Turkey should be a priority for the government. Productivity in agriculture needs to be increased so that a smaller number of people working in agriculture can produce food and other agricultural products for a larger number of people. In this sense, current efforts of the Turkish government to support farm investments and marketing of agricultural products are also a crucial step but further policies need to be established in the area of rural tourism including agrotourism.

It is expected that the agricultural workforce in Turkey will continue to fall significantly dur-

ing the EU harmonisation process but it is the major challenge that how to provide employment for those leaving the agriculture sector. Sustainable employment and income opportunities outside or with agriculture need to be created.

Organic agriculture, which constitutes a small portion in total agriculture at present, can give opportunities for Turkish traditional agriculture and can generate rural employment. In fact, demand for organic agricultural products is increasing significantly. Farmers need to be trained on organic agriculture.

As an alternative option, agrotourism may have an important role in rural development and may often generate higher incomes but it should be noted that it may be of greater or lesser importance depending on regional and local circumstances. It is also important to realise that all areas and all communities may not be suitable for agrotourism development. Moreover, agrotourism development in some areas may have to be limits to growth. The popularity of regions for agrotourism or tourism in general is a major influence on the success of agrotourism businesses. Agrotourism can be integrated into local economics and rural lifestyles in some regions such as Aegean, Mediterranean, and Marmara regions of Turkey more easily than other regions. These regions receive a substantial number of foreign visitors and have certain advantages such as infrastructure, agrotourism potential and social capacity over the other regions. The Aegean and Mediterranean regions have also a relatively high number of larger and more specialised farms. On the other hand, in the future, through successful public sector policies agrotourism can become one of the leading sectors of regional development in the Black Sea region, which has domestic tourism-dominated rural areas.

In order to maximise benefits and minimise the problems, a sustainable agrotourism strategy should be employed. Economic development is important but environmental protection is also crucial for a sustainable agrotourism. However, tourism or agrotourism alone cannot solve all rural regeneration issues in Turkey although tourism can contribute to regeneration. Therefore, a balanced development between agriculture and tourism is required and in resource planning, a multisectoral and integrated approach to the rural economy should be taken into consideration. From the analysis, some other recommendations can be summarised as:

-The notion of agrotourism should be clarified in Turkey. For example, European Commission's definition of agrotourism includes farmers who derive at least 25% of their total income from farming. There is no precise description of the term 'agrotourism' in Turkey.

-Both public and private sector participation is necessary. Moreover, effective cooperation and partnership arrangements is necessary for marketing and development efforts of agrotourism among all responsible bodies including the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Environment, the Agricultural Bank of Turkey and the Treasury. The support of the local population is also necessary besides the cooperation of both public and private initiatives.

-Educational programs may be carried out to assist farmers seeking to diversify into alternative farming enterprises such as agrotourism. For the agrotourism business, farmers need to be trained both in business skills and hospitality skills with the help of the public sector. Compatibility should be set up between agricultural values and guest-service values. They need also to be trained to receive more visitors and more income.

-As a new sector in Turkey, government support (transportation facilities and services, guidance, regulation, finance and grant aid) is required for the initial development of agrotourism.

-Incentives should be provided for farmers to find alternative forms of income like tourism.

-More incentives need to be given to farmers to use environmentally friendly practices as well as encouraging organic farming.

-The motivations behind agrotourism and the factors critical to the success of these enterprises should be identified.

-Viculture may be developed for rural development as a part of agrotourism activity in Central part of the country and Aegean regions, which have substantial vineyards.

-Marketing in the agrotourism is vital. Appropriate and sufficient marketing activities need to be created. A consortium or agrotourism marketing group can be an effective tool to market the agrotourism business but in particular, word-of-mouth recommendations are crucial.

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