

ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA

Ecotourism as a Rural Development Model: As a Women Led Ecotourism Process of Piraziz Şeyhli Village (the Black Sea Region of Turkey)

Kırsal Kalkınma Modeli Olarak Ekoturizm: Kadın Önderliğinde Ekoturizm Sürecinde Piraziz Şeyhli Köyü (Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi, Türkiye)

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is an approach that maintains the social and cultural integrity of a locale, while securing the sustainability of the natural resources of the earth, as well as supporting the economic development of the local community. Turkey has recently begun actualizing the idea of ecotourism as a rural development model. The Eastern Black Sea Region is one of the priorities given region to develop ecotourism in Turkey. Within the scope of this study, Şeyhli Ecotourism Village of Piraziz district in the Black Sea Region will be examined. The most important features of Şeyhli Village, which was declared an Ecotourism Village within the scope of Tourism Brand Urban Development Plan and coordinated by Giresun Governorate GIRTAB (Giresun Tourism Infrastructure Service Association), are accessibility, ease of transport, high level of education, and women being in charge of this process. In this study, after the potentials of Şeyhli Ecotourism Village and the reasons for its selection as an ecotourism area are explained, the ecotourism village approach will be discussed in the context of protection of rural cultural values, natural resources and of understanding women's roles in rural development. The methodology of the study includes site visits, questionnaires, interviews and unobtrusive observation.

Keywords: Ecotourism; rural development model; Şeyhli Ecotourism Village; woman.

ÖZ

Ekoturizm, bir yerin sosyal ve kültürel bütünlüğünü korurken, doğal kaynaklarının sürdürülebilirliğini güvence altına alan ve aynı zamanda yerel toplumun ekonomik gelişimini destekleyen bir yaklaşımdır. Özellikle son yıllarda Türkiye'de de ekoturizm bir kırsal kalkınma modeli olarak kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi, Türkiye'de ekoturizmin geliştirilmesi açısından öncelikli bölgelerdendir. Bu çalışma kapsamında Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesi'nde yer alan Giresun ili Piraziz ilçesine bağlı Şeyhli Ekoturizm Köyü incelenmiştir. Şeyhli Köyü, Turizm Marka Kent Kalkınma Planı kapsamında ekoturizm köyü ilan edilmiş ve ekoturizm gelişme süreci Giresun Valiliği GIRTAB (Giresun Turizm Altyapı Hizmet Birliği) tarafından koordine edilmiştir. Şeyhli Köyü'nün en önemli özellikleri erişilebilirliği, ulaşım kolaylığı, yerel halkın eğitim seviyesinin yüksek olması ve kadınların bu süreci yönetip yürütmesidir. Çalışmada, Şeyhli Ekoturizm Köyü'nün potansiyelleri ve ekoturizm alanı olarak seçilme nedenleri anlatıldıktan sonra ekoturizm köyü yaklaşımı, kırsal kültürel değerlerin, doğal kaynakların korunması ve kırsal alanda kadınların rollerinin anlaşılması bağlamında tartışılmıştır. Çalışma yöntemi; saha ziyaretlerini, anketleri, mülakatları ve gözlemleri içermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Ekoturizm; kırsal kalkınma modeli, Şeyhli Ekoturizm Köyü; kadın.

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Introduction

After the 1980s ecological approaches become widespread and awareness about sustainability increased. Concomitantly, sustainability has increasingly started to play an important role in planning and sectoral decisions. In the tourism sector, which is one of the fastest-growing sectors in recent years, sustainable alternative tourism activities have gained support due to increased environmental awareness in general, and especially due to deterioration caused by traditional mass tourism. Ecotourism has emerged as an important alternative to mass tourism.

Turkey has got much more interested in ecotourism in recent years. The main types of ecotourism in Turkey are agrotourism, botanical tourism, trekking, sports, camping-caravan tourism, mountain tourism, bicycle tours, ornithology tourism, and plateau tourism. Turkey has a rarely seen richness in terms of endemic species, flora, and fauna. In addition, two of the three major bird migration routes in the world pass through Turkey. Turkey also boasts significant walkways (Ankaya et al, 2018). With the originality and richness in the rural culture and vernacular architecture besides its natural habitats, Turkey is a rather suitable country for ecotourism practices. The utilization of ecotourism as a rural development model has become widespread in Turkey in recent years, following the worldwide trend.

Numerous ecotourism areas have been established in different regions of Turkey through the top-down decision of the central government. As a region with high ecotourism potential (Paslı & Paslı, 2019), the Eastern Black Sea Region has become a priority area for ecotourism since it has rapidly lost its rural population and employment possibilities related to agricultural production and animal husbandry. The Şeyhli Ecotourism Village, which is examined within the scope of the study, is in the Eastern Black Sea Region, Giresun province, and is at a very accessible point due to its proximity to the coastal road and the airport. In addition, owing to the high education level of village citizens, the adaptation process to the tenets of ecotourism is relatively fast. Due to these factors, Şeyhli Ecotourism Village constitutes an example where the effects of the central government's decision to instigate numerous ecotourism areas can be observed quite readily in all its social, economic, administrative, and spatial dimensions.

Ecotourism as a Rural Development Model

Ecotourism is a form of responsible and responsive tourism that is oriented at discovering and not consuming, provides benefits for locals socially and economically, and also chances for them to get actively involved in the process, thus contributing to rural development as well as preserving natural and cultural values (Rahemtulla & Wellstead, 2001). Ecotourism

is a multidimensional process providing social responsibility, economic efficiency, and ecological sensitivity, and including the natural environment, ecological and cultural sustainability, local economic benefits, and education (Kaypak, 2012). This multidimensional process is a long-term process. Successful management of this process can only be possible with good planning of the process. At this point, the question of under which principles the process of ecotourism will be carried out becomes crucial. The principles of ecotourism determined by WTO (World Tourism Organization) in 2002 were also accepted by Turkey. These principles include:

- Including local community in the processes such as planning, developing, and operating and in activities aimed at improving the welfare of the local community,
- Giving information to visitors about the natural and cultural heritage of their destination,
- Practices that will help travelers feel freer in addition to the tours organized for small groups (World Tourism Organization, 2002).

All actors involved in the ecotourism development process (local community, local and central authority, private sector, non-governmental organizations, etc.) should have adequate equipment and a good understanding of the process to carry out the process in a sound way. While the locals are educated, ecotourists should be sufficiently aware of the subject. It is also important that the whole process is supported by a local and/or central authority. Non-governmental organizations may play a key role in improving the relationship between authority and the local community in a straight and clear way. Moreover, both non-governmental organizations and local-central authorities have a fundamental role in providing training courses and organizing educational activities. If any of the actors cannot get involved in the process properly, problems are inevitable.

In ecotourism, services are offered for tourists who wish to travel to natural areas and cultural environments, to learn and appreciate local cultures and they are generally provided in rural areas with natural and cultural attractions (Sungur, 2012; Demir & Cevirgen, 2006). In this process, encouraging the use and recycling of sustainable technologies and renewable energy sources, and finding a sound balance between the use and the protection is significant for the maintenance of local resources. The active role of the local community in this process, which will provide economic benefits for them, is indispensable for a successful outcome.

Ecotourism has environmental, economic, and socio-cultural effects on the regions where it is applied. These effects are sometimes positive and sometimes, unfortunately, negative. Protection of natural areas, the use, and promotion of renewable energy sources, the reduction of waste production,

the increase of recycling, etc. are its positive environmental effects. However, misapplication, destruction of natural habitats, forest damages, and pollution of water bodies (such as rivers, lakes, or the sea, etc.) are the negative environmental effects. Increased employment opportunities for the local community through ecotourism and additional regional income are regarded as economically positive effects whereas excessive consumption of resources because of tourism services, etc. is a negative one (Demir & Cevirgen, 2006). It has a positive socio-cultural impact on preventing migration since people from different ethnicities and cultures come together and local employment is provided. Negative socio-cultural effects can be counted as rapid population growth, a decrease in the satisfaction of the locals, the loss of local cultural characteristics (eating habits, daily routine), etc. (Gaul, 2003).

Small-scale and community-led tourism is a proper development instrument, especially for developing countries. If locals believe in the project, they can have an active role in implementation processes as in the projects receiving a limited government grant such as the Ostional-Costa Rica project. However, locals are not involved in the planning processes related to tourism because of the top-down decisions (Campbell, 1999). The ecotourism development process in Turkey was initiated by the central and local authorities as a top-down approach, but in the implementation process, it is becoming a community-led tourism activity. The involvement of the local community at every stage of the ecotourism processes and especially the participation of women in the processes is necessary for the sustainability of ecotourism. In many studies in the literature (gender perspective), women are regarded as the key figure to invigorate the economy and to be successful in solving universal problems such as poverty, security, and environmental degradation. The role of women in rural development is particularly important in developing countries. The extensive study of Sadeghi et al. in the Iranian countryside (Sarbisheh County-South Xorasan) supports this situation. Women in the rural areas are involved in the processes with strong motivation and they are improving themselves being effective in the decisions taken and fulfilling their self-confidence, their positions in the family are changing and as a result, they are integrated into the processes in a more skillful and equipped way (Sadeghi et al., 2015). Hirtenfelder's work in Bostwana is important in terms of indicating the role of women in ecotourism. In this study, Bostwana's National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) is examined from the gender perspective. According to the study, men and women interact with their environments in different ways, but their localized gender norms also affect the roles of men and women in the processes (Hirtenfelder, 2014). Also, it is a common occurrence to see women in labor-intensive and low-skilled jobs. Especially in developing countries like Turkey, women in rural areas and their labor participation are almost invisible. For

this reason, giving women an active role in the rural areas through ecotourism will positively change the status of women in society and lead transformations in gender perspective.

Assessing various areas about their potential for ecotourism particularly has great importance as the first step of the process. In this regard, the paper examines the studies assessing the ecotourism potentials of three different areas in the Black Sea Region. These are studies on Karabük-Safranbolu Yörük Village, Bartın-Söğütlü Village and Artvin-Yusufeli.

SWOT analysis was used in the study by Dönmez et al., which examines Safranbolu Yörük Village in terms of its potential for ecotourism. Thus, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the village in the process of ecotourism have been put forward. Safranbolu is a UNESCO World Heritage site because of its traditional architecture and local culture. The fact that Yörük Village is a village attached to Safranbolu is one of its strengths. Other strengths are local customs, folkloric values and their survival, local product sales, ease of transportation, natural-historical-cultural values, and the protection of the village by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and climate. Weaknesses are the absence of a young population, local community not wishing to be bed and breakfast operators, lack of skilled labor, prolongation of the restoration process of village houses, and the new form of construction that is not congruent with traditional forms of building. The opportunities of the village are determined by its proximity to major cities and convenience for day trip tours, increased interest in ecotourism and outdoor sports, and its proximity to popular holiday destinations. Threats encountered are the continuous migration from the village to the metropolitan cities, the destruction of the traditional fabric by the tourists whose numbers are gradually increasing, the lack of any infrastructure work for nature sports, and the environmental pollution caused by Kardemir Steel Factory. As a result, the study indicates that the priorities are changed according to locals, experts, and local administrations. For example; the most important opportunities for the locals are the proximity to the big cities and convenience for day trip tours whereas the local administrations prioritize the proximity to the popular resorts, and the expert groups give much more importance to the increasing interest in ecotourism and nature sports. The threat that requires the highest priority for the local community is that the pressure of the tourist density is damaging the traditional fabric while the most important threat for experts and local administrations is that people are constantly migrating from the village to the metropolitan cities (Dönmez et al, 2015)

In the study on Bartın-Söğütlü Village, it is seen that the local community seems to be very interested in ecotourism. The locals, who lean towards being bed and breakfast

operators, believe that the tourists will not cause any deterioration in the traditional fabric or culture, but will contribute to the development of the region. As a result of the research, it was seen that young people wanted to take an active part in the process. There is no infrastructure work for ecotourism in the village, but the locals are eager to learn about it, attend training courses and take an active part in the process (Açıksöz et al, 2016).

In the study examining the potential use of ecotourism in Yusufeli and its immediate surroundings, a SWOT analysis was used. As a result of the study, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the region in terms of ecotourism were determined. There are many qualified natural areas within the region, and the region also has a great potential for faith and cultural tourism, water-based tourism, and bird butterfly observation. Endemic plant diversity, folkloric values, local cuisine, and handicrafts are its other strengths. Furthermore, its suitability for different forms of ecotourism and the positive approach of the local community towards ecotourism are positive for the potential use of ecotourism. The weaknesses in terms of the potential use of ecotourism are insufficiency in publicity and marketing, lack of infrastructure and facilities, immaturity of sectors of tourism services, the inadequacy of certified product production, lack of tour organizations, inadequate recognition of natural-cultural resources, lack of qualified staff, lack of knowledge, unconsciousness, the problem of education and foreign language, low level of income, being away from the provincial center and people continuously immigrating for this reason. Besides the above-mentioned strengths, the fact that locals are enthusiastic about ecotourism; governorship, local administration, and university support this process, and wealthy people from the local community are amenable to invest in such processes, are considered as important opportunities. The threats encountered are the dam and the hydroelectric power plant, the district center and its surrounding area submerged and transported to somewhere else because of the dam, poor planning and destruction of natural areas due to unconscious practices, environmental pollution, exceeding carrying capacity, and problems caused by inadequate infrastructure, climate changes caused by dams and gradual decrease in the young population because of emigration (Surat et al, 2011).

As seen in the three different above-mentioned examples, the most important issues related to ecotourism in Turkey are migration from rural areas to urban areas and the rapid decline in the population. In particular, the employment of young people in these areas is a problem that must be solved immediately. Through ecotourism, which is one of the rural development methods, it may be possible to provide employment for young people in rural areas and to make rural women visible in this process.

The Ecotourism Village Approach is discussed in detail in the section below, through Şeyhli Ecotourism Village located in the Eastern Black Sea Region with its different dimensions.

The Case of Piraziz Şeyhli Village

In this section, we'll firstly elaborate on the general characteristics of Şeyhli Ecotourism Village and its surroundings, then explain the process of ecotourism and its services, and finally evaluate the process in consideration of the surveys. Piraziz district is a coastal settlement on the Black Sea sea-shore. The district is surrounded by Bulancak district from the east, Ordu-Gülyalı district from the west, Bulancak Gökıran Plateau from the south, and the Black Sea from the north.

Piraziz is a coastal city with high accessibility due to its location on the Black Sea coast and its proximity to the airport. Being 23 km away from Giresun city center, 22 km away from Ordu city center and four km away from Ordu-Giresun Airport, Piraziz, though administratively attached to Giresun, equally uses two city centers since it is located near the border with Ordu (Fig. 1).

There were nine neighborhoods and 21 villages attached to Piraziz, which gained district status in 1988. Administratively, Şeyhli Village is not regarded as a village but a neighborhood (Piraziz Municipality, 2019). According to 2018 census data, the population of Giresun is 453.912, the population of Piraziz is 14.659 and the population of Şeyhli is 898. It is observed that the population has decreased in Giresun in recent years. This is also the case in Piraziz district and even in Şeyhli village (TUIK, 2019). While the literacy rate in Giresun was 93.61% in 2015, this rate was 100% in Piraziz district (Piraziz Sub-governorship, 2008).

In history, Piraziz nahiye (sub-district as an administrative unit) was first seen in 1642. The centre of this sub-district is Bendehor (Mendehorya) -Güni, Gökçeali and Şeyh İdrisli (Şeyhli) villages. Şeyhli Village, formerly known as Şihli or Şeyh İdrisli (1455), seems to be one of the settlements that are influential in Piraziz's formation. Emecen describes the Şeyhli Village as "having a characteristic that reminds of a dervish settlement being formed around the zawayah (a small Islamic monastery)" (Emecen, 2015). The district was named after a bey called Pir Aziz, son of Ibrahim, who ruled the region in the classical period of the Ottoman Empire. Pir Aziz ruled the region from the village of Nefs-i Piraziz. Pir Aziz's spiritual relationship with Şeyh İdris, who is the opinion leader, was known and Şeyh İdris was living in Şeyhli village adjacent to the village of Nefsi Piraziz (Piraziz Municipality, 2019). Piraziz is still known as "Abdal" (wandering dervish) and Şeyhli village as "Şihli" village (village with a sikh or sheikh).



Figure 1. Location of Piraziz (Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Piraziz,+Giresun/>, 2019).

The climate of Piraziz district is a typical Eastern Black Sea climate and rainfall is spread over four seasons. Summers are cool in the coastal areas, winters are mild. The vegetation is parallel to the rainy climate of the region. Hazelnut orchards surround an area of 800 m from the seacoast. There are forests up to 2000 m altitude, and high plateaus covered with Alpine-like lush meadows. 25% of the land is comprised of agricultural land, 34% of it is forest and heathland, 18% of it is meadow and pasture, and 23% of it is non-agricultural land. Although agricultural activities are based on the economy in the Black Sea Region, agricultural production per rural population is below the national average. This is because the agricultural productivity of the region is low, and the land is rough and not very suitable for the industry. Piraziz also faces similar problems. The economy in the district is based on agriculture, livestock, and forestry sectors. Hazelnut is the head of agricultural production (Işık, 2008). Giresun hazelnut is one of the world's highest quality hazelnuts, but unfortunately, it has lost its value especially in recent years. Therefore, hazelnut farmers can not earn their livings and have been in search of other alternatives. Due to wrong agricultural policies, hazelnut gardens divided by inheritance, hazelnut harvesting not worth its cost, etc., migration from rural areas to cities has accelerated.

Within the scope of the study, Şeyhli Ecotourism village in the Piraziz district of Giresun province in the Black Sea Region

was investigated. Şeyhli Village was announced as a village of ecotourism within the scope of the Tourism Brand City Development Plan and the ecotourism development process was coordinated by Giresun Governorship of Giresun Tourism Infrastructure Service Association. The most important characteristics of Şeyhli Village are its accessibility because of its proximity to the Ordu-Giresun Airport and the Black Sea coastal road, its rapid adaptation to the ecotourism process due to the high level of education in the villagers, and the fact that it is exactly a women's movement since the process is managed and executed by women.

In the scope of the plan in 2012, Şeyhli was selected as an 'eco village', a model village, and studies and works were started (Fig. 2). In this context, the governorship firstly provided a training course to the founding team members under the leadership of an academician, an expert in branded cities. In the training course, four main subjects including home boarding, menu to be presented to guests, planning of time to be spent in the village and products to be sold were elaborated. Initial attempts were made about these basic topics, and the menus, programs, and products to be sold were determined at the request of the guests who came to the village in the process.

Şeyhli Ecotourism Village stands out with its vegetarian cuisine (180 different kinds of food) in the field of gastronomy

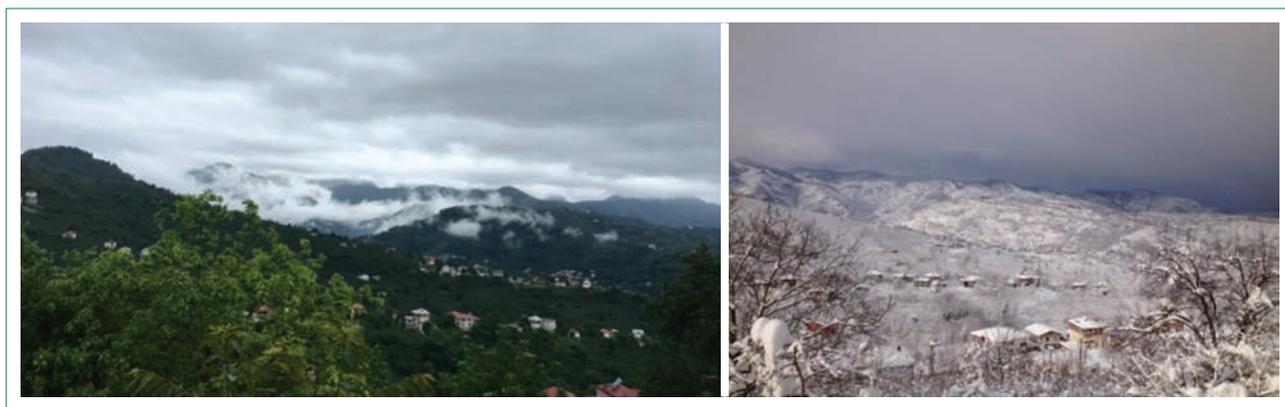


Figure 2. General View of Şeyhli Village (Source: Author, 2018).



Figure 3. Vegetarian cuisine, pear molasses making (left to right) (Source: The Archive of Ecotourism Mansion of Şeyhli, 2018).

(Fig. 3). All vegetables, fruits, and herbs used in the kitchen are produced from local seeds by traditional methods or already present in nature. Traditional ceremonies (henna night, a ceremony for taking bride from her home, etc.) are held for guests coming from the Ecotourism Mansion, local folk dances (Giresun folk dance, three-foot horon) is played and the processes of cooking local dishes and local handicrafts (needlework, etc.) are shared. People talk about nicknames, mani (a type of Turkish poem), laments, idioms, and proverbs of the village, and they entertain with Giresun folk songs. In the mansion, there is also Kitre Bebek Museum prepared by the project director. Nature walks are made around the village, and guests are informed about hazelnut groves, hazelnuts, and fruit trees along the way. Guests can also take a stroll through the vehicle of the hazelnut grove (pat pat). During the trip, Inalti Waterfall, and the tombs of Seyh Idris and Pir Aziz are visited. Children guests are learning and enjoying traditional children's games (kasnak etc.). If the guests wish, the village

houses are visited, and the local daily life is experienced. All these programs are arranged according to the requests of the guests. Works on the souvenir have just begun. A wide range of local foods is available for sale. Some of those are pickles, jams (especially milk jam), molasses, cornflour halva, dry yufka, noodles, hazelnut pastry, hazelnut burma dessert, hazelnut baklava, Piraziz apple (registered), apple jam, apple syrup, apple honey, apple curd, apple cider vinegar, apple pestil, village butter, cornmeal, village sediment, nettle paste, hazelnut, double roasted hazelnut (in village oven), salted hazelnut, hazelnut paste. The mansion also sells handicrafts (needlework, fiber, lace, hoop, etc.) of the village (Fig. 4, 5).

The village has a capacity of 200 people for a boarding house. The ten-bed mansion's restaurant has a capacity of 50 people. The project coordinator stated that they prefer a maximum of 20–25 guests at the same time and do not accept large tours.



Figure 4. Ecotourism Mansion of Şeyhli; hazelnut harvest, İnaltı Waterfall (left to right) (Source: Author, 2018; The Archive of Ecotourism Mansion of Şeyhli, 2018).

Methodology

In this study, the ecotourism village approach as a rural development model is discussed with the example of Şeyhli Ecotourism Village. The ecotourism village approaches are evaluated by studying the ecotourism development process, the actors of the process, the difficulties encountered, and the approach of the local community towards the process.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used together in the study. Data was collected through a survey conducted with locals, in-depth interviews with the coordinator of the ecotourism process, observing tourist visits, observing daily life practices, and random interviews.

The survey, consisting of three parts, was conducted with 34 people. In the first part of the questionnaire, there are questions about the socio-demographic structure including age, occupation, marital status, number of households, and number of children per household. In the second part of the survey, there are questions including multiple choice answers to evaluate the participation of different actors in the development of ecotourism. In the third part of the survey, there are open-ended questions about how the local people see and evaluate the process.

Detailed data were obtained from the in-depth interview with the coordinator regarding the development of ecotourism, the adaptation of the local community, the difficulties faced (bureaucratic problems, promises not being kept, etc.), and future planning.

By way of field visits (daily excursion and overnight stays) to Şeyhli Ecotourism Village, the relationship between the tourist and the local community, the satisfaction of the tourists, the workings of the process, and how locals dealt with problems were observed.

The daily life practices of the locals were observed with spontaneous trips and home visits within the village, and the data obtained from informal conversations during these visits were also effective in evaluating the ecotourism process.

Results and Discussion

A survey study was conducted to evaluate the project of Şeyhli Ecotourism Village as a rural development model, to figure out the local community's approach towards the project, their knowledge, and awareness about the project and to examine the contribution to the project by the locals. Within the scope of the survey, a total of 34 people was interviewed. The results of the survey were evaluated in two ways one of which focused on the founding team (14 women) and the other of which focused on the results of the total number (34) of questionnaires.

The founding team of the Şeyhli Ecotourism Village project consists of 14 women. The project manager is a retired teacher. The founding team consists of ten housewives, one chef, and three retired teachers (Fig. 6). Retired teachers are the guides of the team. Founding team members are consisting of mainly married women (86%) within the age between 51–70 (Fig. 6).



Figure 5. A Ceremony for taking bride from her home, needlework stand; kasnak (a traditional children game) (left to right) (Source: The Archive of Ecotourism Mansion of Şeyhli, 2018; Author, 2018).

Of the 34 people surveyed, 25 were women and nine were men. 11 of the participants were between the ages of 30–50, 20 were between the ages of 51–70 and three were between the ages of 71–80. Considering their occupations, it is seen that 47% of them are housewives, 30% of them are retired and 23% of them are working. The participants mainly consist of housewives age between 51–70. (Fig. 7). Most of them are married and have children (94%). Most of the children do not live in the village because of employment and marriage issues.

Women in the founding team got actively involved in all processes of the project. All the members of the team worked personally (cooking, serving, etc.) and took part in performing the traditional ceremonies (henna night, etc.) organized for the guests. Most of them were accompanied by excursions and natural activities for the guests. 60% of the women stated that they produced agricultural products which were used as ingredients of the meals or sold. 50% of the women let the guests enjoy eating and drinking in their gardens, and they made handicrafts (lace, needlework, etc.) to be sold. 43% of the founding team took part in producing the processed products such as jam, hazelnut products, molasses, pickles, etc. while 35% of them worked on producing foods of animal origin. 35% of the women welcomed the guests in their own homes (house boarding). Three women in the founding team were active in artistic activities and four women were active in educational activities. Two women in the status of manager mentioned that they also prepared a local flavor menu, organized trips, got involved in the processes of performing traditional ceremonies and preparing souvenirs (Table 1). It is observed that the families of the founding team members gave full support to women in this process.

Of 34 participants, 79% stated that they took an active role in the ecotourism process and 21% said that they could not play an active role in the processes since they worked. 79% of active participants participated in entertainment organizations, 70% of them took personally charged in hosting the

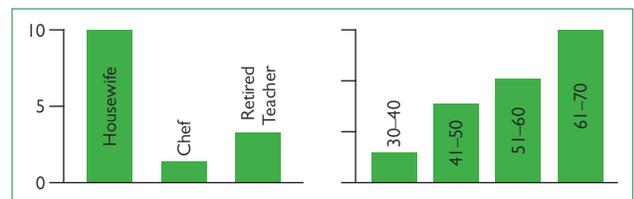


Figure 6. Occupation chart and age chart of the founding team (Source: Author, 2019).

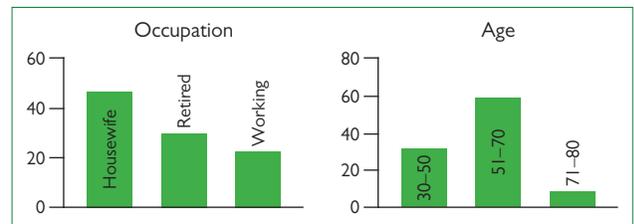


Figure 7. Occupation chart and age chart of the total participants (Source: Author, 2019).

quests, 55% of them accompanied trips, 47% of them participated in natural activities, 41% of them used their garden for eating and drinking activities, 35% of them hosted overnight guests, 32% of them were engaged in agricultural production while 29% of them were engaged in animal food production, 26% of them were occupied with making handicrafts and 23% of them produced processed products, 23% of them participated in training activities, 14% of them participated in getting prepared for TV programs and preparing souvenirs, and finally 11% of them took part in artistic activities. The villagers own single-family houses with large gardens besides agricultural lands (hazelnut gardens and vegetable gardens). Agricultural and animal food production level is rising that they have been realizing they can sell their products to the tourists (Table 2).

The contribution to the ecotourism process of the founding team and all participants were separately grouped in four levels as above. It is possible to compare their efforts and roles

Table 1. The founding team contribution to ecotourism

Level 1	100%	they took an active role in ecotourism process
	100%	participated in entertainment organizations
	100%	took personally charged in hosting the quests
	100%	accompanied trips
	100%	participated in natural activities
Level 2	60%	engaged in agricultural production
	50%	used their garden for eating and drinking activities
	50%	occupied with making handicrafts
Level 3	43%	produced processed products
	35%	hosted overnight guests
	35%	engaged in animal food production
	35%	getting prepared for TV programs and preparing souvenirs
Level 4	28%	participated in training activities
	21%	took part in artistic activities

Source: Author, 2019.

Table 2. The participants' contributions to ecotourism

Level 1	79%	they took an active role in ecotourism process
	79%	participated in entertainment organizations
	70%	took personally charged of hosting the quests
Level 2	55%	accompanied trips
	47%	participated in natural activities
	41%	used their garden for eating and drinking activities
	35%	hosted overnight guests
	32%	engaged in agricultural production
Level 3	29%	engaged in animal food production
	26%	occupied with making handicrafts
	23%	produced processed products
	23%	participated in training activities
Level 4	14%	getting prepared for TV programs and preparing souvenirs
	11%	took part in artistic activities

Source: Author, 2019.

in the process by these tables. The founding team takes part in the activities that involve management issues, more complicated, and long-term works, the rest of the group takes part in the supporting and daily activities.

Considering the families of the participants, 74% of whom were helpful in their participation in ecotourism activities, 26% of whom could not help because of their work.

Most participants think that ecotourism study allows young people in the region to participate in the process. A small percentage of the participants think that the young population in the village is low and the young people cannot participate in the process because they do not have enough knowledge and awareness about ecotourism. The general opinion is that the number of guests coming to the village will increase as a result of the promotion of the village and this situation will create new job opportunities for young people. The group, who disagreed, stated that even if employment increased, young people would not prefer to work in the village.

All respondents stated that ecotourism studies contributed to the development of the region. They indicated that the physical environment will be improved, and as the region comes to be known, it will revive the village as well as its social, economic, and cultural contributions. In addition, the director of the project stated that Seyhli Village Ecotourism Mansion will create awareness about vegetarian cuisine.

Most participants believe that ecotourism is supported by the villagers. It was stated that the people of the village should primarily assist in ecotourism promotion activities and, if necessary, in the provision of indoor/outdoor areas. Other issues expected to be supported by the people of the village are respectively participation in educational activities, home boarding, and, if necessary, much more comprehensive assistance and financial support on every subject. Also, they have stated that the ecotourism project was supported by the official authorities, and especially the governorship gave his support to the project in many steps and built the mansion in the village. Those, who think that the project is not sufficiently supported by the authorities, complain that support was provided only in the first three years of the project, the project was not adequately promoted, and necessary financial support was not provided. Priority issues that the participants expect to be supported by the authorities are the promotion of the village, sales of local products, financial support, comprehensive assistance when necessary, and organization of training courses on ecotourism and allocation of indoor or outdoor areas. Since the person serving as the district governor often changes, the processes are negatively affected. All the participants think that ecotourism contributed to the promotion of Şeyhli Village. They underlined that the village increased its recognition level, they hosted visitors from different parts of both Turkey and the world, and the village was promoted through television channels, newspapers, virtual media, and magazines thanks to ecotourism.

Most of the participants contributed to their family budgets with their hosting the guests, their productions, and sales. All participants agree that the income from ecotourism needs primarily to be used for the development of ecotourism. They emphasized that the income should be distributed among the people of the village only after developing and bringing the ecotourism process to a certain standard. They also stated that the local community could be supported, and the studies could be carried out to create an ecotourism network with the income obtained in further stages and. All participants asserted that ecotourism activities should also be carried out in other regions as in their villages. They stated that through ecotourism activities becoming widespread, it would be possible to establish inter-village networks, increase the diversity and activities specific to each region, open up opportunities for women to produce and contribute to their family budgets, and thus increase the active participation of the rural population in the country's economy by providing rural development.

Problems encountered during the ecotourism project are listed as financial problems and lack of support, the fact that the official authorities only helped find suitable places and actively supported the project only in its first three years, that the people of the village could not get adequate education about ecotourism, that the village was not well-promoted, lack of stands for products and indoor places, lack of tools such as desks, chairs, etc., lack of vehicles for transportation, environmental conditions, lack of infrastructure (power cuts, etc.), and that the locals were eager to get results in a shorter term and could not comprehend the long-term process of ecotourism.

All the participants were addressed with the question of “what do you think ecotourism is?” to figure out their perspectives. The answers to the question were summarized as making guests experience regional and characteristic qualities, customs and traditions, natural beauties, and local cuisine; providing an environment where people, especially those suffering from urban life, can breathe for a short while; protecting local and natural resources and producing without destroying the nature; promoting the village by providing small groups with labor-intensive services and thus making effort to develop the village. It is also defined as a form of tourism that enables women in the Anatolian countryside to obtain their economic freedom by selling their products.

As understood from the survey, the ages of those who are active in the ecotourism project are mostly between 50 and 70. In terms of the sustainability of the project, the younger group should take part in the project. However, young people, as stated, do not prefer to live in the village because they do not have enough job opportunities and the village is not attractive for young people. The founding team members said that they offered young people to take part in the process many times, but most of the time they contributed for a short while and then lost their interest. Therefore, as a first step, studies need to be done to involve young people actively in the process of ecotourism.

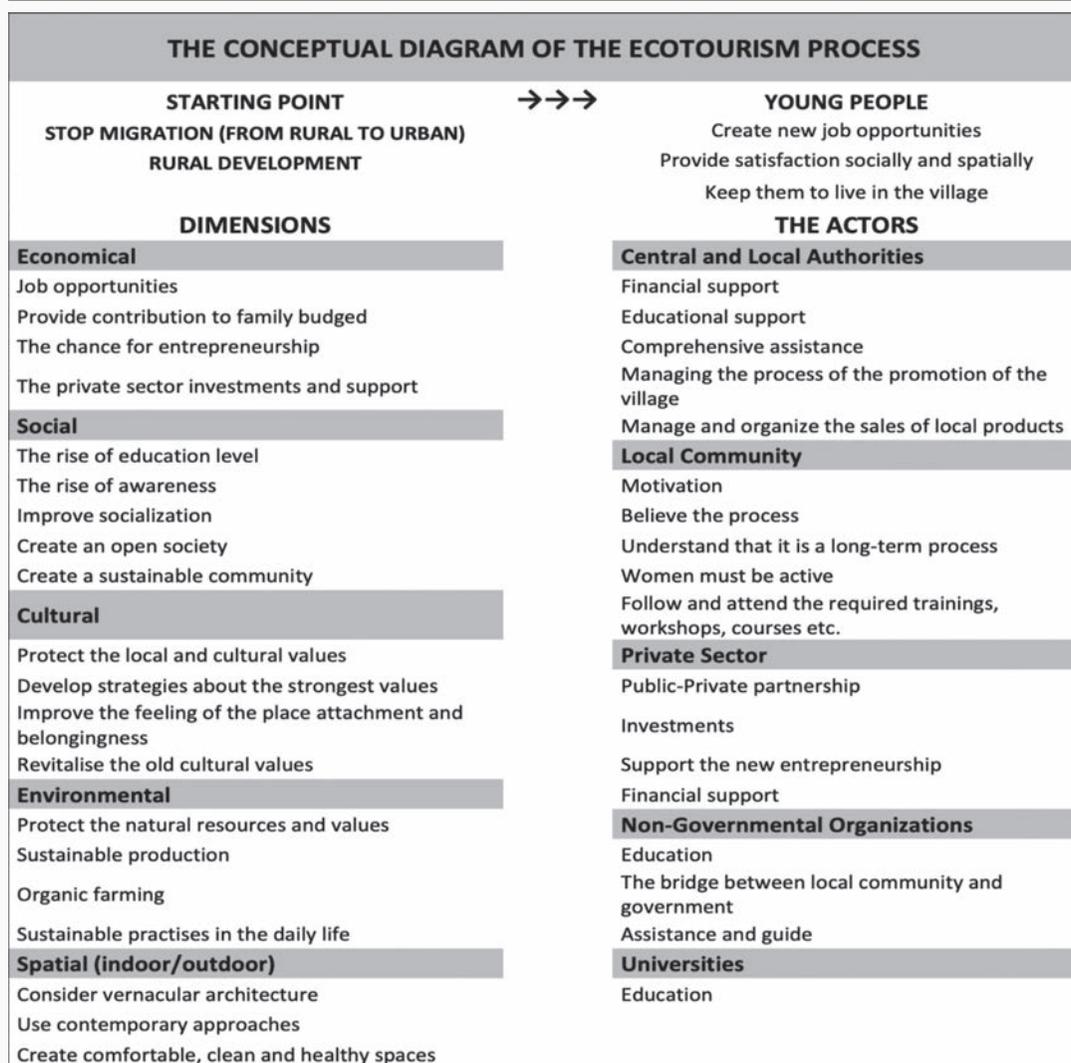
In the case of Şeyhli Ecotourism Village, only the governorship, as the initiator of the project, supported the process in the first three years and built the Ecotourism Village Mansion. However, the support expected by the district governor and the municipality could not be received. Supporting ecotourism by local/central authorities, universities, non-governmental organizations and private sector investors (especially local businessmen) is important for the development of ecotourism. Furthermore, the fact that the people of the village have difficulty in understanding the necessity of a long-term process in an ecotourism project and wish to get results in a short term prevents them from fully supporting the studies. The long-term ecotourism process needs to be explained in detail to all stakeholders, particularly to the local community.

The people of the village are willing to board their houses. After house boarding because of ecotourism activities, that the houses and gardens in the village with their surroundings were re-arranged led to the improvement of the physical environment throughout the village. The arrangements here also serve as a model for the surrounding villages. Existing improvement works are carried out with minimal intervention by traditional architecture and fabric. However, when ecotourism begins to grow, the tendency towards construction will become even more important. For example, there is a suggestion for adaptation of serenders use as accommodation. Serender is a wooden storehouse that is elevated from the ground. It is commonly seen in rural vernacular architecture in the Eastern Black Sea region. There needs to be a really good plan in the forthcoming period about those serenders which is suggested by the founding team, and where to build them, how many of them will be built, how to establish the balance between the bed capacity to be created and the ecological carrying capacity of the village.

Most village houses have a residual heating system. While the wood and hazelnut shells were burned in the heating stoves before, today the use of coal has increased. Although the pollution caused by coal is not realized by the people, for the time being, it will be realized in the future. It is so urgent that the people of the village should be made aware of the non-use of polluting fuels and encouraged to utilize renewable energy sources instead.

In ecotourism, all stakeholders of the process must have sufficient knowledge and consciousness about the subject to achieve a successful result. Education is an important part of the ecotourism process that needs to be well planned. These and similar examples generally focus on tourism, and the requirements of ecological life are often considered less important. In the daily life of the people of the village, it is significant to make them consume less, produce much, leaves as little waste as possible, use environmentally friendly products that do not destroy the environment, give importance to recycling, use energy efficiently and adopt this way of life. A good understanding of the importance of sustainable organic farming with local seeds as in this example can be seen as awareness created by ecotourism. In the case of Şeyhli Ecotourism Village, tourists are regarded as guests and local people never call them tourists. It is the most important reason why the tourists are happy and content while leaving the village.

The most important motivation for local people in the ecotourism process is to achieve long-term financial gain. The project coordinator stated that they have brought the project to a certain standard, but more guests (tourists) should come to the village. Current income is not enough to improve ecotourism. Therefore, the most important need is to promote

Table 3. The conceptual diagram of the ecotourism process

Source: Author, 2019.

the village more and to increase the number of tourists. Moreover, working on the necessary infrastructure studies and eliminating the insufficiencies is crucial for satisfying the tourists coming to the village. Comparing the other examples in the world where ecotourism is more expensive than traditional tourism, it is much cheaper in Turkey. This reality can be considered as an opportunity to improve ecotourism in our country. The correct evaluation of the potentials of local and cultural values in the process of ecotourism will be possible through planning proper approaches and policies.

The Seyhli Ecotourism Village project can be considered a women's movement. The women in the founding team are quite happy to take part in the process, to have a status other than a housewife, and to contribute to their family budgets

even if just a bit. Women's enthusiasm for producing to make the village attractive, their researcher identities, their efficient use of the internet, their open and experiential approaches to innovation are remarkable.

The findings of the study show that the ecotourism process is a multidimensional and multi-actor process. When ecotourism is used as a rural development model; it should be handled with its economic, social, cultural, environmental, administrative, and spatial dimensions. In addition, all actors in the process must take their responsibilities and work in coordination to achieve a successful result (Table 3).

Since ecotourism is a long-term process, Şeyhli case should be evaluated with that thought in mind. The process of ecotour-

ism as a rural development model in the Şeyhli case is at the beginning phase. It is observed that knowledge and awareness are rising day by day. Lots of women improved their skills in hosting guests, producing products, living more sustainably, organic farming, landscaping, promoting their village, using technology, etc. Ecotourism may offer new job opportunities soon in light of these developments. All the stakeholders must work in coordination in this process. Central and local authorities should work together, local private sector investors and non-governmental organizations must support the process, universities should also be included and guide the process related to research and development. Şeyhli case is a good example to learn about the women led ecotourism process.

As mentioned above, infrastructural inadequacies, failure to receive the expected support, organizational problems, etc. cause the slow progress of the process. Although the financial gain is not yet at a satisfactory level, it is seen that it can reach the desired level with the right planning approach.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the ecotourism village approach as a rural development model regarding applicability.

The rural to urban migration movement, which accelerated with the influence of neo-liberal policies after the 1980s, caused serious problems, especially in developing countries. Rural areas have been neglected due to the lack of job opportunities and policies focusing on urban development. Preventing or controlling migration from rural to urban areas will only be possible by prioritizing the development of rural areas.

In the light of the findings of the study, creating attractive rural areas for the young population and making them active in the ecotourism process is a must for continuity in this long-term process. All stakeholders in the process must take responsibility properly and work in coordination. The ecological carrying capacity of the area must be considered during spatial transformation related to ecotourism. Renewable energy sources, recycling, organic farming, sustainable way of living, etc. must be supported by all the stakeholders. The promotion of the ecotourism area and the number of tourists/tours have crucial importance for satisfactory financial gain. At that point, especially local and central authorities should take much more responsibility compared to other actors in the process.

This study is important in terms of indicating that the ecotourism village approach can be used as a rural development model especially in developing countries and that the women in the rural areas need to be active in the process.

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