

## Promotion of Rural Tourism in Turkey Within The Scope of European Union Policies

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### Abstract

Concept of rural tourism has recently become prominent in our country and European Union member states. With a decision to promote rural development, union started to allocate funds to the rural tourism policies. Various projects are developed in the EU countries and practices of benefiting from these grant funds and supporting the rural tourism destinations have started to gain success.

In this regard, concept of rural tourism was mentioned in the study, EU rural tourism policies and contents of these policies were addressed, then rural tourism practices of some EU member states were mentioned. Successful projects were given as examples within the scope of EU rural tourism and finally, recommendations were presented as regards to what should be done in Turkey by talking about promotion of rural tourism in Turkey within the scope of EU policies and the samples.

**Key Words:** Rural Tourism, EU Rural Tourism Policies, Rural Tourism in Turkey

## Türkiye’de Kırsal Turizmin Avrupa Birliği Politikaları Kapsamında Desteklenmesi

### Özet

Kırsal turizm kavramı ülkemizde ve Avrupa Birliği (AB) üye ülkelerinde son dönemlerde öne çıkmaktadır. Birliğin aldığı kırsal kalkınmayı destekleme kararı ile kırsal turizm politikalarına hibe fonları aktarılmaya başlanmıştır. AB ülkelerinde çeşitli projeler üretilerek bu hibe fonlarından yararlanma ve kırsal turizm destinasyonlarını destekleme uygulamaları başarıya ulaşmaya başlamıştır.

Bu kapsamda çalışmada kırsal turizm kavramından bahsedilmiş, AB kırsal turizm politikalarına ve bu politikalarının içeriklerine değinilmiş daha sonra AB üyelerinden bazı ülkelerin kırsal turizm uygulamalarından bahsedilmiştir. AB kırsal turizm kapsamında başarılı proje uygulamalarından örnekler verilmiş ve son olarak Türkiye’de kırsal turizmin AB politikaları kapsamında desteklenmesinden ve örneklerinden bahsedilerek Türkiye’de yapılması gerekenler ile ilgili önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kırsal Turizm, AB Kırsal Turizm Politikaları, Türkiye’de Kırsal Turizm

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Alternative tourism types have started to emerge together with the development of tourism sector in the world. This trend of creating new destinations brought the need of presenting different products and services with it. The fact that individuals participating in the tourism services started to go beyond the usual holiday understanding and use their holiday requests and preferences in places away from urban noise, full of local components and in the nature has given prominence to the rural tourism. Infrastructure and suprastructure deficiencies in the regions with high rural tourism potential constitute impedements for them to attract more tourists. EU started to put forward various policies in order to promote these regions. On the other hand, exemplary successful rural tourism projects conducted in Europe were introduced. Our country is rich in terms of rural tourism potential. These regions should be necessarily supported and EU projects should be developed in order to cover infrastructure and suprastructure deficiencies with EU grant funds and to make these regions come to the places they deserve in the market.

### 2. THE CONCEPT OF RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism is a type of tourism which can integrate with natural environment, rural culture and agriculture and commune with the other tourism types (Soykan, 1993:2). There are opinions that rural tourism includes agriculture or farm-based tourism as well as ecotourism, other nature-based tourism types and also culture tourism even though it is not directly related to agriculture (Akoğlan Kozak and Bahçe:2009:180). According to the definition of World Tourism Organisation, rural tourism does not include only the agricultural or farm-based tourism but also all the activities performed in the rural areas (OECD, 1994:4).

In the studies carried out by EU, purpose of the rural tourism was explained as “performing touristic activities in the small settlements where small scale enterprises provide accommodation, refreshment and the other services to the tourists who are willing to enjoy their holidays by experiencing agricultural or local values in line with their expectations (Avcıkurt and Koroğlu, 2008:63).

In order to have a better understanding of rural agriculture concept, components of rural tourism need to be identified. They are the rural areas, rural heritage and rural activities (Soykan, 2006:73). Basic characteristic of the rural types included in the rural tourism is that they provide the tourists with the opportunity to live in the nature away from the modern life style of big cities. This kind of activities are based on environmental values. They are the touristic activities that include the principle of sustainability at the maximum level (Kahraman and Türkay, 2009:49).

Rural tourism is a tourism type based on natural sources and they take place in the rural settlements. With its ever-growing importance, rural tourism is considered as an alternative or supplement of tourism types existing in developed and developing countries (MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003:307).

In addition to the above definitions of rural tourism, we can define it as a tourism type in which alternative tourism types based on nature such as farm-based tourism, agricultural tourism, adventure tourism and ecotourism that are performed by bringing local values of the region forward are carried out altogether or separately and social and economic contributions are provided to the region.

Beside to its numerous benefits, if it is not coordinated and controlled properly, it can have negative environmental effects such as excessive use of natural resources and destruction of natural sites, historical values and regional characteristics (Avcıkurt and Koroğlu, 2008:67).

Many tourism types are available in the rural areas within the scope of rural tourism. These can be diversified according to the demands and current conditions. Some of the tourism types that can be performed in the rural areas:

- White water tourism,
- Botanic tourism,
- Mountain and winter sports tourism,
- Farm-based tourism,
- Birdwatching,
- Tableland tourism,
- Adventure tourism,
- Speleological tourism

### 3. EUROPEAN UNION RURAL TOURISM POLICIES

EU has a big potential of rural tourism. Importance of holidays spent in mountain regions and rural areas is increasing day by day especially in terms of secondary and short term holidays. The fact that specific touristic events achieved satisfaction at large in EU and holiday preferences and decisions of tourists are changing gradually is considerably promising for the development of rural tourism. As a result of the diversification of touristic demand in EU and increasing competitive power of non-European products, member states who felt themselves obliged to present new, quality and different products started to promote the rural tourism and development of original touristic products within this context (Avcıkurt, 1997:85).

In EU, rural development policies are implemented within the framework of multi-year programs developed with a strategic approach through management principles far from partnership and centralization and necessary measures are taken according to the results of monitoring and evaluation activities (Altundağ, 2008:1).

Promotion of rural tourism as an important alternative in terms of mass tourism at the EU level was also emphasized in the commission communique dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 1990 where such activities as introducing local culture, natural structure, architecture and handicrafts to the people and ensuring the establishment of direct relationships between tourists and community were envisaged. Planning various incentives for investments to be made in the rural areas, EU now strives for establishing a local tourism enterprises network so as to support the activities of local enterprises and developing an education system aimed at increasing the service quality provided in such enterprises. These efforts will be supported by programmes aimed at ensuring regional development and improving employment opportunities and their basic objective is to set up a European network that will facilitate the extensification of rural tourism throughout Europe and dissemination of original touristic products (Avcıkurt, 1997:85). Nowadays, Europe has realized that tourism is a potential source of income for rural areas, in particular as the popularity of the agriculture sector has decreased (Çolak, 2009:73).

EU supports pilot projects aimed at rural tourism with various funds. Those having an important place among these programmes are European Regional Development Fund, Agricultural Fund, European Social Fund IPARD (Instrument for Preaccession for Rural Development), SAPARD (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) and LEADER (Links between Action for Development of the Rural Economy) (Avcıkurti 1997; Şerefoğlu, 2009). Agriculture policy of EU supports tourism in various ways. Farmers residing within EU are supported by various loans for the development of farm-based tourism. It also gives support through Agricultural Orientation Fund and Guarantee Fund for the improvement of infrastructure services such as water and road and development of farm houses. European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund promote projects in the fields of infrastructure, capital investments and education in the less favoured regions of the union, in particular. These funds are not aimed at tourism directly but they give support to tourism and rural tourism indirectly by promoting the projects in the fields of road, transportation and environment (Avcıkurt, 1997:86).

A fund amounting to 7,3 billion Euro was transferred to the tourism projects in Europe between 1994 and 1999. LEADER programme is the most interesting one of the European rural development plans. It was established in 1990 as LEADER1 to introduce the rural areas with broad local participation and continued as LEADER2. These two LEADER programmes are funded by public and private institutions so as to develop strategies and plans of rural areas socially. Funds are used to create the infrastructure that will meet the requests of the tourists, develop rural areas and structures, finance such activities as promotion and marketing. EU Rural Development Programme continued after 2000 under the name of LEADER+ as a more detailed and comprehensive programme (Çolak, 2009:73).

Objectives of the measures taken within the scope of LEADER programme to develop rural tourism are as follows (Avcıkurt, 1997:86):

- Encouraging the development of demands towards tourism and leisure activities in the rural areas,

- Developing the supply both in terms of quality and quantity in case of increasing demand of potential tourists,
- Improving basic equipments (swimming pools and tennis courts) and developing rural tourism centers to support cultural and artistic activities,
- Vocational training to promote rural tourism, financing of investments in the rural areas, establishment of rural accommodation, parking, golf and sport facilities

LEADER programme also provides financial support for the development and restoration of buildings in the rural areas. To this end, promotion activities, market investigation and activities aimed at developing short distance weekend tourism to extend the tourism season are also included in the scope of this programme.

### 3.1. Rural Tourism Practices in the European Union Countries

Rural tourism is regarded as an alternative to the development of rural areas in Europe as it is a sector that revives the societies where industry and the traditional agriculture sectors are currently showing a decline. It is emphasized in the studies conducted by EU General Tourism Department that rural tourism draws more attention increasingly (Morgül, 2006:73). Rural tourism activities in some EU member states are as such:

#### Germany:

Even though there are currently 23 thousand tourist accepting farms (1400 of these have quality certificate) in Germany, the number of families that host tourists is not increasing rapidly since they are not well prepared in this regard, new financial instruments emerge and tourists put forward accommodation and common area related conditions at higher levels. In Germany that has a rural tourism potential of 184 thousand bed capacity, rural tourism delivering additional income for farmers and their families provides 100 days overnight opportunity annually (Özkan, 2007:99).

#### France:

With rural tourism which allows the use of diversity of rural areas (accommodation at farm, rural shelters...), public authorities encourage the diversification of touristic supplies in mountains or coastal areas. Agreements concluded between state and local communities concretize the efforts exerted for a better distribution of touristic flow. As an example, Jura Mountains Interregional Agreement Tourism aims at reviving tourism by putting a global communication strategy into effect, developing the industry tourism and renewing the common tourist accommodation centers based on partnership (Morgül, 2006:73).

#### England:

In England, it was declared that 590 million tourists visited rural areas between April and October in 1993 and that the number reached to 1 billion tourist visits in a year. 107.000 beds were used in the bed+breakfast model in the rural areas. It was approved in 1991 that this type of houses which remain open for 140 days in a year should be affiliated to the state via a special tax. There are some opinions in England that rural tourism distracts the nature. However, there are also people who argue just the opposite by expressing that rural tourism is used slightly but yields a substantial income.

#### Spain:

Andalucia region of Spain is one of the important rural tourism centers. In this region, the state is rather sensitive regarding environment protection and has declared 17 % of the field to be natural park. Important factors effecting the development of rural tourism in Andalucia region are explained as natural environment, warm climate and the characteristic of receiving sunlight for 300 days on average annually. Visitors are provided with such opportunities as camping, horse riding and horse trips, trekking and mountain bike within the scope of rural tourism (Morgül, 2006:74).

#### Greece:

Rural tourism is promoted in Greece in order to make use of the tourism opportunities that mountain and less favourable regions have and also to raise the life standards of the people living in these regions. According to the data of 2000, there are 892 farms engaged in tourism in Greece. 35,7% of these farming enterprises provides only accommodation, 46,2 % of them provides accommodation and breakfast, 6,7% of them gives accommodation+breakfast+lunch service. The remaining 11,4 % provides service to the visitors at rooms with a common kitchen. In 2003, "GUESTINN" accommodation network composed of low capacity traditional accommodation units was created for the first time in the rural areas in partnership of France-Greece. In this network, 357 rooms and 1010 beds having 42 members in 9 of 13 regions of the country are included in this network (Özkan, 2007:100-101).

#### Italy:

Arrival of tourists to the rural areas of Italy whose economy is largely based on agriculture in summer has created new employment opportunities and the system of boarding houses has gained popularity (Çeken et al., 2007:8). In Italy, rural tourism is referred to as farm-based tourism or agricultural tourism as it is closely related to agriculture and farms. Central government gave a financial support of 441 million Euro to the rural tourism in 2004. Share of e-marketing has become 40 % among marketing activities (Özkan, 2007:95-96).

### 3.2. Successful Project Implementations within the Scope of European Union Rural Tourism Policies

Two EU projects, Italy (Altundağ, 2008:50-54) and Bulgaria (Şerefoğlu, 2009:75-79) implemented within the scope of rural tourism and rural development were included in this section as examples by being summarized from the cited references.

#### 3.2.1. Italy Sample

Project with the name of "the use of typical local products in the restaurants" was prepared by Mare&Monti Local Action Group located in the province of Nuoro at the North of Sardinia. There as a growing socio-economic problem in the region due to rapid immigration from rural areas to the urban areas. Tourism is closely related to the typical characteristics of the region and therefore, special importance is attached to natural sources, local folklore and production of local products in the region. Beside to this, people engage in the other sectors including agricultural production, milk production in particular, cattle breeding and construction.

It was detected that there was a serious decline in the number of tourists coming to the region due to lack of large scale facilities in Nuoro when compared to other regions of Sardinia. Local development strategy focused on making natural and cultural heritage of the region gain value and developing the economical structure to create employment sources. Project aims at improving the quality of local restaurants and expanding the local products market with the purpose of promoting food training. As a result of studies conducted in terms of demands, group focused on local restaurants and their products services. Furthermore, legal provisions concerning foods sold in the school canteens, their purchase conditions and how they are produced were investigated. It was thought to offer special diets in which local ecological products with high nutritional value. Two basic intervention fields of the project were determined as establishment of a network between local producers and restaurants and creation of a communication system in order to promote food training (focusing on local products).

The project of establishing a network between local producers and restaurants began in September 2005 with the analysis of the conditions necessary to establish, coordinate, promote and operate a local restaurant network. Today, this network includes numerous restaurants that signed a cooperation agreement to provide a quality service by using local agriculture-food products. 15 restaurants remain in out of the scope of LEADER+ are also included in this network. Additionally, 32 producers (bread, pastries, cheese and wine producers) signed an agreement guaranteeing that they would put quality local products on the market. New agreements are still being signed between restaurants and producers.

A series of seminars were conducted with the support of experts in order to raise awareness regarding value of the local products and their contributions to the healthy nutrition within the framework of the project of setting a communication system to improve training given as regards to nutrition (attaching importance to the use of local products). Except for seminars, some other activities were also carried out to raise awareness within the scope of the project. For instance, children's plays on the life circle of the local products, informative materials about the value of local products for teachers, parents and students, exercise books including special and animated explanations and comic strips on the local products for the school children were prepared and school trips were organized to the enterprises producing local products.

Project started in 15<sup>th</sup> March 2004 and ended in December 2006. Total budget of the project was 25.306 Euro. 156.310 Euro was supplied from EU and 98.996 Euro was collected as public contribution.

### 3.2.2. Sample of Bulgaria

Bulgarian villages are settlements that have preserved their historical characteristics and traditions to the present day. Even though construction properties vary from one region to the other, buildings constructed with stone and soil are weighted. Properly conserved houses attract a lot of domestic and foreign tourists to the region. Rural tourism activities display an integrated development in the country. Many people have modernized their houses as guest house or taverna in many coastal towns. Bulgaria also received

various supports from EU funds within the scope of SAPARD Programme. Many EU projects were adopted regarding rural tourism in the country. Some projects conducted by EU were investigated in the field works carried out in June, 2006.

When projects implemented in Bulgaria were examined, sample of rural tourism observed in Celina district which is a settlement located among Rodepe mountain range shines out. A market place in circular shape was established in the district through LEADER programme that the local community adopted. Houses were constructed as single floor to reflect the architectural structure of the country. A tourism office was set up to provide the domestic and foreign tourists coming to the region with essential informations about the region. Two people from university students were employed in the office. They give leaflets that promote the region and short informations to the tourists when they first come to the region. Rural and ecotourism activities including rafting, safari, bird watching and speology can be performed in the region. This tourism destination has become an additional source of income for the local people. Activities in the region have diversified with this center. A post office was opened and now, postal cards demonstrating the region can be found more easily. Moreover, cafes were opened in the central areas and tarpaulin was covered in the open air so that people can rest in the open air.

## 4. PROMOTION OF RURAL TOURISM IN TURKEY WITHIN THE SCOPE OF EUROPEAN UNION PROJECTS

As a candidate country in the pre-accession period, Turkey will be able to benefit from funds and financial aids that the Union will provide in the field of rural development within 2007-2013 programming period. Activities aimed at having people gain skills, take action and at providing help conducted to help the creation of local action groups and preparation of local development strategies during IPARD Programme implemented on EU candidate states will contribute to the capacity building needed for the implementation of LEADER programme in our country (Altundağ, 2008:90-102).

After rural tourism was included in 2023 Turkey Tourism Strategy, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs was incorporated in support programmes provided by EU and started to launch initiatives in this regard. IPARD programme was divided into two phases and prepared by the Ministry during the membership process. First phase lasts from 2007 to 2009 and the second phase lasts from 2011 and 2013. As can be seen in the Figure 1, provinces where rural tourism will be supported in the first phase are Amasya, Çorum, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kars, Konya, Samsun, Sivas, Şanlıurfa, Tokat and Trabzon while Afyon, Ağrı, Burdur, Çankırı, Erzincan, Giresun, Isparta, Kastamonu, Kütahya, Mardin, Nevşehir, Ordu, Uşak, Van and Yozgat will also be provided with support in the second phase (Şerefoğlu, 2009:96-130-136).

If it is necessary to address the rural tourism project samples conducted in Turkey, the following projects can be listed;

- Küre Mountains and Zümrüt Village sample
- Project of developing ecotourism in Azdavay, Kastamonu and restoration of Yanıkali Residence
- Buldan sample



- Rural tourism study sample in the East Anatolia development programme
- East Anatolia tourism promotion project
- Rural tourism sample study conducted in Şirince village of İzmir
- Rural tourism development project implemented in Tekelioğlu village of Manisa
- Göreme sample
- Beypazarı sample

It is observed that regions which were not included in the provinces of first priority by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs within the scope of EU IPARD programme have embarked new quests to benefit from EU funds. If a sample is required for these projects, Leonardo Da Vinci Partnership Project of “Entrepreneurship Qualifications Necessary for the Development of Rural Tourism in the Regions with Weak Economies” can be put forward.

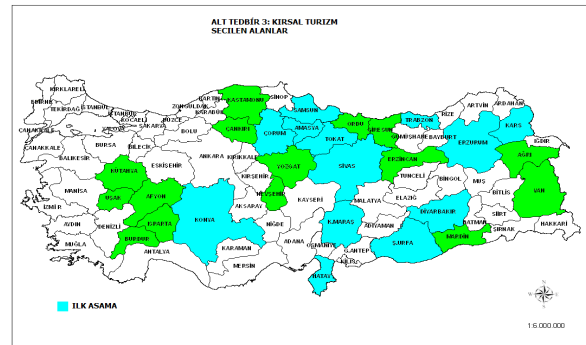
This project was coordinated by Bulgaria and Italy, Turkey and Romania were present among its partners. Its scope covered the promotion of entrepreneurship in rural tourism and sharing of the information and practices related to the field. This project aimed at promoting entrepreneurship in the field of rural tourism and improving practice skills. Another objective was to put forward guide brochures for the people willing to operate in the rural tourism sector. At the end of the project, knowledge sharing, practice experiences obtained in the field of entrepreneurship would enable the participant to develop their vocational guiding qualifications which constituted the basis of European business sector. Starting in 2008, this project was implemented between 2009 and 2010. The book titled “Rural Tourism Entrepreneur Guide” was copied and introduced to the potential entrepreneurs, local administrations, newspapers and television channels. The project implemented in Manisa brought an income of 24000 Euro to the province. Tekelioğlu, Gökeyüp, Kösel, Adala, Orseli and Dakale villages were given priority for rural tourism (www.kirsalturizm.com).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our country is rich in terms of tourism diversity. Rural tourism has become prominent to extend tourism to twelve months and maintain tourist continuity. As the concept of rural tourism is a new concept and product, it can not grab the attention of the people living in these destinations sufficiently. These regions are attached importance and supported by funds by EU member states to ensure the development and increase the tourism incomes. Our country is entitled to use these funds as it has the status of candidate country. As rural development can be ensured by using these funds, rural tourism will have an important share during this development.

Development of rural tourism will lead to an increase in the income levels of the people living in the rural areas of our country. In this framework, the following points should be paid attention in order to benefit from EU funds and ensure that rural development is maintained through rural tourism:

- Creating “Local Action Groups” by bringing the public sector, private sector and non-governmental organizations together and ensuring an effective representation structure among organisation representatives constituting the group,
- Developing effective projects by taking the regional characteristics into account, promoting and encouraging the universities to develop such projects,



**Figure 1:** Rural Tourism Assistance Program in Support of Provincial given IPARD

**Kaynak:** Şerefoğlu (2009,136)

- Ensuring that the Local Action Groups to be created in Turkey will participate in joint projects with the European groups and work together,
- Establishing a common institution to provide communication and coordination between the relevant public institutions and ensuring that rural tourism activities are conducted by a single party,
- Creating a content titled “EU Rural Tourism Project Samples” to provide samples for the future studies in the web site of the Ministry of Tourism and ensuring that projects which benefited from EU funds in Turkey are introduced under this title,
- Conducting promotion and introduction activities to raise awareness of people living in the rural areas on this matter and indicating the contributions of rural tourism to the regions by organizing trips to the destinations where successful project samples are available,
- Ensuring that courses about the rural tourism are added to the curriculum in the universities located in the districts and provinces with high rural tourism potential.

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