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Article

An evaluation of rural policies and approaches in Türkiye in the planned period within the scope of quality of life

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ABSTRACT

Rural policies and approaches shape the physical, economic, social, and environmental dimensions of rural life. When well-designed and implemented, they lead to improved living standards, greater opportunities, and sustainable development, all of which are core components of quality of life. Since the founding of the Republic, Türkiye has developed numerous policies and approaches to address rural settlements. However, comparative analyses examining these policies and their impact on the quality of life in rural areas remain scarce in the existing literature. In this regard, this study investigates Türkiye's rural settlement policies and approaches during the Planned Period (1963–present) through the lens of quality of life. It does so by assessing the extent to which these policies incorporate quality of life aspects, identifying areas that have been addressed and those that have been neglected, and offering insights for future policy development. To this end, the study conducts a comprehensive review of relevant literature and policy documents, offers a comparative evaluation of rural policies in the context of quality of life, and discusses the findings to support the formulation of future approaches. The key recommendations of this research include: (1) clearly defining the tools and mechanisms for implementing policy strategies; (2) increasing the state's role in developing new approaches and applications for rural settlements; (3) addressing each settlement's unique priorities for sustainable development; and (4) holistically evaluating the multiple dimensions comprising rural quality of life.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural settlements constitute a significant component of national economies, particularly due to their natural resource potential, raw materials, and food production capacity. Türkiye possesses distinct rural potentials due to its diverse geography and favorable climatic conditions. Although

certain rural development policies have been incorporated into national development plans, both the rural population and agricultural production have been gradually declining. The prioritization of urban centers and metropolitan areas in national economic policies and investment strategies has further widened the disparity in living standards between

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rural and urban areas, thereby accelerating rural-to-urban migration (Eminaoglu & Çevik, 2005; Taş, 2016; Açmaz Özden & Özden, 2019). As indicated by the United Nations (2002) and the State Planning Organization (DPT, 2007a), the average age in rural settlements is rising, particularly due to the migration of younger populations to urban areas. This phenomenon leads to the disruption of basic services, and the decline in agriculture threatens the sustainability of these settlements. On the other hand, the increasing influx of population into cities leads to reduced employment opportunities, strains on public service efficiency, and a deterioration in overall social cohesion in urban areas. Moreover, as noted by Yenigül (2016), the growing phenomenon of urban sprawl and the escalating impacts of climate change on agriculture have brought food security to the forefront of global concerns. Given the interrelated nature of these processes, it is inevitable that challenges encountered in rural areas will have a significant impact on urban centers in the future. Therefore, the policies and approaches developed for rural settlements play a pivotal role in shaping the broader future of countries.

The quality of life in rural settlements is a critical determinant in curbing rural-to-urban migration and ensuring the retention of rural populations within their communities. Consequently, international rural development policies over recent decades have underscored the importance of adopting a holistic approach to quality of life in policy formulation to achieve sustainable development in rural areas. However, rural policies in Türkiye have yet to comprehensively address all dimensions of quality of life within this integrated approach.

Within the framework of these issues, this study aims to achieve three primary objectives: first, to elucidate the quality of life in rural settlements along with its dimensions; second, to explore the relationship between rural policies and the quality of life; and third, to examine the rural development policies and approaches in Türkiye during the Planned Period, in order to evaluate the extent to which these have influenced various dimensions of quality of life—whether positively or negatively—by comparing their effectiveness, shortcomings, or overall contribution to improving rural living conditions. The ultimate goal is to provide insights that can guide the development of new approaches and contribute to the formulation of future policies and practices concerning rural settlements.

METHODOLOGY

In alignment with the issues and scope outlined in the introduction, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the dimensions that constitute the quality of life in rural settlements?

2. What is the theoretical relationship between rural policies and quality of life?
3. Which dimensions and indicators of quality of life in rural settlements are addressed by the policies and approaches developed for rural settlements in Türkiye during the Planned Period?
4. What directions can be proposed for the formulation of future policies and approaches within the framework of quality of life in rural settlements?

In responding to these specified questions, the research comprises a three-phase methodology:

1. literature and document analysis,
2. content analysis,
3. comparison of parameters for different approaches through tables (Figure 1).

In the third section, the concept and dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements are first examined, followed by a discussion of the theoretical relationship between rural policies and quality of life. To identify the relevant dimensions, a document analysis was conducted based on international organizations' quality of life measurement frameworks, such as the *Eurostat Quality of Life* (2015), the OECD's *How's Life?: Measuring Well-Being* (2011), and the *WHOQOL Measuring Quality of Life* (1997). In addition, academic studies by Kolodinsky et al. (2013), Michalska-Żyła & Marks-Krzyszowska (2018), Wiesli et al. (2021), and Küçükogul & Türkoğlu (2021) were reviewed. Based on these sources, a content analysis was conducted to identify frequently cited indicators, which were then systematically grouped into economic, technical infrastructure, social infrastructure, environmental, and institutional dimensions, conceptualized within the framework of this study.

Subsequently, policy documents of international organizations—including *Reaching the Rural Poor: A Renewed Strategy for Rural Development* (World Bank, 2003), *Scaling-Up the Impact of Good Practices in Rural Development: A Working Paper to Support Implementation of the World Bank's Rural Development Strategy* (World Bank, 2010), *Support for Rural Development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development*

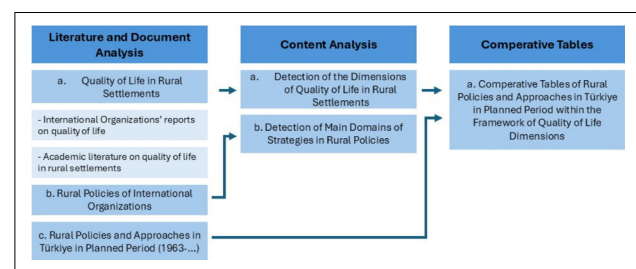


Figure 1. Methodology of research.

(European Commission, 2013), *Megatrends: Building Better Futures for Regions, Cities and Rural Areas* (OECD, 2019), and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations, 2023)—were analyzed to relate the strategic approaches to the identified dimensions of quality of life. In addition to the policy analysis, concrete examples from various countries, including Sweden, Ireland, Finland, Germany, and Italy, were briefly examined to further contextualize the discussion on rural settlement policies and their relationship with the dimensions of quality of life.

In Section Four, the evolution of rural settlement policies in Türkiye from the founding of the Republic to the present day was examined, with a focus on the Planned Period, a key era that marked the global integration of quality of life into development discourse and the national initiation of long-term development planning. To examine the relevant policies and approaches, a literature and document analysis was conducted using a range of sources, including academic publications, national theses, books, legislative texts, and official documents such as development plans, strategic frameworks, and action plans.

In the *Discussion and Conclusion* section, the dimensions of quality of life and Türkiye's rural settlement policies were jointly examined. Comparative tables were used to highlight key findings and to identify commonly addressed and overlooked issues. These tables also supported the evaluation of the effectiveness of the policies and approaches in enhancing the quality of life in rural settlements. For this evaluation, the OECD's *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully* (2021) framework—specifically developed as a comprehensive tool for assessing development-related policies, strategies, and interventions—was utilized. Although the OECD framework proposes six evaluation criteria, it encourages context-specific selection depending on the study's focus. Accordingly, four criteria—**relevance**, **coherence**, **effectiveness**, and **sustainability**—were used in this study, as they were the most applicable and assessable within its framework. To guide the evaluation process from the perspective of rural quality of life, the following questions were formulated for each criterion:

- **Relevance:** Did the rural policies and approaches include appropriate interventions in terms of quality of life?
- **Coherence:** Were the strategies embedded within the policies and approaches coherent and well-aligned with other policies to improve rural quality of life?
- **Effectiveness:** When considered in the context of quality of life, have the implementations achieved their objectives?
- **Sustainability:** Have the rural policies, approaches, and their effects been maintained and continued over time?

Since obtaining quantitative results for each approach or policy requires a more detailed, data-driven study, the evaluation carried out in this study was descriptive. It relied solely on responses to the formulated questions, assessing each policy's alignment with the selected evaluation criteria in relation to quality of life in rural settlements, focusing on content and implementation aspects rather than measurable numerical outcomes.

Based on these analyses, the *Discussion and Conclusion* section presents comprehensive recommendations for future rural settlement policies, highlighting key factors and challenges to improve quality of life, as a major outcome of the study.

QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL SETTLEMENTS

The discourse on quality of life within a global context first emerged during the 1920s. By the 1960s, the concept was being examined in relation to national development, particularly in the United States. Beginning in the 1990s, the scope of quality of life broadened significantly, consequently becoming a pivotal theme in both national and international policy agendas. This evolution occurred concomitantly with the increasing interest in concepts such as sustainability, livability, smart growth, and resilience.

In recent years, with the rise of the information age, the rapid advancement of information technologies, transportation systems, production methods, and services, the concept of quality of life has gained even greater importance. This growing emphasis has been reflected in the agendas of international organizations and has also expanded academic research, highlighting the topic's global significance.

The quality of life of individuals is significantly influenced by the characteristics of the settlement in which they reside. In this context, especially with the increasing focus on rural development, there has been a notable surge in global research on quality of life in rural areas. It is emphasized in almost all international policies on rural settlements that the quality of life in rural settlements should be improved; accordingly, new strategies have been developed and continue to be implemented to advance this agenda.

However, in Türkiye, the concept of quality of life is predominantly addressed within the urban context, and studies focusing on quality of life in rural settlements remain relatively limited. This situation highlights the necessity to prioritize enhancing quality of life in rural settlements and expanding related research in Türkiye's academic literature, along with other critical aspects of rural development.

In this context, the study examines the approaches and policies concerning rural settlements in Türkiye—particularly during the Planned Period—with a focus on

quality of life, aiming to identify the dimensions that require improvement for the future. For this purpose, the following sections first address the definition and dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements and then explore its relationship with rural policies.

Definition and the Dimensions of Quality of Life in Rural Settlements

The most basic definition of quality of life refers to the degree of an individual's satisfaction with their living environment and standards. Scholars emphasize that there is no universally accepted definition of quality of life (Sarı & Kindap, 2018), and the term is often used interchangeably with concepts such as “well-being,” “life satisfaction,” “happiness,” and “livability.”

Quality of life is often discussed in relation to economic welfare in various studies. However, scholars such as Nussbaum & Sen (1993), Gregory et al. (2009), and Brauer & Dymitrow (2014) emphasize that the economy is not the sole determinant of quality of life. They contend that factors such as the natural and built environment, physical and psychological health, education, leisure and recreational activities, and the social environment also play a significant role in shaping quality of life.

As the topic is more frequently discussed in urban contexts, the study begins by examining urban quality of life, although the influencing factors may differ in rural settlements. Geray (1974) defines urban quality of life through the adequacy of infrastructure, services, and amenities across social, economic, and spatial dimensions. The Specialized Commission Report on Urban Quality of Life (T.C. Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2018) links it to residents' rights, equitable service access, and satisfaction, emphasizing policies that support justice, accessibility, locality, and participation. While the scale and context differ from urban environments, these principles remain relevant for enhancing quality of life in rural areas.

Rural settlements encounter more significant challenges related to quality of life than urban areas due to harsher geographical and climatic conditions, limited employment opportunities, demographic factors, and insufficient government investments (Wardenburg & Brenner, 2020). Their small size and low population density make the provision of public services more difficult and costly (Bukenya et al., 2003), contributing to lower living standards and driving rural-to-urban migration (Dissart & Deller, 2000; Üçdoruk, 2002).

Quality of life indicators are widely discussed in both academic literature and reports by international organizations. However, their definitions often vary depending on the context. To address this variability, the study conducted a content analysis to identify and thematically group commonly used indicators into broader dimensions, forming a new framework for assessing rural

quality of life. This framework was then applied to examine rural policies in Türkiye. Table 1 presents the indicators used by various international organizations to evaluate quality of life, while Table 2 summarizes the indicators identified in academic studies that focus on rural settlements. All of these indicators were considered during the literature and document analysis for this study.

While many indicators have been used to assess rural quality of life, this study offers a new classification based on content analysis of academic and international sources. Based on this methodological framework, quality of life indicators in rural settlements are categorized into five dimensions: economic, technical infrastructure, social infrastructure, environmental, and institutional dimensions (Table 3). It should be noted that indicators related to individual characteristics—such as age, health status, etc.—were excluded from the scope of this study to maintain focus on structural and contextual dimensions of rural quality of life.

Table 1. Indicators used by international organizations to evaluate quality of life

International Organization and Name of the Study	Indicators
Eurostat Quality of Life (2015)	1- Material Living Conditions 2- Employment 3- Education 4- Health 5- Leisure and social interactions 6- Economic and Physical Safety 7- Governance and Basic Rights 8- Natural and Living Environment 9- Overall Life Satisfaction
OECD How's Life?: Measuring Well-Being (2011)	1- Health Status 2- Work and Life Balance 3- Education and Skills 4- Social Connections 5- Civic Engagement and Governance 6- Environmental Quality 7- Personal Security 8- Subjective Well-Being
WHOQOL Measuring Quality of Life (1997)	1- Physical Health 2- Psychological Health 3- Level of Independence 4- Social Relationships 5- Environment 6- Spirituality / Religion / Personal Beliefs

Table 2. Content analysis of academic literature on quality of life indicators in rural settlements

Author	Indicators
Kolodinsky et al., 2013	1- Mobility 2- Infrastructure 3- Perceptions of Safety 4- Social Networking 5- Age 6- Weather
Michalska-Żyła & Marks-Krzyszowska, 2018	1- Functioning of Health Care Institutions 2- Functioning of Educational Institutions in the Commune 3- Functioning of Cultural and Entertainment Institutions 4- Quality of the Environment 5- Possibility of Doing Business in the Commune 6- State of Roads in the Commune 7- Cleanliness of Public Places 8- Activities of the Local Parish and Priests 9- Assortment of Local Shops 10- Conditions for Rest and Recreation in the Commune 11- Transport Links in the Commune 12- Management of the Commune 13- Functioning of the Local Government 14- Activity of Political Parties in the Commune 15- Activity of Non-governmental Organizations in the Commune 16- Possibility of Influencing Important Issues in the Commune 17- State of Safety in the Place of Residence
Wiesli et al., 2021	1- Social Relations and Equality 2- Nature and Landscape 3- Education and Knowledge 4- Living 5- Participation, Identification, and Collective Emotions 6- Mobility 7- Health and Safety 8- Leisure and Recreation 9- Income and Employment
Küçükoğlu & Türkoğlu, 2021	1- Identity and Sense of Belonging 2- Landscape Character and Harmony 3- Settlement Pattern and Coherence 4- Street Pattern and Walkability 5- Open Spaces and Squares 6- Buildings and Interaction 7- Employment and Local Economy 8- Services and Amenities 9- Infrastructure, Maintenance, and Restoration 10- Social Structure 11- Participation and Decision-Making

Table 3. Organization of quality of life indicators extracted from literature and document analysis according to dimensions

Dimensions	Indicators Extracted from Document and Literature Analysis
Economic	Employment
	Income
	Local Economy
	Possibility of Doing Business
	Assortment of Local Shops
	Work and Life Balance
	Material Living Conditions
	Economic Safety
Technical Infrastructure	Infrastructure, Maintenance, and Restoration
	Mobility and Transportation
	Buildings and Interaction
Social Infrastructure	Education, Knowledge and Skills Health
	Social Networking and Connections
	Leisure, Cultural and Social Interactions
	Recreation
	Social Relations and Equality
	Identity and Sense of Belonging
Environmental	Social Structure
	Natural and Living Environment
	Environmental Quality
	Weather
Institutional	Physical Safety
	Governance and Basic Rights
	Participation and Decision-Making
	Activity of Political Parties and Non-governmental Organizations

These dimensions offer a holistic perspective on rural quality of life, enabling the organization of numerous sub-indicators within a coherent and unified structure. Subsequent subsections provide concise explanations of how each dimension influences quality of life in rural contexts.

• Economic Dimension

The economic dimension includes indicators such as income, employment opportunities based on the local economy and sector diversity, as well as material living conditions. In the current context, a decline in global agricultural production, also observed in Türkiye, has led to reduced economic vitality in rural areas, driven by global conditions and national sectoral policies (Küçüköğül & Türkoğlu, 2021). Small-scale producers are particularly affected, experiencing financial difficulties that reduce

their quality of life. Rising costs, falling profits, and youth migration further reduce the rural labor force and living standards (Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska et al., 2019). Moreover, landless rural populations also face economic insecurity due to limited capital (Rybakovas, 2016). Limited economic development also results in unemployment, particularly among the educated, while restricted access to consumer goods and dependence on urban centers for basic needs further reduce rural quality of life (Malkina-Pykh & Pykh, 2008).

• Technical Infrastructure Dimension

The technical infrastructure dimension includes transportation and communication systems, essential utilities, adequate housing, and technologies that support economic activity. In rural areas, low population density limits public transportation, especially in remote settlements, making private vehicle ownership essential and costly (Küçüköğül & Türkoğlu, 2021; Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska et al., 2019). Dülger Türkoğlu et al. (2008) point out that limited transportation options complicate commuting for work or education and reduce leisure time. Additionally, individuals without private vehicles experience mobility constraints, significantly lowering quality of life.

Deficiencies in basic infrastructure such as clean water, sewage, electricity, gas, and communication substantially affect well-being and contribute to environmental degradation.

In today's information age, internet access and tech skills are crucial. Koutsouris & Darnhofer (2010) points out that the lack of adequate infrastructure and digital literacy in rural settlements creates a digital divide, leading to social inequalities in education and connectivity, and economic disadvantages such as limited market access, reduced competitiveness, and slower technological adaptation.

Housing conditions also play a significant role in rural quality of life. Poor construction materials, inadequate heating/cooling systems, lack of planning, and weak resilience to natural disasters reduce housing comfort and, in turn, the quality of life.

• Social Infrastructure Dimension

The social infrastructure dimension encompasses access to education, healthcare, public facilities, and cultural or recreational services. In rural areas, low population density limits public investment, restricting access to social services and lowering quality of life.

Education is a key factor, yet schools are often closed or not established due to insufficient student numbers, forcing students to commute or drop out—negatively impacting both present and future quality of life. Similarly, limited healthcare infrastructure makes rural populations dependent on distant services, even for emergencies.

According to Wiesli et al. (2021), recreational and cultural leisure activities play an important role in individuals' social lives and personal development, and thus their overall quality of life. The lack of venues for cultural and recreational activities negatively impacts workforce reproduction, hinders stress relief through engaging in diverse pastimes, and lowers quality of life.

The need to travel for essential services also highlights rural mobility challenges. As noted by Michalska-Żyła & Marks-Krzyszowska (2018), the availability of nearby services significantly influences individuals' perception of their place of residence as attractive, which is closely tied to their overall quality of life.

• Environmental Dimension

The environmental dimension covers climate, geographical conditions, and natural disasters, and the state of natural resources. Harsh climate and geographical conditions in rural environments significantly impact quality of life. Since rural settlements are predominantly undeveloped and surrounded by natural environments, they are more vulnerable to natural disasters. The inadequacy of infrastructure and services to withstand such disasters renders rural settlements less resilient, creating a disadvantage in terms of quality of life.

Inadequate infrastructure and lack of modern technologies in sectors like agriculture and livestock also harm environmental quality. Problems such as uncontrolled waste disposal and lack of recycling lead to soil and water pollution, degrading the rural environment. Since rural populations are more closely connected to nature, environmental degradation affects them both economically and psychologically (Vaishar & Statsna, 2019). Additionally, urban expansion into rural areas also leads to gradual alteration, pollution, or destruction of natural rural spaces, indirectly impacting rural quality of life.

• Institutional Dimension

The institutional dimension includes indicators such as participation, voting rights, decision-making processes, transparency, and the responsibilities of various actors and institutions over rural settlements.

Local residents' ability to engage in decision-making through democratic mechanisms significantly shapes rural quality of life (Beslerová & Dzuríčková, 2014; Wiesli et al., 2021). In this context, transparent and accountable local governance, along with trust in local authorities, plays a critical role.

Decisions made by central governments are equally important in determining rural living conditions. As Yenigül (2016) explains, urbanization policies that support the expansion of cities transform rural land into a commodity. Natural and agricultural areas are undergoing reclassification as urban land through zoning changes and

infrastructure development. In response to these rent-driven pressures, rural residents may choose to sell their land and migrate to urban areas due to the higher economic returns. Those who remain may encounter social tension as they try to maintain their way of life in the face of changing rural landscapes. Plans and projects driven by speculative interests lead to the disorganized and uncontrolled transformation of rural settlements, reshaping their social, economic, and physical identities. These developments often contribute to a broader decline in environmental and overall quality of life.

When examined holistically, it becomes evident that the dimensions of rural quality of life are deeply interconnected. Negative conditions in one dimension can trigger adverse effects in others, thereby influencing the overall well-being of rural residents. In this context, the following section discusses rural policies and their relationship with quality of life.

Relationship Between Rural Policies-Approaches and Quality of Life in Rural Settlements

The multidimensional nature of quality of life in rural settlements necessitates a comprehensive approach to policy design, in which rural policies and development strategies play a central role in enhancing overall well-being. This section examines how international policy frameworks reflect and align with these dimensions. These frameworks commonly address several interrelated areas, including the following (WB, 2003; WB, 2010; EC, 2013; OECD, 2019; UN, 2023):

- **Economical strategies:** Enhancing productivity in primary sectors; creating new employment opportunities; developing credit, insurance, and financial support mechanisms; promoting income growth and reducing poverty and inequality; supporting multisectoral rural development; encouraging entrepreneurship, vocational training, and competitiveness in rural economies; advancing the knowledge economy; fostering innovation and technology adaptation; promoting renewable energy and sustainable production-consumption patterns; strengthening rural value chains.
- **Technical strategies:** Increasing accessibility to basic services; improving transportation and mobility systems; upgrading rural infrastructure; developing e-services and improving digital literacy; integrating new technologies into daily life and production; enhancing access to sustainable and clean energy sources.
- **Social strategies:** Enhancing accessibility and quality of social services; improving the quality of education and promoting lifelong learning; ensuring equality, equity, and social inclusion; addressing the needs

of disadvantaged groups; reducing interregional disparities; fostering participation and new social networks; promoting rural cultural heritage and community resilience; supporting cooperatives and community-based organizations.

- **Environmental strategies:** Ensuring environmental conservation; preserving natural and cultural resources; promoting the sustainable management of natural resources; addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation; supporting land use planning and landscape protection; encouraging biodiversity preservation; promoting responsible production and consumption.
- **Institutional strategies:** Enhancing transparency, accountability, and participatory governance; developing new rural policies and institutional frameworks; strengthening coordination between public, private, and civil society actors; promoting open data and digital governance; supporting decentralized, locally tailored solutions; facilitating partnerships and collaborative networks; improving service flexibility and adaptive policy tools; supporting strong institutions, rule of law, and inclusive governance mechanisms.

These strategies aim to support sustainable rural development, reduce migration, retain youth, and improve rural welfare. Recent policies also increasingly address global challenges like climate change, warming, and food security.

While these strategies provide a valuable framework for understanding the multidimensional aspects of rural quality of life, their practical relevance can be better understood through concrete examples. In order to do so, implementations from various European countries under the LEADER program, which is widely recognized as a key instrument for supporting rural development in the EU, are briefly presented. These cases illustrate how theoretical strategies are put into practice at the local level and demonstrate tangible steps taken to improve rural quality of life. The common characteristic of these examples, as highlighted in this section, is that none explicitly target “rural quality of life” as a goal; however, all the issues addressed in their proposed solutions closely align with the dimensions of rural quality of life. Thus, this section demonstrates the direct relationship between rural policies and rural quality of life.

Economical strategies – Cultivation Academy in Sweden

The *Odlingsakademien* project in Sweden aimed to strengthen agricultural production in order to create more sustainable and resilient rural settlements. To achieve this, the initiative focused on increasing the community’s knowledge and skills related to sustainable farming practices, while emphasizing the promotion of local production. It actively involved diverse segments of

the population in training programs designed to enhance production capabilities. Moreover, producers were educated in environmentally friendly farming techniques, and new networks were established to facilitate knowledge exchange, particularly bringing together older and younger farmers. Consequently, the project not only supported economic development but also fostered a strong sense of community and belonging (European Commission, n.d.a). In addition, it enhanced the collective capacity for collaboration and action, creating enabling environments where local actors could work together effectively, thereby contributing to significant improvements in the overall quality of life within these rural communities.

Technical strategies – Broadband 4 Our Community in Ireland

The *Broadband 4 Our Community* project in Ireland aimed to increase connectivity through investments in internet infrastructure, thereby enhancing digital inclusion. By establishing a local network, the project also managed to reduce infrastructure costs. A social enterprise was created, allowing profits to be shared with the local community. The initiative employed an FTTP (Fiber to the Premises) network and successfully established a model of social and financial innovation, attracting co-funding from local businesses. Improvements in internet infrastructure facilitated opportunities such as remote working (European Commission, n.d.b). Although the primary objective was to develop technological infrastructure, the project also generated positive economic and social impacts, thereby contributing to improvements in the quality of life.

Social strategies – The Most Pessimistic Town in Finland

In Finland, a project was developed to address the challenges faced by rural settlements experiencing both population decline and aging. Referred to as “the most pessimistic town in Finland,” the community suffered from reduced services and recreational opportunities. The initiative aimed to foster a happier social environment and improve living standards. Beyond social infrastructure, the project incorporated approaches related to tourism, the establishment of new businesses, and the promotion of local culture. Its goal was to transform a pessimistic community into an optimistic one, primarily by engaging young people through humorous and creative activities. Existing pessimism was rebranded as a source of entertainment and cultural identity, encouraging participation in cultural events. The project had a positive impact on local economic development and stimulated cultural regeneration. It also strengthened the community’s sense of belonging and expanded social services and employment opportunities for the youth (European Commission, n.d.c). Thus, while rooted in social infrastructure, the project effectively addressed multiple dimensions of rural quality of life.

Environmental strategies – Na-Tür-lich Dorf, Germany

The *Na-Tür-lich Dorf* project in Germany primarily aimed to prevent environmental degradation and promote environmental conservation. Alongside these environmental priorities, the project also focused on empowering local communities and supporting entrepreneurship. New economic opportunities based on natural resources were created, and various training programs were provided for nature-friendly production methods. The initiative fostered social awareness regarding environmental issues and included the renovation of buildings following ecological architecture principles. Implemented through the collaboration of diverse stakeholders from both local communities and various levels of government, the project contributed to the sustainable development of rural areas. Moreover, it was recognized at both regional and national levels, highlighting its broad impact and significance (European Commission, n.d.d). Although the main emphasis was on environmental protection, the project adopted a holistic approach by addressing multiple dimensions of quality of life to improve rural inhabitants' living conditions.

Institutional strategies – Giovani Dentro, Italy

The *Giovani Dentro* project in Italy aimed to assess the quality of life of young people and identify challenges in order to develop targeted policies. Initiated as a research project in Italian rural mountain areas, it sought to promote sustainable local development by fostering new networks among stakeholders and encouraging participation. The project led to the development of new policies focused on education and improving knowledge related to livestock farming, accompanied by a pilot implementation (European Commission, n.d.e). While primarily addressing governance issues, the initiative also encompassed economic, social, and technical infrastructure dimensions. By doing so, it contributed to enhancing various aspects of rural quality of life and supporting the well-being of young residents.

Since the LEADER program is designed to fund and support projects based on local needs, the examples presented here address highly specific and place-based issues. Nevertheless, a broader look at these initiatives reveals that the goals and outcomes they pursue are closely linked to various dimensions of rural quality of life. Although these are individual cases, they reflect a wider trend that is not limited to LEADER alone but can also be observed in the practices of other international frameworks. Within the scope of this study, such illustrative cases were included alongside policy discussions to provide a more grounded understanding of how strategies are implemented in practice.

As observed, rural policies are closely tied to multiple dimensions of quality of life, influencing them directly and indirectly. Although economic factors are among the most significant determinants of quality of life, numerous

non-economic factors also play a crucial role. Challenges include population decline due to migration, climate change impacts, urban sprawl threatening rural identity, and the loss of traditional customs and social practices.

Improving rural quality of life is essential for residents' well-being and the sustainability of rural areas. Therefore, policies and approaches must address both current and anticipated challenges by focusing on economic development and providing social and technical infrastructure and services, through a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional factors influencing quality of life.

International rural policies and practice examples were utilized in this study primarily as a theoretical basis to explore the link between quality of life and policy frameworks, due to their global relevance. However, drawing specific lessons from these policies for Türkiye or evaluating the feasibility of their implementation falls beyond the scope of this study and remains a subject for future research. The objective of this study is to establish the theoretical underpinnings, with the next section analyzing how rural policies during the Planned Period in Türkiye align with the dimensions of rural quality of life.

POLICIES AND APPROACHES DEVELOPED FOR RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN TÜRKİYE: PAST TO PRESENT

The rural population in Türkiye began to decline in the 1950s, and the urban population surpassed it for the first time in 1985. Since then, the rural population has undergone a steady decrease (Figure 2). A substantial decline was observed following the enactment of Law No. 6360 in 2012, which reclassified villages within metropolitan municipality boundaries as neighborhoods. This change led to a statistical reduction in the rural population, although it did not reflect an actual demographic shift. According to the provisions of this legislation, approximately 7% of the total population was considered rural in 2021 (TÜİK, 2021). However, under TÜİK's updated urban-rural classification system, this figure was reported to be 17.3% in 2022 (TÜİK, 2023).

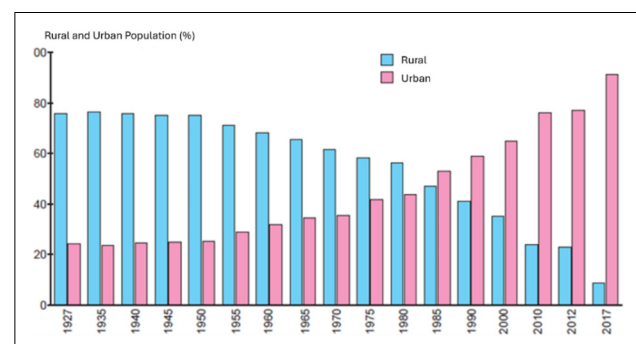


Figure 2. Changing rural and urban population rates in Türkiye between 1927-2017 (TÜİK, 2017).

Since the establishment of the Republic, various policies and approaches have been implemented for rural settlements in Türkiye. These efforts aimed to promote rural development, sustainability, and stability, and were shaped by shifting political, economic, and international dynamics. In this context, the evolution of rural policy in Türkiye can be divided into three main periods based on significant turning points:

1. **The Early Republican Period (1923–1946)**, during which policies and approaches toward rural settlements were shaped by the goals of post-war recovery and modernization;
2. **The Pre-Planned Period (1946–1963)**, which began with the transition to multi-party democracy and was marked by the introduction of new economic perspectives, representing a transitional phase; and
3. **The Planned Period (1963–...)**, characterized by the introduction and implementation of National Development Plans.

This study focuses specifically on the Planned Period (1963–...), which itself can be subdivided into two distinct phases based on critical milestones:

- The first period is between **1963–1980**, when policies and approaches were predominantly shaped and implemented by the state; and
- The second period is **post-1980**, marked by the growing influence of neoliberalism, globalization, and the information age.

The earlier periods are summarized below in order to provide context for understanding the state of rural settlements at the outset of the Planned Period (Figure 3).

The Early Republican Period (1923–1946)

This period marked the foundation of a new nation and the launch of post-war recovery and modernization efforts. These efforts had a significant influence on rural settlement strategies. During this period, the focus was mainly on economic and spatial characteristics, as well as social development. Additionally, improvements were made in cultural and physical conditions and service provision. These multidimensional efforts reflect an early holistic approach to rural policy-making that considered various

facets of rural life, even if it was not explicitly framed as such at the time.

Rural policies during this period prioritized the improvement of economic conditions for those engaged in agriculture, primarily through targeted legislation and regulatory measures. Within the context of a statist, protectionist, and inward-oriented economy, rural and agricultural policies were closely aligned with national strategies. From a spatial perspective, the Village Law, which continues to exert influence over certain rural settlements today, played a crucial role in shaping rural policy. This period was characterized by initiatives aimed at the systematic planning and establishment of new villages from the ground up. In terms of social development, significant emphasis was placed on educating the rural population, leading to notable advancements in this domain. Although these initiatives improved rural welfare and agricultural productivity, limited post-war resources and adverse global economic conditions prevented the full realization of the intended goals.

When evaluated in terms of the dimensions that constitute rural quality of life and their impacts, it can be argued that, despite limited resources, the policies and approaches developed during this period included strategies or practices corresponding to each of these dimensions, many of which were relatively fulfilled in practice.

The Pre-Planned Period (1946–1963)

This period commenced with the advent of the multi-party era and introduced new economic approaches, representing a transitional phase. During this period, most of the previously initiated rural settlement practices were either discontinued or left incomplete, resulting in a relative halt in the development of new rural policies and approaches.

With regard to economic policies targeting rural settlements, agricultural subsidies occupied a central role. These policies were designed to stimulate the agricultural sector through the provision of loans from foreign sources, thereby laying the foundations for reliance on external capital. However, an increase in agricultural mechanization, coupled with a decline in labor demand and inadequate rural service development, triggered a rapid migration process to urban areas.

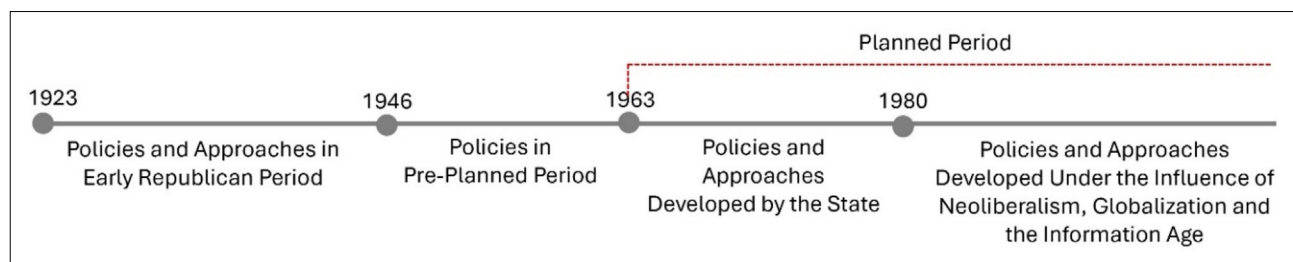


Figure 3. Milestones of policies and approaches developed for rural settlements in Türkiye by periods.

When evaluated through the framework of rural quality of life dimensions, this period appears to have focused mainly on economic concerns, particularly through the implementation of policies designed to attract foreign capital. As a result, it is difficult to assert that significant progress was made in enhancing the overall quality of life in rural settlements during this time. This phenomenon also sheds light on the substantial rural population decline that was observed towards the end of the period. At the same time, new and significant advancements occurred in urban areas. Emerging employment opportunities, improved services, and better living conditions began to raise the quality of life in cities relative to rural regions. Therefore, from a quality of life perspective, this demographic shift is closely linked to the growing appeal and improving conditions of urban life during this period.

Within this context, the dynamics of rural settlements and global developments during these two periods led to new approaches in the Planned Period.

Rural Settlement Policies and Approaches in the Planned Period (1963–...)

As discussed in the section on quality of life in rural settlements, the 1960s marked a significant turning point globally, where the concept became more relevant in development discourse. This period also witnessed the initiation of national planning in Türkiye, introducing long-term strategies for the first time. Although major policy shifts occurred after the 1980s, driven by global influences, the Planned Period fundamentally shaped the contemporary conditions of rural settlements in Türkiye.

Over twelve Five-Year Development Plans (FYDPs), Türkiye has aimed to improve rural living standards and drive national economic growth. Most of these plans focused on reducing regional disparities, enhancing rural well-being, improving service delivery, and guiding investment in rural areas. However, persistent challenges in implementation led many plans to call for new approaches.

This study divides the Planned Period (1963–...) into two sub-periods due to major shifts. From 1963 to 1980, rural policies were state-driven, while the post-1980 phase was

shaped by neoliberalism, globalization, and the information age. Both periods are analyzed in the following sections through the lens of rural quality of life.

Policies and Approaches Developed by the State (1963–1980): Between 1963 and 1980, policies and approaches toward rural settlements were predominantly developed within the framework of development plans. The institutional responsibilities for implementation were assigned to various organizations in accordance with the administrative structure of the period (Figure 4).

The first distinctive initiative of this period was the **Model Village Approach (1963–1966)**, developed independently of national plans. This approach aimed to improve selected villages as benchmarks for surrounding areas, promoting the diffusion of services. Villages were planned with functional zones such as “cultural” and “agricultural” sites (Kılıç, 1997) (Figure 5). From a quality of life perspective, the implementation primarily concentrated on the **social infrastructure** dimension, neglecting the others. The lack of public participation and failure to address local needs eventually led to the discontinuation of the initiative.

Building upon earlier efforts, the **Community Development Approach** was adopted alongside the **First FYDP (1963–1967)**, emphasizing the need to improve services in rural settlements. Initially developed by the United Nations (UN), this approach aimed to foster collaboration between state

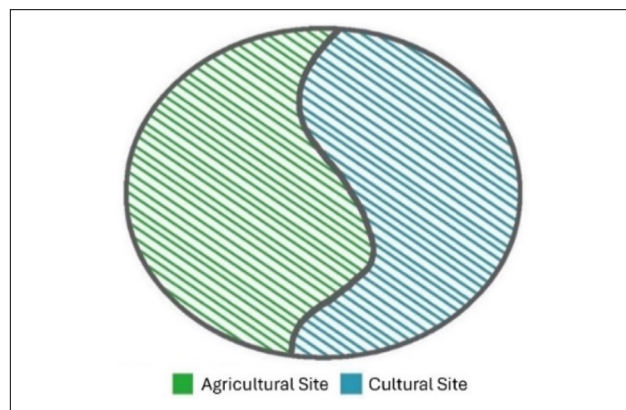


Figure 5. Model village.

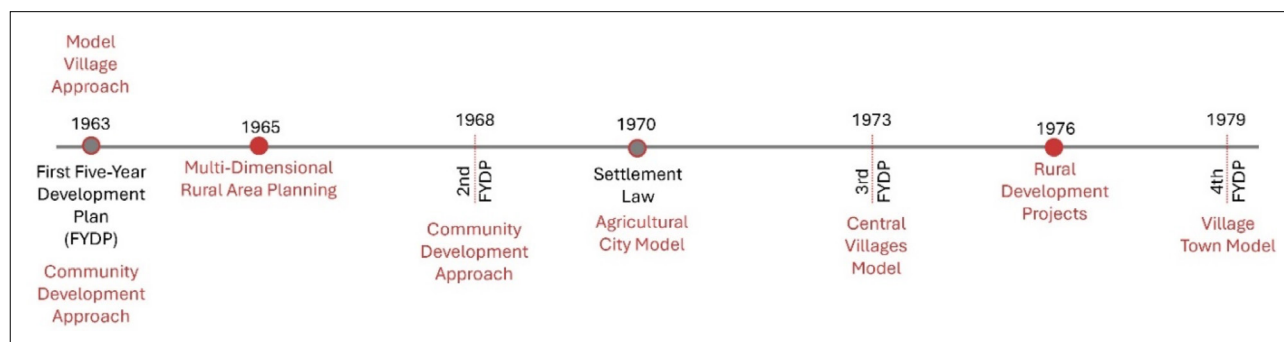


Figure 4. Timeline of rural settlements policies developed by the state between 1963-1980.

institutions and rural communities in service provision. Key elements included the establishment of agricultural cooperatives, expansion of agricultural training programs, creation of new employment opportunities, reduction of regional social disparities, enhancement of rural productivity, and optimization of service delivery (DPT, 1963). The **Second FYDP (1968–1972)** further highlighted the importance of addressing rural and urban issues jointly. It encouraged dialogue between local residents and public officials to identify needs and develop tailored solutions (DPT, 1968). The responsibilities of villagers were generally framed as voluntary participation in public activities, fostering cooperation, and constructing housing with loans and standardized designs (DPT, 1968). Implemented in various provinces, this approach addressed all dimensions of quality of life **except the environmental one**. However, institutional goals fell short due to weak legal and administrative frameworks and frequent institutional changes, limiting public participation (Kılıç, 1997; Çelik, 2005).

As an alternative, in 1965 the **Multi-Dimensional Rural Area Planning** approach was developed, aiming to increase the self-sufficiency, livability, and attractiveness of rural settlements while promoting the rational use of resources. This approach included components such as family planning, social services, agricultural production development, marketing, cooperatives and credits, transportation and infrastructure development, spatial planning, and environmental protection, with the objective of eliminating rural–urban inequalities (Geray, 1974; Kılıç, 1997; Çelik, 2005). Drawing from international practices, the model underscored the necessity of a holistic approach. It advocated for planning at macro, micro, and regional levels, supported by integrated development parameters. The approach also proposed standardized designs for similar types of settlements.

Due to financial and technical constraints, the approach was restructured in 1966 into two stages: **village planning** and **village cluster planning** (Kılıç, 1997). Consequently, the concept of village clusters was incorporated into Türkiye's rural settlement policy for the first time. Between 1965 and 1975, this approach was implemented in several provinces. However, due to lack of coordination among administrative units and insufficient technical personnel, the approach remained limited to district-based projects and failed to integrate with regional plans (Çelik, 2005). From a quality of life perspective, this approach addressed all dimensions **except the institutional one**. Consequently, the absence of public participation contributed to the discontinuation of these projects.

The **1970 Settlement Law** aimed to resolve rural settlement issues through spatial solutions, such as relocating unsuitable villages, consolidating scattered ones, and providing housing and infrastructure support. From a quality of life perspective, it focused mainly on **technical and environmental** aspects, neglecting **economic, social, and institutional** dimensions. As Doğanay (2002) notes,

limited budgets and technical staff hindered widespread implementation.

The **Third FYDP (1973–1977)** emphasized the integrated organization of agricultural, technical, and social services. In this context, the **Central Village Approach** was introduced to extend these services to surrounding rural areas through central villages selected based on specific criteria (Figure 6; DPT, 1973). These villages were planned to host key facilities such as schools, health centers, vocational training units, agricultural extension services, and marketplaces.

Continued under the **Fourth FYDP (1979–1983)**, the central village approach aimed to create service hubs for trade, education, and health (DPT, 1979). While it addressed **economic and social infrastructure**, it neglected other dimensions of quality of life. As Geray (1974) and Kayıkçı (2005) note, the initiative focused on services but failed to address deeper socio-economic issues or introduce innovative economic strategies.

Rural Development Projects, initiated in the 1970s and predominantly funded by foreign sources, aimed to reduce rural-to-urban migration by improving resource use, infrastructure, and socio-economic conditions (Çelik, 2005). The pursuit of foreign capital during this period signaled the subsequent phase, gradually paving the way for increased dependence on international financial sources and alignment with global policy frameworks. Between 1976 and 2010, efforts focused on modernizing agriculture, infrastructure, farmer education, and living standards (Doğanay, 1993; Çelik, 2005). While these projects addressed all quality of life dimensions **except the institutional one**, most indicators were vague.

The **Fourth FYDP (1979–1983)** introduced measures to address income imbalances between rural and urban regions, promote agricultural development, and facilitate the transition to an industrial society. These goals were to be achieved through land reform policies, support for cooperative enterprises, and the introduction of the **Village Town model** (DPT, 1979). The approach sought to advance existing villages by promoting specialization in specific economic domains and prioritized collaboration among neighboring villages (Figure 7).

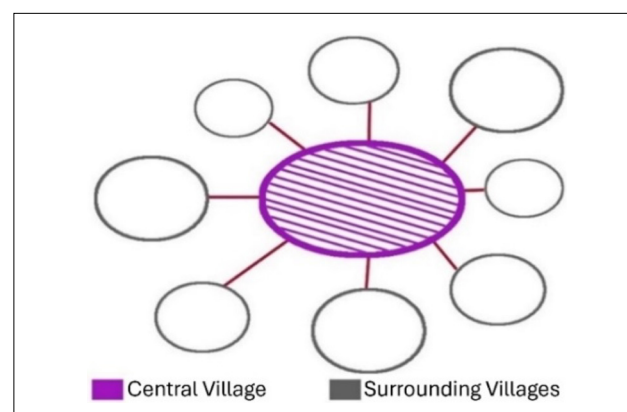


Figure 6. Central village approach.

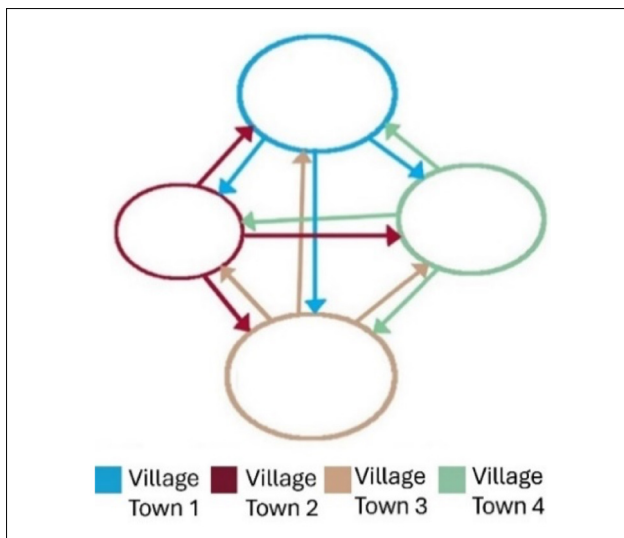


Figure 7. Village Town Model.

This approach aimed to integrate rural and urban areas through spatial planning and service provision (Polat, 2000), with pilot projects focused on infrastructure, social services, and cooperatives. Investments included transportation, water, sanitation, education, healthcare, and economic activities like agriculture, forestry, and tourism (Başbüyük, 2004). Although it addressed all quality of life dimensions **except the institutional one**, many indicators lacked clarity. Limited to a few villages, the projects failed to achieve rural-urban integration and were often halted due to low participation or administrative changes.

In summary, institutional dimension was largely neglected in rural policies of this period. While economic, technical, social, and environmental goals existed, indicators and implementation were often vague. Failures were mainly due to limited public participation, insufficient funding, and unmet local needs. The dimensions and indicators associated with this period are presented in a table and further discussed in the discussion and conclusion section.

Policies and Approaches Developed Under the Influence of Neoliberalism, Globalization, and the Information Age (1980–...):

Neoliberal policies that began to influence Türkiye in the post-1980 period reduced the state's economic involvement, cut public employment, and withdrew agricultural support (Gürçam & Aydın, 2019). As Soyak (2003) notes, the Five-Year Development Plans (FYDPs) became largely advisory during this period. From this point onward, international institutions such as the IMF, WB, WTO, OECD, and the EU began to exert a dominant influence over Türkiye's economic agenda, reshaping rural development policies to align with their priorities—especially the EU's Cohesion Policy (Figure 8).

New economic policies caused rural incomes to decline, which in turn reduced quality of life and accelerated migration from rural to urban areas. Although international organizations promoted sustainable rural development and quality of life, implementation in Türkiye's rural areas was limited. Despite the continuation of the FYDPs, the influence of local governments weakened, and state involvement in rural spatial planning declined. As a result, neoliberal policies affected not only the economy but also various dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements.

The **Fifth FYDP (1984–1989)** aimed to retain villagers in rural areas by enhancing quality of life, continuing the Central Village model with an emphasis on economic development and **social infrastructure** (DPT, 1984). Meanwhile, economically challenged urban residents and retirees began relocating to rural settlements, indirectly increasing demand for amenities in these areas. The **Sixth FYDP (1990–1994)** promoted agricultural industrial investments in Central Villages and sought to align regional policies with the EU (DPT, 1990). In 1995, the WTO Agriculture Agreement shifted agricultural production and trade toward market mechanisms, weakening state support (Şahinöz, 2010). Following this, Türkiye began harmonizing its policies with the EU Customs Union and the Common Agricultural Policy, eventually achieving EU candidate status in 1999.

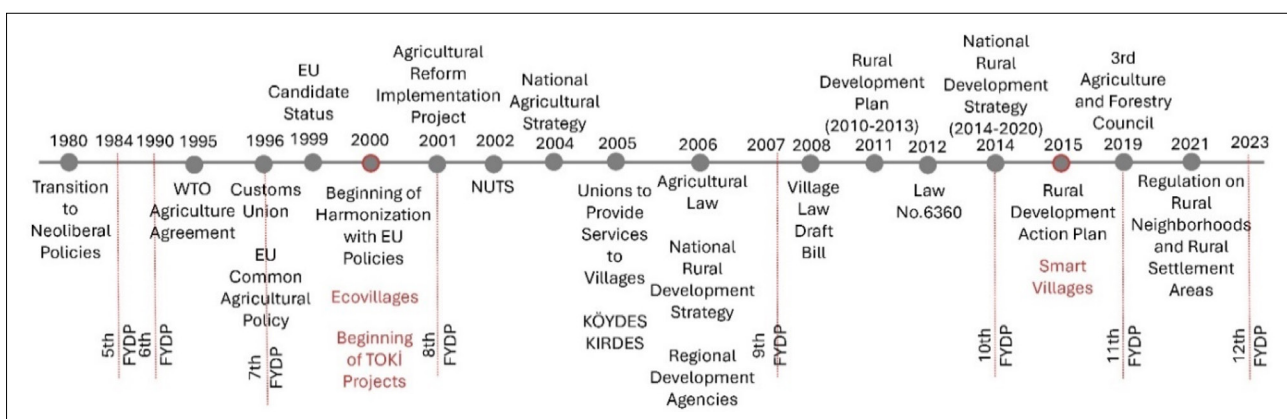


Figure 8. Timeline of policies in the planned period of post-1980s.

The **Seventh FYDP (1996–2000)** introduced the concept of "sustainable development" with the objective of ensuring agricultural development compatible with environmental protection. Both the Seventh and **Eighth FYDPs (2001–2005)** highlighted that the absence of land use plans for rural settlements led to the non-agricultural use of agricultural lands, negatively impacting agricultural productivity. In response, they proposed the implementation of preventive legal regulations and the preparation of zoning plans. These two plans marked an important step in explicitly recognizing indicators related to the **environmental** dimension of quality of life, while considering its interrelation with the **economic** dimension.

Furthermore, the plans suggested aiding entrepreneurs to foster rural industry (DPT, 2000). Due to harmonization with EU policies, the initiation of the **Agricultural Reform Implementation Project** in 2001 emphasized support for farmers and cooperatives (Eştürk & Ören, 2014). In 2002, in order to benefit from financial aid programs, **Rural Development Agencies** and **Regional Development Agencies** were established according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). Although these agencies originally had distinct responsibilities and operational fields, as Akin and Yıldız (2005) point out, they were later consolidated, which resulted in challenges related to administration and implementation. Consequently, Regional Development Agencies were transferred to the Ministry of Industry and Technology, and the Rural Development Agencies were dissolved. As a result, Regional Development Agencies assumed responsibility for rural development policies, but their role generally remained limited to financial support for related initiatives.

In 2004, a **National Agricultural Strategy** was adopted for the first time, outlining several key priorities (Çelik, 2005): improvement of rural infrastructure; renewal of villages; regulation of agricultural lands and prevention of their misuse; protection and management of natural resources; support for producer organizations; investment in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors; promotion of agricultural-industrial integration; development of organizations for the marketing of new production methods and products; mitigation of damage caused by natural disasters; and vocational training for rural communities. In line with these objectives, the **Agricultural Law** was enacted in 2006 to advance rural regions and support the agricultural sector. In the same year, the **National Rural Development Strategy** was introduced as a comprehensive policy framework to address the challenges faced by rural communities. The preparation of these documents specifically targeting rural settlements marked a positive step aligned with international efforts to improve quality of life in rural areas. However, due to the lack of effective implementation mechanisms, the quality of life in rural settlements—particularly the economic dimension—has

continued to deteriorate. Moreover, the persistent gap in opportunities compared to urban living standards has further accelerated rural-to-urban migration.

The **Ninth FYDP (2007–2013)**, aligned with EU accession, prioritized organic farming, e-commerce, support for young and women farmers, and food security. It highlighted sustainable resource use, water basin planning, and building a competitive agricultural sector, with district and town municipalities playing a key role in facilitating rural development (DPT, 2007b). This indicated a hint of the continuation of the Central Village approach—with a slight shift toward emphasizing the economic dimension of quality of life—and with priority given to tourism, conservation, and high-risk disaster areas.

In 2007, the **Agriculture and Rural Development Support Institution** was established for channeling grants, such as from the **Rural Development Investment Support Program** and **IPARD**, provided by the EU to farmers' investments. In this context, several indicators related to the **economic** dimension of quality of life in rural settlements were also brought to the agenda. Furthermore, with the adoption of the EU's **LEADER** program, efforts have been made to involve local stakeholders in decision-making processes and to improve rural living conditions, thereby addressing the **institutional** dimension of quality of life in rural settlements. However, although these economy-oriented programs developed under EU frameworks originally included spatial strategies, their adoption in Türkiye has largely lacked such components, raising concerns about their effectiveness in enhancing rural living.

The **General Directorate of Rural Services** was abolished, with its duties transferred to the Ministry of Public Works, while village responsibilities shifted to metropolitan municipalities and special provincial administrations. **Law No. 6360 (2012)** reclassified villages as neighborhoods within metropolitan areas, leading to economic challenges due to urban-level service charges and additional municipal obligations. This change affected all dimensions of quality of life, especially the **institutional** aspect, resulting in uncertainty in service provision. To address this, the **KÖYDES** and **KIRDES** projects were launched to support local and metropolitan rural municipalities.

The **Tenth FYDP (2014–2018)** introduced renewable energy for the first time, focusing on installing technology-based infrastructure to create an efficient and competitive agricultural sector. The plan also underscored the significance of social services and widespread internet use in enabling elderly and disabled participation in socio-economic activities (T.C. Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2014). Additionally, the necessity for a revised definition of "rural" was highlighted. In order to guide rural policies, the **Second (2014–2020) and Third National Rural Development**

Strategy (2021–2023) and the Rural Development Action Plan (2015–2018) were adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture. The primary objectives of these documents set forth the promotion of participation and organization, the facilitation of problem-solving, the provision of basic social and infrastructural requirements, the generation of sustainable income sources, the encouragement of entrepreneurship, the implementation of sustainable management of natural resources, and the strengthening of NGOs in the conservation of rural heritage and environment (Kan et al., 2020). Compared to previous FYDPs, these plans and strategies address multiple dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements more comprehensively, reflecting international approaches they seek to align with.

The **Eleventh FYDP (2019–2023)** proposed a framework leveraging innovative and environmentally friendly methods, digital opportunities, artificial intelligence, and data in the realm of smart agricultural technologies. It outlined the expansion of measures addressing climate change, sustainable agriculture, training for Good Agricultural Practices, contracted farming, clustering, research, marketing, and branding activities. Additionally, the plan envisaged the sustainability of the rural population, as well as the preservation of heritage, natural and cultural assets. It also emphasized the promotion of authentic handicrafts, agrotourism, the cultivation of alternative agricultural products, and the transfer of traditional production methods to future generations (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı, 2019). While primarily focusing on the **economic and environmental** dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements, the **Final Declaration of the Third Agriculture and Forestry Council**, held the same year, placed greater emphasis on the institutional dimension by outlining the restructuring of neighborhoods affiliated with metropolitan municipalities under Law No. 6360. Accordingly, the **2021 Regulation on Rural Neighborhoods and Rural Settlement Areas** classified settlements within metropolitan municipality boundaries that were converted into neighborhoods as “rural neighborhoods.” To this end, metropolitan municipalities were tasked with assessing neighborhoods exhibiting rural characteristics (T.C. Resmi Gazete, 2021). Consequently, the introduction of the terms “rural neighborhood” and “rural settlement” has aimed to facilitate a rethinking of rural areas. However, unclear procedures and the lack of defined status for these settlements within the planning hierarchy raise questions regarding differentiation among rural settlements. In this context, it is crucial to clarify which settlements will be encompassed by national rural settlement policies and how the distribution of administrative responsibilities will be determined.

The **Twelfth FYDP (2024–2028)** proposed the advancement of social prospects for women and youth in rural communities

with equal opportunities. Furthermore, the plan includes targets such as the development of innovative projects designed to facilitate reverse migration to rural settlements, the enhancement of quality of life, and the revitalization of the socio-economy based on the characteristics and potentials of the local area. While the plan emphasizes improving quality of life in rural settlements, it does not comprehensively cover all relevant dimensions and their interconnections.

Since the 1980s, FYDPs have introduced no new approaches for rural settlements. From the 2000s onward, state efforts have focused on **Agricultural Villages** built through TOKİ in post-disaster rural settlements. These projects aim to reduce migration by improving livelihoods, production, and social life (TOKİ, n.d.). However, Açmaz Özden & Özden (2019) criticize them for focusing mainly on replicated housing without public facilities, neglecting local authenticity, environment, and quality of life (Figure 9). In other words, these rural construction projects lack an agenda for providing a quality of life for their residents.

Apart from projects initiated by TOKİ and governmental ministries, most rural settlement initiatives such as **ecovillages and smart villages** are predominantly driven by private investors motivated mainly by economic objectives. While these projects may inadvertently foster urban-to-rural migration, they often fall short of adequately addressing the specific needs and challenges of existing rural communities. Moreover, rather than enhancing quality of life, these projects—especially when located in or adjacent to existing rural settlements—tend to disrupt the balance of the rural living environment. For instance, they encroach upon or degrade the nearby natural environment, exploit natural resources used by the local population, or indirectly alter the local economic structure due to the socio-economic characteristics of newcomers. These impacts, in turn, negatively affect the quality of life for long-standing residents, particularly in its **economic, environmental, and social** dimensions. Furthermore, the independent evolution of these initiatives is largely attributable to the absence of comprehensive, coordinated policies and strategic frameworks at the national level, which hampers their potential to contribute effectively to sustainable rural development.

To summarize the rural policies of this period, although most of them mainly focused on the economic dimension, it is evident that each policy emphasized different aspects of quality of life rather than considering it as a holistic concept. The main shortcomings of these strategies were the lack of clearly defined tools and the absence of a well-structured and planned institutional framework. The dimensions and indicators associated with this period will be presented in a table and discussed in more detail in the discussion and conclusion section.



Figure 9. Agricultural village samples (TOKİ, n.d.).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A review of the literature and documentary evidence in this research indicated that the policies and approaches to rural settlements in Türkiye have been short-term, whereas the majority of them sought to address similar problems and proposals from a piecemeal perspective, either incomplete or not implemented.

Between 1963 and 1980, most policies introduced new rural settlement approaches. After 1980, while some strategies persisted—mainly with the Central Village model—no fundamentally new approaches were adopted (Table 4; Table 5; Table 6).

In the first sub-period, rural approaches addressed various quality of life dimensions, except the institutional one. Although each dimension included indicators, clear implementation plans were largely missing. Economic goals like improving agriculture and specialization lacked defined tools. Technical and social infrastructure were mentioned as broad improvements without concrete strategies. Nevertheless, the environmental dimension had fewer indicators, acknowledging goals like protection and efficiency but without clear methods to achieve them. The sustainability of the approaches was limited by weak authority delegation, staff shortages, limited funding, and low public participation.

In contrast, the post-1980 period shifted focus towards **economic and environmental** dimensions. During this period, economic indicators became more detailed,

outlining key sectors for rural investment. This increased specificity, particularly in these two areas, reflects Türkiye's shift toward international frameworks and the EU accession process. As rural policies began to align with the priorities and standards of the EU and other global actors, the emphasis transitioned from merely identifying goals to partially defining actionable pathways for achieving them. Institutional indicators like public participation and legal regulations were added to policies, also largely drawn from international sources rather than local needs or inputs from the community. The financial sources were unclear, public communication methods were unspecified, and rural priorities were poorly defined. Although technical and social infrastructure indicators remained in policies, they continuously lacked clear tools or implementation strategies, which highlighted a major gap in addressing quality of life comprehensively.

Beyond the rural settlement policies addressed and reflected in the tables within this study, there are, of course, other policies as well as sectoral ones. The policies and approaches evaluated in this study have been limited in scope to those that represent the most significant historical turning points and have shaped the overall trajectory. Furthermore, repeated indicators from previous periods were not duplicated in the tables due to the lack of new discourse. The recurring issues and recommendations highlight a failure to incorporate lessons from the past. Despite frequent mentions of participation in FYDPs, policies often overlooked local needs and priorities. Theoretical solutions were

Table 4. Comparison of rural settlement policies between 1963 and 1980 based on the dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements

Governmental Policy	Approach	Dimensions and Indicators of Quality of Life			
		Economic	Technical Infrastructure	Social Infrastructure	Environmental Institutional
-	Model Village (1963-1966)	-	-	Improvement of services Creation of new public buildings	-
First Five-Year Development Plan (1963–1967)	Community Development	Agricultural cooperatives Agricultural extension New employment opportunities	Housing construction	Improvement of services Reduction of regional social disparities	Collaboration between state institutions and rural communities
Second Five-Year Development Plan (1968–1972)		Training programs			Participation
-	Multi-Dimensional Rural Area Planning (1965-1975)	Agricultural production development Marketing Cooperatives Credits	Transportation and infrastructure development	Family planning Education Health Social services	Rational use of resources Spatial planning Environmental protection
Settlement Law (1970)	-	Credits	Relocating villages to more accessible locations for infrastructure Standardized building plans	-	Standardized village layout
Third Five-Year Development Plan (1973–1977)	Central Village Approach	Vocational training Agricultural extension Marketplaces Trade hubs	-	Extending services Service hubs	-
-	Rural Development Projects (1976-2010)	Economic development Modernizing primary sectors Educating farmers Providing credits	Infrastructural development	Social development	Efficiency of natural resource utilization
Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1979–1983)	Village Town (1979-2001)	Specialization in economic fields Cooperatives and credits Production facilities Crop production Tourism	Infrastructure Transportation	Service provision at urban standards Social services Education Healthcare Sports, playgrounds and religious facilities Community centers	Spatial planning

Table 5. Comparison of rural settlement policies after 1980 based on the dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements

Governmental Policy	Approach	Dimensions and Indicators of Quality of Life				
		Economic	Technical Infrastructure	Social Infrastructure	Environmental	Institutional
Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1984–1989)	Central Village Approach (Continuation)	Continuation	-	Continuation	-	-
Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (1990–1994)	Central Village Approach (Continuation)	Agricultural industrial investments	-	Service provision on health and education	-	-
Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (1996–2000)	-	Agricultural development	-	-	Environmental protection. Land use and zoning plans	Legal regulations-
Eighth Five-Year Development Plan (2001–2005)	-	-	-	-	Land use and zoning plans	Legal regulations
National Agricultural Strategy (2004)	-	Support for producer organizations Investment in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors	Infrastructure	-	Renewal of villages Protection and management of natural resources	Legal regulations
Agricultural Law (2006)		Agricultural-industrial integration			Mitigation of damage caused by natural disasters	
National Rural Development Strategy (2006)		New production methods and products				
		Vocational training				
Ninth Five-Year Development Plan (2007–2013)	-	Organic farming e-commerce Support for young and women farmers Competitive agricultural sector	-	-	Sustainable utilization of natural resources Planning of water basins	-
Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2014–2018)	-	Efficient and competitive agricultural sector	Installation of technology-based infrastructure Use of the internet	Social services	Renewable energy	-
Second National Rural Development Strategy (2014–2020)	-	Sustainable income sources Encouragement of entrepreneurship	Provision of basic infrastructural requirements	Provision of basic social requirements	Sustainable management of natural resources Conservation of rural heritage and environment	Participation and organization Facilitation of problem-solving
Third National Rural Development Strategy (2021–2023) (T.C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2021)						
Rural Development Action Plan (2015–2018)						

Table 6. Comparison of rural settlement policies after 1980 based on the dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements (continued from Table 5)

Governmental Policy	Approach	Dimensions and Indicators of Quality of Life				
		Economic	Technical Infrastructure	Social Infrastructure	Environmental	Institutional
Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2019–2023)	-	Smart agriculture Training for Good Agricultural Practices Contracted farming Clustering Research Marketing and branding activities Promotion of authentic handicrafts Agrotourism Cultivation of alternative agricultural products Transfer of traditional production methods	Digital opportunities Artificial intelligence Use of data	-	Innovative and environmentally friendly methods Climate change Sustainable agriculture Preservation of heritage, natural and cultural assets	-
	-	-	-	-	-	Restructuring of neighborhoods affiliated with metropolitan municipalities
Regulation on Rural Neighborhoods and Rural Settlement Areas (2021)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Twelfth Five-Year Development Plan (2024–2028)				Advancement of social prospects for women and youth		

undermined by poor implementation, limited adaptation to local contexts, and the sidelining of local administrations.

A key challenge has been the dispersed, small-scale nature of rural settlements, making service delivery difficult and costly. However, responses have lacked a holistic view that balances rural–urban dynamics. As a result, rural-to-urban migration has persisted, highlighting the need to boost both the rural economy and quality of life. From a broader perspective, the migration parameters identified in the literature—economic conditions, infrastructure, security, environment, and social structure—closely align with the key dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements. Consequently, it is conceivable that the decline in Türkiye’s rural population and primary economic activities could threaten national food security and the economy, signifying the importance of rural settlement policies for social welfare.

Despite the recognition of these challenges and emerging priorities in national development plans, practical implementation in rural settlement policies remains insufficient. While the recent development plans emphasize new concepts like sustainability, smart technologies, and food security, these are not reflected in rural settlement practices. This gap stems from the absence of a dedicated authority to develop innovative rural approaches. The Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development Agencies are primarily concerned with the provision of financial assistance to rural communities. However, there is a lack of dedicated institutional capacity for the development of innovative solutions that address the multifaceted challenges facing rural settlements. Given the country’s geographic, climatic, and socio-economic diversity, each rural area has unique needs, which complicates uniform policy implementation and outcomes. As a result, rural development is limited to TOKİ-built housing, which is sold rather than tailored to the needs of economically disadvantaged villagers.

Even more strikingly, since the 1980s, private sector projects in rural areas have mostly focused on building new settlements, often ignoring local identity and socio-economic context. These projects tend to become tourism, real estate, or advertising ventures,

creating communities disconnected from rural culture and economy. In this context, as in pre-1980 efforts and international examples, it's essential for the state—not just the private sector—to lead rural settlement planning and implementation.

Besides evaluating the scope of the policies and approaches regarding the dimensions of rural quality of life, it is equally important to assess their effectiveness in practice. Based on the content analysis presented above, this study also assesses the rural settlement policies and approaches using four **OECD (2021)** criteria: **relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and sustainability**. These criteria provide a qualitative framework not only for evaluating the stated objectives of the policies but also for examining their actual implementation and long-term impacts. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of policy performance, extending beyond the initial scope of analysis. However, due to the lack of detailed quantitative data regarding policy outcomes, this evaluation relies on the presence or absence of clear evidence for each criterion in policy documents and secondary sources.

Although all the policies and approaches reviewed in this study appear to have **relevance** to the identified dimensions of quality of life in rural settlements, their **coherence, effectiveness, and sustainability** vary significantly (Table 7; Table 8).

In the **1963–1980 period**, coherence—examined through the question “*Were the strategies embedded within the policies and approaches coherent and well-aligned with other policies to improve rural quality of life?*”—shows that most of the rural settlement approaches were largely consistent with other national policy goals and development frameworks. However, in the **post-1980 period**, even though rural settlement policies remained conceptually coherent and were included in national development plans, the actual implementation prioritized urban, particularly metropolitan, development. As a result, rural areas were marginalized in practice. Therefore, it is difficult to argue that these rural policies were coherent in terms of their alignment with broader development efforts during implementation.

Regarding **effectiveness**, the question “*When considered in the context of quality of life, have the implementations achieved their objectives?*” reveals that during the 1963–1980 period, many of the proposed approaches were not implemented as originally planned, limiting their ability to meet their stated goals. In the post-1980 period, despite the presence of relevant objectives related to rural quality of life, these policies lacked actionable frameworks or concrete implementation mechanisms. Consequently, strategies built around abstract concepts failed to produce effective outcomes on the ground.

In terms of **sustainability**, the **Central Village approach** is notable for its recurring presence across decades and its implicit continuation in current practices. However, the success of this approach in improving rural quality of life remains open to debate. Other approaches, by contrast, were largely discontinued due to institutional weaknesses, limited funding, and lack of participatory mechanisms. Nevertheless, when looking at laws, plans, and strategic documents—particularly those developed after 1980—some policy elements appear to have conceptual continuity with more recent strategies, likely due to their alignment with global development discourses. Yet this type of sustainability is mostly theoretical and fails to translate into visible improvements in rural quality of life.

Based on these findings and the gaps identified in previous implementations, the following strategic directions are proposed for future rural development policies:

- **Economic strategies** that not only define the targets but also specify the tools to achieve them, such as enhancing production; providing education to support grassroots development; promoting entrepreneurship and expanding employment opportunities through the creation of place-based sectors and products tailored to the capacities of individual settlements; and formulating effective policies that support small-scale enterprises rather than focusing solely on large-scale producers or external investors.
- **Social and technical infrastructure strategies** that extend beyond identifying development needs by addressing the economic instruments necessary for implementation, while also defining the potential roles of communities, cooperatives, and other local actors in this process; as well as developing technological facilities through various public partnerships, integrating them into both production and daily life, and educating the rural population to effectively utilize them.
- **Environmental strategies** that emphasize not only the protection of natural resources and ecosystems, but also clearly define the specific responsibilities of the state and the public in this regard; that encourage the adaptation of successful international conservation practices to local contexts; and that consider both the natural environment and built environment, ensuring that living and production spaces—along with their interrelations—are addressed comprehensively within the broader environmental framework.
- **Institutional strategies** that begin by acknowledging the shortcomings of past approaches, particularly concerning the problematic delegation of authority and limited public participation, and thus emphasize the development of transparent policies and approaches that account for the demographic diversity of

Table 7. Assessment of the effectiveness of rural settlement policies and approaches between 1963 and 1980 on quality of life

Governmental Policy	Approach	Evaluation Criteria			Sustainability
		Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	
-	Model Village (1963-1966)	Yes: The approach included interventions regarding social infrastructure	No: The approach was not supported by policies	No: The approach was not implemented as planned	No: The approach was discontinued due to lack of participation and failure to address local needs
First Five-Year Development Plan (1963–1967)	Community Development	Yes: The approach included interventions on all dimensions of quality of life besides environment	Yes: The approach was parallel to the rural policies	Yes: The approach was implemented in various provinces as planned	No: The approach was discontinued due to lack of institutional limits
Second Five-Year Development Plan (1968–1972)					
-	Multi-Dimensional Rural Area Planning (1965-1975)	Yes: The approach included interventions on all dimensions of quality of life besides institution	No: The approach was not applied as originally planned according to the rural policies	No: The approach was implemented in a very limited manner	No: The approach was discontinued due to lack of institutional limits
Settlement Law (1970)	-	Yes: The law included interventions regarding technical infrastructure and environment	Yes: The law was consistent with past and future policies	No: The law was implemented in a very limited manner	Yes: The law remains in Türkiye's rural policies
Third Five-Year Development Plan (1973-1977)	Central Village Approach	Yes: The approach included interventions regarding economy and social infrastructure	Yes: The approach was parallel to the rural policies	No: The approach was implemented in a very limited manner	Yes: The approach was maintained in future policies and practices
-	Rural Development Projects (1976-2010)	Yes: The approach included interventions on all dimensions of quality of life besides institution	Yes: The approach was parallel to the rural policies	Yes: The approach was implemented in various provinces as planned	Yes: The approach is still maintained implicitly
Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1979–1983)	Village Town (1979-2001)	Yes: The approach included interventions on all dimensions of quality of life besides institution	Yes: The approach was parallel to the rural policies	No: The approach was implemented in a very limited manner	No: The approach was discontinued due to lack of participation or administrative changes

Table 8. Assessment of the effectiveness of rural settlement policies and approaches after 1980 on quality of life

Governmental Policy	Approach	Evaluation Criteria		
		Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness
Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1984–1989)	Central Village Approach (Continuation)	Yes: The approach included interventions regarding economy and social infrastructure	Yes: The approach was parallel to the rural policies	No: The approach was implemented in a very limited manner
Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (1990–1994)				Yes: The approach was maintained in future policies and practices
Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (1996–2000)	-	Yes: The plans included interventions regarding economy, environment and institution	No: The plans were not parallel to implementations, especially in urban areas	No: While the plans appear to be holistic, there were no main approaches for implementation
Eighth Five-Year Development Plan (2001–2005)				Yes: The objectives of these plans still remain in today's policies
National Agricultural Strategy (2004)	-	Yes: The strategies and law included interventions on all dimensions of quality of life besides social infrastructure	No: The strategies and the law were not parallel to other national strategies and implementations especially in urban areas	No: While the strategies and the law appear to be holistic, there were no main approaches for implementation
Agricultural Law (2006)				Yes: The objectives of these strategies and law still remain in today's policies
National Rural Development Strategy (2006)				
Ninth Five-Year Development Plan (2007–2013)	-	Yes: The plan included interventions regarding economy and environment	No: The plan was not parallel to implementations, especially in urban areas	No: While the plan appears to be holistic, there were no main approaches for implementation
Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2014–2018)	-	Yes: The plan included interventions on all dimensions of quality of life besides institution	No: The plan was not parallel to implementations, especially in urban areas	Yes: The objectives of this plan still remain in today's policies
Second National Rural Development Strategy (2014–2020)	-	Yes: The plan included interventions on all dimensions of quality of life	No: The plan was not parallel to implementations, especially in urban areas	No: While the strategies and the plan appear to be holistic, there were no main approaches for implementation
Third National Rural Development Strategy (2021–2023)				Yes: The objectives of these strategies and plan still remain in today's policies
(T.C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2021)				
Rural Development Action Plan (2015–2018)				

Table 8. Assessment of the effectiveness of rural settlement policies and approaches after 1980 on quality of life (Cont.)

Governmental Policy Approach	Evaluation Criteria			
	Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Sustainability
Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2019–2023)	Yes: The plan included interventions on all dimensions of quality of life besides social infrastructure and institution	No: The plan was not parallel to implementations, especially in urban areas	No: While the plan appears to be holistic, there were no main approaches for implementation	Yes: The objectives of this plan still remain in today's policies
Final Declaration of the Third Agriculture and Forestry Council (2019)	Yes: The documents included interventions regarding economic, environmental and institutional dimensions of quality of life	No: The documents were not clear regarding their implementation in parallel to other policies and implementations	No: While the documents appear to be holistic, there were no main approaches for implementation	Yes: The objectives of these documents still remain in today's policies
Regulation on Rural Neighborhoods and Rural Settlement Areas (2021)				
Twelfth Five-Year Development Plan (2024–2028)	Yes: The plan included interventions regarding social infrastructure	No: The plan was not parallel to implementations, especially in urban areas	No: While the documents appear to be holistic, there were no main approaches for implementation	Yes: The objectives of these documents still remain in today's policies

different regions. These should enable meaningful local participation in decision-making processes, including educating local communities about the scope and importance of their involvement, while also prioritizing improvements in inter-institutional coordination during implementation—a challenge that has persisted over time.

Overall, rural settlement policies should holistically enhance quality of life, recognizing that rural economies now extend beyond primary sectors. Globalization and the information age have transformed rural areas into multifunctional and multisectoral spaces. Therefore, future strategies must be **multi-dimensional**, **multi-sectoral**, and **multi-disciplinary** to reflect these shifts.

To effectively improve the quality of life and prevent rural-to-urban migration, it is essential to identify the **economic**, **technical**, **social**, **environmental**, and **institutional** dimensions that shape well-being in each community. Place-specific and context-sensitive approaches that address these dimensions comprehensively are crucial for developing sustainable and resilient rural policies. Moreover, as observed in the post-1980 period, it is essential to shift from **abstract goals to concrete implementation objectives** and to address rural settlements in an integrated manner with other sectoral policies and strategies developed for urban areas.

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