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New Policies, Trends, and Experiences in Resilient Urban Food Systems in Türkiye in the Age of Multiple Crises

Çoklu Krizler Çağında Türkiye’de Dirençli Kentsel Gıda Sistemlerinde Yeni Politikalar, Eğilimler ve Deneyimler
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ABSTRACT

Developments such as the food crisis, COVID-19, increasing drought due to global warming and earthquakes are prompting widespread discussions on how to strengthen and make cities, in which the majority of the world’s population now resides, more resilient to sudden shocks, both globally and in Türkiye. As questioning of the industrial food system becomes more prevalent, crises and shocks are compelling many actors to construct new food systems centered around fresh food policies and strategies. Within this broader context, this study examines local food systems established through cooperation between international organizations, ministries, and local initiatives within the framework of local/rural development policies in cities in Türkiye such as Hatay, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Adana, and Mardin. These local food systems, in which newly established cooperatives play key roles, have evolved into models that bring together actors of various scales—such as women producers, small family producers, and refugees—with global organizations, ministries, and NGOs. The study focuses on these local food systems in terms of their governance mechanisms, supply chains, localization, and resilience potential. The research draws on data collected during fieldwork conducted in 2021 and 2022, as well as observations made during subsequent field visits in 2023 and 2024. Urban food systems evolving through the support and collaboration of multiple actors play a critical role in integrating small farmers, women, and refugees into the system. However, the strong influence of higher-level institutional structures also poses new challenges in building resilient systems.

Keywords: Cooperatives; governance; localization; resilience; urban food systems.

ÖZ

Gıda krizi, COVID-19, küresel ısınmaya bağlı artan kuraklık ve deprem gibi gelişmeler, dünyada ve Türkiye’de nüfusun ağırlıklı olarak yaşadığı kentleri ani şoklara karşı güçlendirme ve dirençli hâle getirme tartışmalarını yaygınlaştırmaktadır. Bu süreçte endüstriyel gıda sistemine ilişkin sorgulamalar artarken, çoklu krizler aktörleri yeni politikalar ve stratejiler etrafında gıda sistemleri inşa etmeye zorlamaktadır. Türkiye’de uluslararası örgütlerden merkezi devlete, yerel yönetimlerden gıda inisiyatifleri ve kadın örgütlenmelerine kadar birçok aktör özellikle kent ölçeğinde yeni modeller geliştirmektedir. Bu çerçevede çalışmada; Hatay, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Adana, Mardin gibi kentlerde uluslararası örgütler, bakanlıklar ve yerel inisiyatifler arasındaki işbirlikleriyle kurulan yerel gıda sistemleri ele alınmıştır. Yeni kooperatiflerin merkezi roller üstlendiği kentsel gıda sistemleri; kadın üreticiler, küçük aile üreticileri ve mültecilerle küresel örgütler, bakanlıklar, yerel yönetimler ve STK’lar gibi farklı ölçeklerdeki aktörleri bir araya getiren modellere dönüşmüştür. Yerel gıda sistemleri; yönetimlik mekanizmaları, tedarik zincirleri, yerelleşme ve dirençlilik potansiyelleri bakımından değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışmada 2021–2022’de yapılan saha araştırması verileri ile 2023–2024’te tekrarlanan ziyaretlerdeki gözlemlerden yararlanılmıştır. Çoklu aktörlerin destek ve işbirlikleri çerçevesinde gelişen kentsel gıda sistemleri; küçük çiftçiler, kadınlar ve mültecilerin sistemle entegre olmasında kritik roller üstlenmektedir. Ancak üst ölçekteki kurumsal yapıların güçlü etkileri dirençli sistemlerin inşası bakımından yeni sorunlar da yaratmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Kooperatifler; yönetim; yerelleşme; dirençlilik; kentsel gıda sistemleri.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, in addition to the increasingly evident crises in food and ecology, the COVID-19 pandemic, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, and wars have encouraged new approaches and searches for models in the fields of agriculture and food both in the world and in Türkiye. The food crisis, which at first glance manifests with rapidly rising prices, nutritional problems and food security issues, is closely tied to multifaceted problems that emerge in areas such as rural-urban relations, migration, employment, climate change, and the political crises they accompany. In Türkiye, which ranks among the top five countries experiencing rapid increases in food prices in recent years (Yıldırım, 2024), extreme climatic conditions such as rising temperatures and drought, along with challenges in agricultural production, employment, and urban access to affordable and healthy food, are emerging as key dimensions of the crisis. As multidimensional crises and shocks associated with natural disasters become part of daily life, development models based on economic growth and productivity are being questioned globally and domestically. In this regard, numerous actors have started to develop new models in the areas of urban food systems and ecological frameworks. Reports published by the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2008 and 2021 have highlighted issues related to the industrial food regime and the need for policy changes in agriculture (FAO, 2008; 2021). Alongside the policies implemented by global organizations such as the European Union (EU), other countries and the World Bank (WB), which focus on sustainability, transitioning to a green economy, and inclusive policies, discussions on cooperative economies, degrowth, circular economy, and localization have become prominent topics in the process of change and transformation. A key aspect of this process is enhancing the alignment of urban food systems—from production to consumption—with ecological principles, while simultaneously building more resilient and inclusive systems capable of withstanding multiple crises and shocks.

Social cooperatives, or new generation cooperatives, have become one of the leading elements of new development programs worldwide in recent years. The cooperative policy, rooted in the concept of social and solidarity economies, represents one of the key strategies endorsed by international organizations, including the UN, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the EU, and the OECD. The ICA employs the framework of social and solidarity economies to characterize the production of goods and services by various non-profit organizations and initiatives guided by principles of solidarity, ethics, and democratic governance, while simultaneously integrating ecological objectives (UN, 2014; ICA, 2020). Within this framework, cooperatives are regarded as

essential entities for advancing sustainability, facilitating the transition to a green economy, enhancing livelihoods, and promoting small-scale producers and women's entrepreneurship. Spain and Italy stand out as prominent examples where advanced models of social and solidarity economies have been developed, particularly in the domains of agriculture, food systems, and social services. Businesses and cooperatives operating within the social solidarity economy contribute approximately 10% to Spain's national income and 15% to that of Italy (EU, 2022). Notably, the number of social cooperatives active in these economies has expanded significantly in Spain and Italy in the years since the 2008 financial crisis.

In countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico, cooperative-type organizations have reemerged in the context of local development, inclusive business models, and multiple social policies (UN, 2021). It has also been noted that in Türkiye's 11th and 12th Development Plans, cooperative-type organizations will be supported to assist and empower disadvantaged groups, such as women and small family farmers. Furthermore, the new public management approach has brought flexible, accountable, and transparent governance practices to the forefront, rather than rigid, bureaucratic, and centralized structures, with an emphasis on quality at every stage (Yılmaz, 2015, p. 200).

In the face of multifaceted crises and shocks, questioning of industrial food systems has become increasingly widespread, with new frameworks of food policies and new practices and models alongside new structures being established. In Türkiye, interest in production and supply models has been growing with respect to collaboration, accountability, local scale, and ecological policy-making processes. In addition to the dominant system controlled by corporations and supermarkets, we observe the emergence of various alternative models that draw on local culture, institutions, and social movements. These models develop within short supply chains and adhere to ethical and ecological principles. The political polarization being experienced in Türkiye has also affected the agricultural and food sectors, with novel food policies being adopted in response to the crisis, which in turn has resulted in greater diversification. In certain cases, emerging agricultural and food policies have deliberately positioned themselves outside the frameworks of the central state, market, and capital. For this reason, The Hopa Agricultural Development Cooperative, the Ovacık Experience, and the Gödençe Agricultural Development Cooperatives, along with food initiatives and consumer cooperatives that collaborate with small-scale farmers and women producers, all strive to establish alternative food systems in urban areas based on the principles of solidarity economy.¹

¹ In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature on alternative food networks and cooperative efforts in Türkiye, with an increase in relevant books, articles, and theses. For examples of these studies, see Öngel and Yıldırım (2019), Özkaya (2021), and Şahin (2021).

Alongside the above-mentioned model, many local governments have started to develop rural-urban economy systems aimed at empowering small family farmers and women producers while addressing the city's need for healthy food, and utilizing the opportunities provided by amendments to municipal law. Moreover, as the operations known as the 'İzmir Model,' begun during the term of Mayor Aziz Kocaoğlu of the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, and the Ovacık Experience, initiated by Fatih Maçoğlu, are recognized as pioneering experiences by many other local governments—including the metropolitan municipalities of İstanbul, Çanakkale, Eskişehir, Gaziantep, Konya, and Adana, as well as district municipalities such as Karşıyaka and Nilüfer—they too have also started to develop food policies and strategies. Therefore, a primary *raison d'être* for these cooperatives is the twofold aim of local governments' rural development policies, namely empowering small producers and addressing the city's need for healthy and affordable food. As observed in these models, the contemporary understanding of cooperatives not only aims to strengthen rural areas and agriculture but also address the economic needs of urban life and underdeveloped areas within cities, particularly those of disadvantaged communities (Yalçın, 2022, p. 16). Furthermore, these new generation cooperatives provide institutions and municipalities with the opportunity to implement comprehensive, inclusive food policies that integrate rural and urban systems.

In addition to these various models, another we will focus on in this study is the food systems that have been established through collaboration between international organizations, ministries, and local initiatives within the framework of local/rural development policies in cities such as Hatay, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Adana, and Mardin, all of whose agricultural and food systems have been affected by shocks such as drought, climate change, pandemics, and earthquakes in recent years (Özcan, 2018; Yılmaz et al., 2020; Yıldızcan, 2023). These cities also received large numbers of refugees following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. Thus, the food crisis and shocks resulting from natural disasters, combined with employment and social integration issues, brought to prominence the construction of new food systems, organized by governance mechanisms and institutions. This process, manifested through a new dynamic of cooperativism, has transformed into models that bring together actors a range of actors, including women producers, small family farmers, and refugees at the local level with global organizations, ministries, and NGOs.

The governance mechanisms applied within the framework of local/rural development paradigms are structured around various social policies, including the food crisis, women's empowerment, refugee social integration, and climate change. The support policies implemented within this framework are carried out with cooperative-type or-

ganizations based on new entrepreneurship, and job and employment development opportunities in the pursuit of profitability aimed at disadvantaged groups.

Thus, it is assumed that cooperatives play new roles in local development and food systems within this framework, roles which significantly differ from other models in terms of their relationship with the central state and the market, as well as in their guiding principles and values. Cooperatives in receipt of substantial support from international organizations and institutions during their establishment, development, and operations are structured according to principles such as branding, entrepreneurship, and profitability, spanning the entire process from production to sales. The roles of cooperative policies in local food systems vary considerably, involving a diverse range of actors, including international organizations, the central state, civil society components, and social movements. Beyond models integrated with the central state and market relations, cooperatives emerging from grassroots organizations—such as food initiatives, women's organizations, and ecological movements—also display notable differences in roles and principles. This study will therefore focus on the diversity of complex relations which cooperatives and food systems embrace based both on principles such as entrepreneurship, branding, and profitability as they align with market relations, and those other principles that have evolved through collaboration with the central state, local authorities, and social networks.

As will be discussed in the field data section of this study, the number of cooperatives established in recent years for agricultural development and women's entrepreneurship has increased rapidly. These cooperatives play a crucial role in food systems, bridging local production and urban consumption. They are formed within the framework of employment and integration policies aimed at small family farmers, women producers, and refugees, and they deliver to urban consumers food products produced and processed using local and traditional methods via various collaborations, support mechanisms, and digital channels. Thus, cooperatives, operating within governance frameworks, are pivotal in forging social and economic connections between production groups, ministries, NGOs, and international organizations, as well as between rural and urban areas. This study investigates the experiences of multi-stakeholder local food systems that have been established and expanded through various institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks since the onset of the pandemic, particularly in the cities of southeast Türkiye mentioned above. Grounded in the conceptualization of resilient food systems, a significant proportion of these cooperatives—key actors in the development of local food systems—were founded in the post-pandemic period. They operate within a framework of extensive collaboration and support involving diverse groups, including women, small-scale producers, and

refugee organizations, as well as institutions and organizations at both local and higher administrative levels. This study will critically examine the evolution of local food systems, fostered through cooperation between cooperatives and institutions, focusing on key dimensions such as governance, localization, and short supply chains, while assessing the opportunities and constraints these systems face in terms of resilience.

2. Literature: Urban Food Systems and Resilience

According to Akşit (2006), theoretical debates on agrarian question and the transformation of small-scale peasantry in Türkiye during the 1960s and 1970s predominantly revolved around systemic and structural processes such as modernization and capitalist influences, and their effects on rural areas. These debates emphasized diversified transformation processes. The critical literature of the 1990s and 2000s, while primarily concerned with the transformations and dislocations brought about by neoliberal capitalism—especially in the context of rural areas and agricultural systems—has evolved in recent theoretical discourse to increasingly emphasize the urban scale, thereby embedding cities within a more holistic framework. Tekeli (2015) argues that the blurring of boundaries between rural and urban areas necessitates a re-evaluation of agricultural and food issues within the context of urban systems. This perspective is reinforced by the 2016 UN HABITAT III Report, which emphasizes the importance of supporting small and medium-sized cities in enhancing food security and nutrition through cooperation and solidarity across various scales (UN HABITAT, 2017, p. 17).

As the focus on capitalism's global and local impacts has intensified, so too has interest grown in local initiatives, food organizations, official institutions, and NGOs that base themselves on agricultural and food issues. Hence, resilience, robustness, and inclusivity of food systems have become the subject of studies, especially in the face of crises and shocks.² Agriculture and food systems thus intersect with multidimensional problems, including the effects of climate change on food security, agricultural labor loss, migration, and employment issues. These complex challenges underscore the need to restructure rural-urban relations, making it essential to build resilient, local food systems based on ecological principles and inclusive models for marginalized groups.

The FAO and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Food Systems (RUAF), for instance, have been approaching food systems through participatory and governance processes that involve various institutions, poli-

cies, scales, and programs (Blay-Palmer et al., 2021). Their frameworks address three main subtopics: (1) evaluating the vulnerabilities and strengths of food systems across rural and urban areas; (2) fostering continuity and planning between rural and urban areas, enhancing multi-stakeholder collaboration; and (3) coordinating actions to protect livelihoods and ensure food and nutrition security.

The concept of resilience has been greatly explored in various studies focusing on how to minimize the social, economic, and ecological risks and vulnerabilities associated with natural disasters throughout the entire agricultural and food system, ranging from cultivation, harvesting, packaging and processing, to distribution, marketing, consumption, and waste management (Ericksen, 2008; Committee on World Food Security, 2016; Ballamingi et al., 2022). Resilience involves enhancing the system's capacity to withstand future crises and shocks across all stages and scales. Studies suggest that preparing food systems for future shocks requires strengthening access to sufficient, healthy food, establishing food sovereignty, maintaining biodiversity, and preserving local and cultural knowledge (Tendall, 2015; Hospes & Brons, 2016; Dower & Gaddis, 2021).

2.1. Governance Principles in Food Systems

A significant dimension of resilient food systems is regulation based on horizontal relationships between rural and urban areas that adheres to multi-stakeholder governance principles. It has been emphasized by many scholars that effective local-scale food systems require governance mechanisms (İlhan & Kerimoğlu, 2023). Hospes (2016) also describes multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms as involving small producer groups, cooperatives, social movements, consumers, and NGOs in policy, planning, and strategy formulation to build fair and sustainable food systems within the capitalist framework. Multi-partner projects involving various institutions, civil society organizations, local governments, academics, and social movements are essential to the resilience process.

Faus and Sonnino (2018) have analyzed the concept of governance in relation to the literature on social movements and interactions across diverse localities and urban contexts. Within this framework, food policies and practices tailored to the specific needs and capacities of local settings are considered through the lens of network formation, cross-sectoral and multi-scalar collaborations, the cultivation of shared imaginaries and collective action capacities across localities, and the facilitation of knowledge and experience flows. In this context, the food planning process is structured through interactions, collaborations, and organizational frameworks

² The concept of 'inclusivity' which is considered one of the foundational elements of making systems resilient, is addressed on the basis of providing goods, services, and livelihood resources to disadvantaged groups at the base of the economic pyramid and integrating them into value chains (G20, 2025; Schoneveld, 2022). In agricultural and food systems, providing opportunities such as purchasing guarantees, machinery/input support, and technical assistance to strengthen the production ties of vulnerable groups, such as small family farmers, women producers, and refugees, is seen as one of the key dimensions of 'inclusive' models. Furthermore, the empowerment of women in rural areas and the integration of their knowledge and experience into food systems is another critical feature of building inclusive, resilient, and sustainable systems (Kumar et al., 2023).

spanning multiple scales, sectors, localities, and actors. Similarly, Morgan (2009) conceptualizes the process of food policy and planning in the development of sustainable food systems as an inclusive and participatory endeavor that unfolds within communities and engages a diverse array of actors.

Moreover, effective governance processes between municipalities, administrators, and national or international organizations serves to enhance both democratic processes and urban resilience (Ballamingie, 2018). During crises, governance models that focus on local dynamics and adopt bottom-up rather than top-down methods, are more likely to produce flexible and responsive policies. Research by the FAO during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that top-down methods often failed due to communication gaps and inadequate resource distribution (FAO, 2020a, p. 14).

Especially municipalities in cities such as Lima in Peru, Dhaka in Bangladesh, and various African cities developed partnerships with local communities to ensure effective food distribution and supply chains during the pandemic. Thus, the food systems approach requires coordination among numerous actors, from rural to urban areas, and from production to consumption, adopting a holistic perspective (Tendall et al., 2015). Strong connections between food councils and multi-stakeholder platforms through multi-scale governance mechanisms are crucial for developing suitable, flexible, and rapid policies during crises.

2.2. Short Supply Chains and Localization in Food Systems

Localization and short supply chains are also significant in building resilient food systems. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with other crises such as wars, earthquakes, and climate change-related disasters, has underscored the need for management models that are sensitive to local dynamics in food planning and policy-making processes. The literature highlights the challenges of applying a general template for food planning and the vulnerabilities of global industrial food systems in the face of shocks (Blay-Palmer et al., 2021). Localization involves developing participatory networks between city centers, surrounding areas, and rural regions, reducing reliance on distant sources for food, and leveraging local resources.

Examples such as the agricultural region of Montréal, Brazil's National Food Program, and Ontario's Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance illustrate efforts to source locally-produced food to ensure a stable supply during extreme events (Ballamingie et al., 2022; Diekmann et al., 2020). Strengthening rural-urban ties, fostering local economies, and reducing carbon emissions through shorter supply chains align with the UN's sustainability goals under Goal 11, which focuses on building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable cities (UN, 2024).

The revival of urban agriculture, local product consumption, shorter supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa and Asia, and Bolivia's model of home delivery from peri-urban areas, demonstrate the critical role of short supply chains in ensuring rapid food supply. The EU Green Deal Agreement also emphasizes reducing transportation distances and intermediaries to expand local supply channels (AB Commission, 2020; Yıldırım & Yıldırım, 2021). Some researchers have argued that localization should be considered alongside agroecological methods, rural-urban solidarity, and producer-consumer organizations for greater resilience (Karakaya Ayalp & Yarış, 2023, p. 58). Therefore, access to sufficient and healthy food is both a quantitative issue and a process involving the preservation of traditional practices (Tendall, 2015).

In recent years, the literature has widely assumed that localization directly contributes to sustainability and resilience. However, some researchers have critically questioned this perspective. Purcell and Brown (2005) introduced the concept of the 'local trap' to challenge the presumption that the local scale is inherently the most appropriate for fostering social justice, ecological principles, and sustainable socio-economic relationships. They argue that within local communities, economic and political agendas often diverge, and power dynamics, along with conflicting interests, can hinder collective action on ecological and social justice issues. The authors highlight that localization does not inherently guarantee sustainability and stress the importance of evaluating each scale within its specific socio-political and ecological context rather than making broad generalizations. Researchers propose a dynamic theory of scale that incorporates the analysis of divergent interests and conflicts shaped by unequal power relations within food policy and planning processes. This approach challenges the bias that localization inherently enhances sustainability in food systems, and seeks to avoid what it calls the 'local trap' (Born & Purcell, 2006).

2.3. Resilient Food Systems and Cooperatives

Cooperatives have (re)emerged as a prominent organizational model in building resilient food systems in recent years³. We observe a renewed interest in cooperative-type organizations similar to those which emerged to deal with past crises which drove large populations into social and economic turbulence. In today's neoliberal era, cooperatives are re-emerging as an alternative to address social, economic, and ecological issues where the central state and market mechanisms have proven insufficient in agriculture and food sectors. Cooperatives organized through communities, social networks, and new values, can play significant roles during crises and provide resilience in food systems against shocks (Billiet et al., 2021; Schoneveld, 2022). Based as they are on multi-stakeholder and collaborative work

³ In this study, we address cooperatives based on the definition of these as autonomous organizations established by individuals who come together to meet their economic, social, and cultural needs and expectations through a business enterprise managed by democratic regulations (Polat, 2017, p. 19).

models, resilient food systems can be built which respect local, social and economic dynamics. We develop collective solutions and resilience during crises based on shared values and principles, participation, solidarity, and trust in social, economic, and ecological processes (Vieta, 2010; Zamponi & Bosi, 2018).

In regard to better inclusivity in food systems, it is widely acknowledged that under competitive market conditions producer and consumer cooperatives act as an umbrella for small family farmers, the rural poor, and other vulnerable groups in cities (Bijman & Wijers, 2019). Cooperatives are found to provide significant advantages in reducing production costs for small family farmers, facilitating their participation in value chains and business development processes, and connecting their products with the market (Wassie et al., 2018, p. 626; Quilloy, 2015). Moreover, as a self-help and solidarity movement, cooperative-type organizations offer small family farmers and other disadvantaged groups in rural and urban areas access to goods, services, and livelihood opportunities. Additionally, women's cooperativism is becoming increasingly common due to the patriarchal nature of agricultural and food systems and barriers faced by women in joining mixed cooperatives. Despite their involvement in all processes of agricultural food production, processing, supply, and sales, women are often excluded from management processes. Women's cooperativism is emphasized as a model for the economic and political empowerment of women, enabling them to take a more active role in building food systems (Dohmworth & Hanisch, 2018). Field studies conducted in India, Egypt, and Kenya show that policies and projects aimed at empowering women provide opportunities to diversify activities in agricultural food systems, engage in sustainable agricultural practices, participate in decision-making processes, and access new livelihood opportunities (Kumar et al., 2023, p. 11).

3. Transformation of Food Systems and New Policy Searches in Türkiye

There was a significant transformation in the Turkish literature of agricultural and food systems from the 1980s to the 2000s. In this period, market actors such as corporations, chain markets, banks, and both large and small traders strengthened their dominance over food systems. As frequently emphasized by researchers such as Keyder (1983) and Boratav (2004), there was a continuity from the late Ottoman period through the early years of the Republic, whereby agriculture was dominated by small-scale peasantry in terms of labor, production, and ownership, with state institutions, cooperatives, and organizations playing regulatory roles in both agriculture and food markets. Mainly, the central state's support-focused agricultural policies centered around 'peasantism' (Karaömerlioğlu, 2006), and this along with efforts to keep small farmers on the land and the need to regulate food markets, constituted the core characteristics of food systems during this era.

Cooperatives, in the context of agricultural and food sector organizations, were established around national developmental goals during the early period of the Turkish Republic and began to spread in the 1960s as a result of stronger connections with social movements and peasant movements. In the 1970s, cooperativism, with the help of the social municipalism approach of CHP-led local governments in agriculture and food, witnessed a revival. In the literature, the post-1970s period is designated the neoliberal era, the era in which the foundations of the corporatization of agriculture and food systems and the entrenchment of the industrial system were established. During this period, the central state gradually withdrew from its regulatory, supportive, and protective roles in small-scale agriculture and family farming (Kuran, 2021, p. 174). The central state's withdrawal from national-level agricultural and food policies, especially in the 2000s, has led to two significant developments concerning the future of food systems in Türkiye. The first is the increasing share of multinational food companies and large capital groups like Sabancı, Koç, Yaşar, and Tekfen in sectors such as meat, dairy, vegetables, fruits, and processed foods, along with the rapid expansion of the supermarket in cities across Türkiye (Oral, 2006). Between 2014 and 2017, the number of chain markets like Migros, Carrefour, Real, Tesco, Adese, Makro, Uyum, Onur, Beğendik, Özdilek, and Happy grew by 29%, while local chains expanded by 13%. Meanwhile, the growth of discount national chains like BİM, A101, and Şok reached 72% (Ekinci, 2017).

The second major development observed in the most recent decade of the 2000s is the emergence of a new phase in which a wide range of actors—including global organizations, central governments, local administrations, and social movements—have begun to seek new policies and solutions in response to the crises and problems generated by the industrial food system. Urbanization and construction dynamics in peri-urban and rural/agricultural areas led to new regulations in the Municipalities Act in 2004 and 2012, as rising food inflation and developments in migration and employment all necessitated the development of policies and strategies to more holistically encompass both rural and urban areas in agricultural and food policies. A particularly significant recent development is the role local governments have taken on as key actors in local agricultural and food systems in Türkiye.

Another characteristic of the current period is that new food policies and experiences are developing locally in processes that are fragmented and multi-faceted. In general, multi-models which display inclusive and public-centered characteristics, and attempt to intervene in and improve the problems produced by the food crisis, are spreading in different cities with varying political approaches. Experiences of solidarity economies connecting rural to urban areas, including tea producers, cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, and local governments, as well as struggles around urban gardens in İstanbul

and the turn towards consumer cooperatives are some examples of these models in districts like Kadıköy, Beşiktaş, and Üsküdar in İstanbul since the 2013 Gezi Park protests, and in İzmir (Öcal & Erkut, 2019). Initiatives organized within the framework of solidarity economies aim to build alternative food systems outside of the central state, local governments, and market actors, based on principles of direct democracy and solidarity (Oba & Özsoy, 2023). Actors within these networks tend to organize food production and supply processes along the lines of gender equality and ecological values, without intermediaries like chain markets or companies.

As previously mentioned, the organization and agricultural support efforts conducted by Metropolitan Municipalities such as İzmir, Gaziantep, İstanbul, Çanakkale, and Adana, under the rural development approach, and the attempts of Nilüfer and Karşıyaka Municipalities to create food strategies and local-specific policy roadmaps, are among recent prominent efforts. CHP-led local governments approach agricultural and food issues within the framework of rural development and the city's needs concerning nutrition, poverty, and employment. Local regulatory policies and interventions regarding food systems are being carried out based on the city's food security issues, strengthening the ties between small family farmers and production, as well as on employment and migration policies (Yıldırım, 2019). The rural development and agricultural production-strengthening policies of metropolitan municipalities are reflected in employment data. The support policies pursued by İzmir Metropolitan Municipality under Aziz Kocaoğlu's leadership resulted in an increase in agricultural employment rates from 7.5% to 8.5% between 2008 and 2018, and in the number of farmers from 49,782 to 51,334 over the same period (Yetişkul et al., 2021, p. 270).

As is clear then, in the context of food planning in Türkiye, growing crises have significantly diversified research in food and ecology, and the shocks related to natural disasters are prompting new policies and institutional efforts. Over the last decade, and largely shaped by the dissolution of agriculture, the food crisis, pandemics, and earthquakes, the central government, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Customs and Trade, and international organizations such as the FAO, ILO, UNWOMEN, EU, and WB, have been collaborating with local governments in efforts to build resilient, inclusive systems (KEİG, 2015). Another model in which ministries and international organizations are active involves policies aimed at improving agricultural and food systems, intertwined with social policies focused on women and refugees. Within this governance framework, the empowerment of women producers, refugees, and small family farmers, and the branding of traditional, local food products to create new opportunities for profit and entrepreneurship, are among the key goals. In particular, cooperative-type organizations play an essential role in strengthening these disadvantaged groups and running multi-dimensional social policies in

areas such as food, gender equality, and refugees (Gültekin et al., 2024). As briefly summarized above, it may be observed that while urban and local-scale policies and practices are spreading in the field of agriculture and food in Türkiye, so too are models diverging according to the specific social, political, and economic characteristics of different cities.

4. Field Findings

4.1. Aim and Method

In recent years, rapid changes and new developments have been occurring in the field of agriculture and food in Türkiye, in terms of planning, policy, and implementation. Particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, new models and organizations aimed at meeting the local needs in the agricultural and food sectors have emerged in numerous cities, such as İstanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Mardin, Şanlıurfa, Mersin, and Adana. While the search for new policies and organizational structures has diversified, at the same time, collaborations between international organizations, NGOs, the provincial branches of the central government, local governments, and other professional associations at the local level have been attempting to establish new food systems, from production to sale, in these cities.

These systems have two dimensions: the first involves organizing production and sales around cooperatives between cities, surrounding areas, and nearby rural regions, supported by numerous institutions through funds, grants, and land. The second dimension is about how models centered on agricultural and food policies that focus on supporting small producers intersect with various goals such as women's empowerment and refugee social cohesion and integration policies. The aim of this study is to analyze one of the emerging models, which is built around cooperatives where multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms are collaborative and involve joint management systems. In this context, within the framework of resilience discussions, this study seeks to examine how these governance mechanisms function and the roles that short supply chains and localization play within this model.

As for providing an answer to the study's questions, we benefit from the field data based on a research report conducted jointly by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security's Directorate General of International Labor Force (TCÇSGB) and the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ) between 2021–2022 and published as a book in 2024. This report, titled 'The Effects of Cooperatives on Employment and Social Cohesion,' was carried out in cities such as İstanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Mardin, Şanlıurfa, Mersin, and Adana (TCÇSGB & GIZ, 2023). As is known, rapid urbanization, population growth, and the rapid transformation of rural/agricultural structures, coupled with intensive refugee migration, are processes that significantly

affect these cities. Qualitative methods were employed in the field research, which was structured around questions concerning the operational mechanisms of local food systems, institutions, governance processes, supply chains, and localization. Within the scope of the field study, 58 interviews were conducted with various agents, including cooperative members, local governments, international organizations, and NGO experts in the areas of agriculture, food, ecology, gender equality, and refugee policies.⁴

Questions were posed to cooperative members, experts, and bureaucrats accessed through the snowball sampling method about cooperatives' operational processes, relationships with institutions collaborating in the process from agricultural production to sales in urban areas, and topics related to disadvantaged groups. Although the field research focused primarily on cooperatives, extensive data and observations were collected regarding multi-agent structures, supply chains, and localization processes developed around the production, processing, and supply practices of food within rural-urban relationships. Therefore, in this study, cooperatives are not viewed as single entities conducting economic and social activities, but rather as dynamic actors embedded in local systems shaped by spatial dynamics, built through relationships and collaborations among institutions and organizations operating across multiple scales.

4.2. General Dynamics Affecting Urban Food Systems

A significant number of the cities within the scope of the field research have been experiencing rapid urbanization, construction, and population increase in recent years, while also possessing significant potential for agricultural production. Despite this potential, in cities like Gaziantep, Hatay, Adana, and İzmir, rural populations and agricultural labor have been declining over the past decade, while at the same time, there has been a strong trend toward marketization in food supply processes. In another research study, which focused on small family farmers in İzmir, it was found that 56% of the interviewed farmers were unwilling to continue production, as they were negatively affected by rising input costs (Yılmaz et al., 2020, p. 116). Similarly, in recent days, farmers affected by extreme heat and drought, who protested the inability of market prices to cover their costs, organized a convoy with tractors and blocked the Kahramanmaraş-Gaziantep highway (Keber & Yaşar, 2024). In the related news, it was mentioned that tomato, wheat, cotton, and watermelon producers were being severely affected by low market prices.

It is also worth noting here that Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş and other cities in Türkiye's Southeast Anatolia are among those most affected by climate change in Türkiye in recent

years (Selçuk & Gülümser, 2023, p. 437). In particular, wheat, corn, fresh fruit, vegetables, and cotton are among crops most affected by the impacts of climate change, with predictions of declining productivity due to climate change effects by 2050. In Gaziantep's İslahiye and Şehitkamil districts, as well as in many villages with large agricultural areas, vulnerability to the effects of climate change and drought has been found to be quite high (İpekyolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2019). It is expected that this process will result in direct effects on water resources, soil, cropping patterns, crop yields, food prices, and social change.

What's more, the city centers and outlying districts of Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, and Adana are among the cities most affected by the February 6, 2023 earthquakes. Of Türkiye's plant production value, 20.9% derives from this region; 33% of corn, 72% of cotton, 57% of citrus fruits, 82.7% of pistachio nuts, 19% of wheat, and 16% of olives respectively are produced in the eleven cities affected by the earthquakes (TMMOB, 2023). According to the TMMOB report, the earthquakes caused significant losses of livestock, with nearly 13,000 barns destroyed, and various damage to food warehouses belonging to both the private sector and the Turkish Grain Board (TMO) in city centers. The earthquakes accelerated the abandonment of agriculture and rural areas, while also causing a reverse effect whereby 800,000 people sought refuge in rural villages in some areas (Yıldızcan, 2023, p. 19).

It is also well known that small-scale retailers like grocers, butchers, and greengrocers have struggled to survive amid intense competition with large chain markets, in which they lose their significance within urban economics (Sarı, 2019, pp. 233–234). In cities like Gaziantep, Hatay, and Kahramanmaraş, a rapid marketization process in food supply chains has been observed, paralleling nationwide trends. It is estimated that in Gaziantep the total number of markets, including those in districts, has approached 700, with the number of chain markets such as Migros, Bim, A101, and Şok reaching 450 (Olay Medya, 2021). In cities like Gaziantep, Adana, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, and Adıyaman, chain markets account for 70% of the food retail sector. Similarly, in İzmir, since the 2000s, the share of grocers in the food supply chain and retail sector has been steadily declining, while the share of chain markets has been rapidly increasing (Candemir, 2010). İzmir is also known as the city where the first hypermarket in the Middle East and the Balkans, Alsancak Migros, was opened, making it a symbol of marketization in food retailing (Migros, 2011).

To sum up, growing risks in the food market—such as marketization, climate change, and shocks related to earthquakes—are creating significant vulnerabilities among producer groups within agricultural and food systems. Existing market actors and food companies are inadequate in the face of increasing

⁴ The field research and the report titled 'The Effects of Cooperatives on Employment and Social Cohesion' involved researchers, Prof. Dr. Aylin Çiğdem Köne, Prof. Dr. Çağatay Edgücan Şahin, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ferit Serkan Öngel, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Cevat Yıldırım, and Dr. Uygur Dursun Yıldırım.

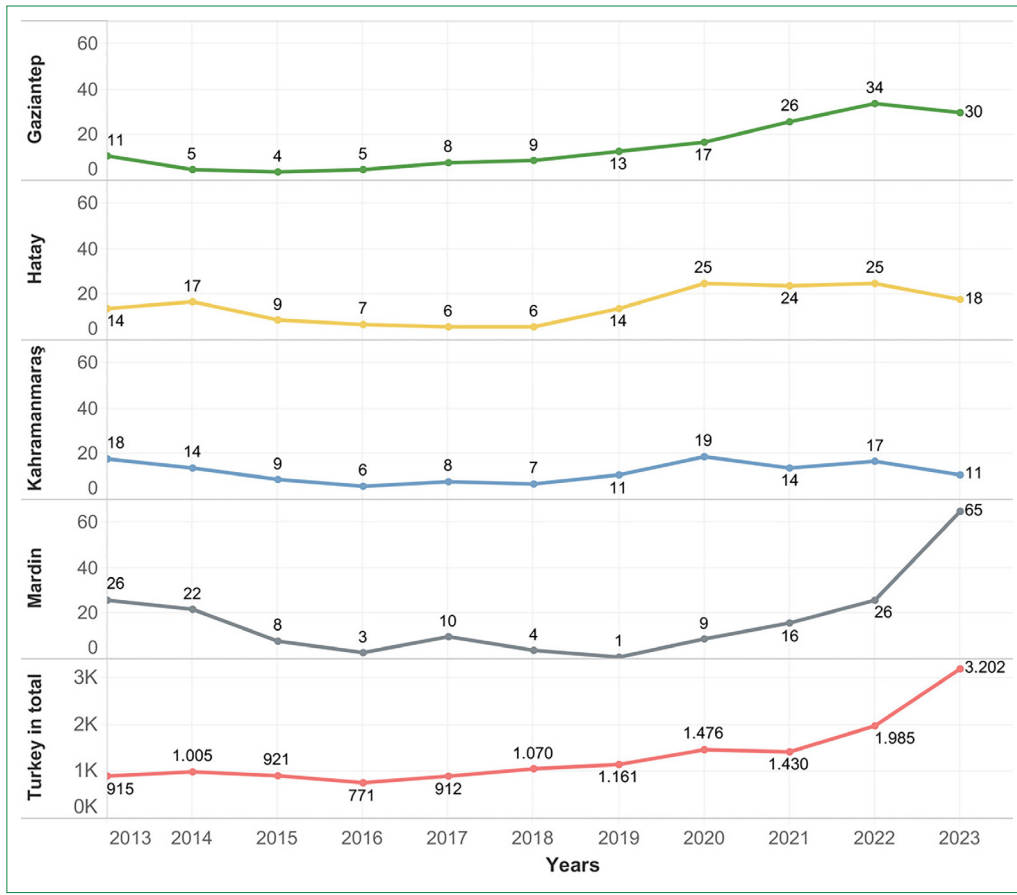


Figure 1. Changes in the number of cooperatives by year across Türkiye and in different cities (2013–2023).

risks and vulnerabilities to agricultural and food systems, nature, and biodiversity. As a result, strategies, organizations, and experiences surrounding new agricultural and food policies are emerging within the governance mechanisms and local initiatives of these cities. The most striking change within these organizations has been observed in cooperatives. As seen in the Figure 1, there has been a steady and rapid increase in the number of new cooperatives established over the past 10 years. As discussed below, this increase is emerging within the framework of building resilient and inclusive local food systems in response to existing risks and shocks in different cities. These cooperatives are positioned at the intersection of multiple social policies concerning agriculture, food, women, and refugees in local areas, and have become post-earthquake hubs for collecting and distributing aid and support.

According to the 2000 census, there were 37 cooperatives in Gaziantep engaged in agricultural development and sales, two of the most prominent being Güneydoğu Birlik and Çukobirlik (TMKB, 2001). These cooperatives are organized around the production and processing of products such as grapes, legumes, red peppers, olive oil, and pistachios. In the intervening period, the number of members affiliated with Güneydoğu Birlik reached 11,000. By 2019, the total num-

ber of cooperatives in Gaziantep had reached 200, with the number of producer members increased to 27,000 (Koopbis, 2019). As shown in the Figure 1, there has been a consistent increase in the number of cooperatives established in other cities included in the field research, as well as across Türkiye, particularly from 2019 and 2020 onwards.

Additionally, it has been observed in other field studies conducted in rural areas of cities like Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep, and Hatay, that imece culture (a traditional form of communal labor) was revived in the wake of the earthquakes, and nearly all the land of farmers who lost their lives in the earthquakes has been recultivated by their relatives or those close to them (Gülçubuk & Oğuz, 2023; Yıldızcan, 2023). Following the earthquakes, cooperatives in Gaziantep, Hatay, and Kahramanmaraş that were initially unable to carry out their routine activities assumed crucial roles in the social and economic reconstruction process in the wake of the destruction and loss. Observations from visits to these cities in June and July 2023 revealed that these cooperatives continued their operations in aid collection and distribution, as well as in maintaining food supply. During this period, various solidarity organizations, aid agencies, and foreign entities seeking to provide support established contact with the cooperatives in the region. Given that,

we may say governance processes and cooperativism emerge under extraordinary circumstances such as food crises, climate change, pandemics, and earthquakes, especially for those who focus on agricultural food production and processing.

4.3. Governance Processes in Local Food Systems

In the cities covered by the field research, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that global organizations such as the FAO, ILO, WB, UN Women, as well as the provincial branches of the Ministries of Agriculture and Commerce, municipalities at the district and provincial levels, NGOs, and producer and women's organizations, were all actively producing inclusive policies and projects. The policies carried out by different institutions and actors at the global, national, and local levels demonstrate a variety of characteristics. For instance, in 2022, the World Bank (WB) announced a \$341 million loan to develop sustainable, competitive, and climate-sensitive agricultural systems in Türkiye (WB, 2022). The development of agricultural and food systems encompasses long-term sustainable growth, the creation of new job opportunities for young people, the prevention of outward migration, the elimination of gender inequalities, and the enhancement of welfare in rural areas. The FAO also outlines the three main outcomes of its support as the restructuring of agri-food systems, the revitalization of agricultural labor markets and the empowerment of rural communities (FAO, 2023). In the Ministry of Agriculture's rural development policies the focus on small producers is of particular significance. The provincial branches of ministries, local governments, and NGOs links to international organizations such as the UN provide extensive support, including prices for products, inputs (credit, fertilizers, pesticides, machinery, seedlings, seeds, land allocation), income support (grants and fund transfers), and training/legal information support (Kuran, 2021, p. 50). In addition to UN-affiliated organizations like the ILO, FAO, and UNDP, NGOs linked to the WB and the EU are actively providing support in the form of grants, machinery purchases, and training within the scope of various policies and projects in the region. Projects and support mechanisms developed in cooperation with local state institutions and local governments play a significant role in both the establishment and development of cooperatives and in the construction of local food systems, spanning stages from production and processing to supply and consumption. It is evident that new policies and institutional frameworks have emerged in the field of agriculture and food particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic in cities such as Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, and Adana, alongside a new dynamic of cooperativism.

4.3.1. Small Producers, Women and Governance Processes

The primary target groups of these institutions and cooperatives comprise women, refugee groups, and small farmers. In the establishment processes of cooperatives, therefore,

women are often the ones who undertake the tasks on a voluntary basis, have no regular income, need additional income, and are motivated by the desire to work collaboratively (TCÇSGB & GIZ, 2023, p. 18). The majority of women seeks to integrate their domestic labor or products from their fields into cooperative networks, but have limited access to credit and capital resources and lack opportunities to be employed. In cities such as Adana, Mardin, Gaziantep, and Hatay, agricultural development cooperatives and women's initiative production and management cooperatives provide regular support by purchasing products produced by small family producers and refugee women in homes and fields. Producers and women are involved in the economic and managerial activities of cooperatives since they take a role in social and spatial networks such as NGOs, local governments, ministries, and international organizations. Collaborative activities open pathways for these groups to engage in local food systems, while also facilitating spatial cooperation within the city region and breaking down gender-based barriers. It has been mentioned that when women producers in an agricultural cooperative first went to sell their products in Adana's wholesale market, they were initially met with surprise by the predominantly male traders, but once they actively began taking on a role in the cooperatives, they were able to sell their products easily (M. H., Cooperative Chairwoman, Adana, 28.07.2022) (TCÇSGB & GIZ, 2023, p. 71).

Through global organizations, NGOs, and local governments, the support often extends from the production of agricultural food to processing and eventually to sales. In this context, the cooperatives and small producers in Gaziantep and Hatay benefit from support for drying and packaging machines, seedling and seed distribution, vocational/technical training, free sales areas, and contract purchases. Additionally, there are examples of rent for buildings and personnel expenses being covered by district and provincial municipalities, NGOs, and various organizations affiliated with the UN and WB. In the FAO's rural development policies, besides strengthening agricultural production, input support is provided in organizing groups such as women, small family producers, and refugees. Likewise, NGOs affiliated with the WB support urban-centric projects aimed at empowering women's entrepreneurship and bringing women's labor to market through branding efforts. Furthermore, district governorships and municipalities support agricultural lands, shops, and sales points. Many cooperatives operating in Gaziantep, Hatay, and Mersin run restaurants and kitchens supported by various institutions within the scope of comprehensive aid programs.

“Through the protocol of cooperation with the municipality, we have been provided with a production site and a restaurant. The basic equipment such as maintenance machines, packaging machines, dough kneading machines, mixers, external packaging machines, etc., were also acquired with

Table 1. Governance processes and actors

Institutions	Policies	Support processes	Target groups	Social objectives
UN FAO UN ILO UN UNWOMEN UN UNDP WB EU GIZ Ministry of Customs and Trade Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Local Governments NGO'S	Empowerment of agricultural production Empowerment of women and refugee groups Mitigating climate change impacts and sustainability Local/rural development	Funds and grants Machinery and equipment purchases Land, store, and stand allocations	Funds and grants Machinery and equipment purchases Land, store, and stand allocations	Job and employment development Promotion of entrepreneurship Branding of local/traditional food products

Prepared by the researcher based on field data.

support from an NGO and the Metropolitan Municipality.” (Cooperative Member, 19.10.2022, Hatay) (TCÇSGB & GIZ, 2023, p. 37)

“Had our director not allocated a total of 30 decars of land for organic farming, we would not have been able to achieve this. We received significant support from nearly all institutions in Nurdagi. The Chamber of Agriculture and the District Directorate of Agriculture were particularly helpful in terms of sales. We received training support from UN Specialized Agencies. We also receive product development and marketing support from the FAO.” (Cooperative President, 20.10.2022, Gaziantep) (TCÇSGB & GIZ, 2023, p. 37)

“The municipality has now distributed more than three million seedlings. In addition, they provide support for procurement, logistics, and fertilizer.” (Cooperative President, 21.10.2022, Adana) (TCÇSGB & GIZ, 2023, p. 38)

Support provided through collaborations between institutions, international organizations, and NGOs can reach cooperatives and producers in district centers such as Altınözü, Defne, Kırıkhan, Nurdagi, and İslahiye in Gaziantep and Hatay. Since these supports are delivered through direct purchases, they can also reach the products of small producers in rural areas surrounding the district centers. For instance, the ‘Topraktan Tabaga’ Agricultural Development Cooperative in the center of Mardin, was able to regularly purchase locally sourced, chemical-free products grown from heirloom seeds from small family farmers and women producers in the districts. These products are then distributed to consumers through cooperative-owned stores in the city center and via social media channels.

In these examples, we see that cooperatives act as intermediaries connecting producers in the rural periphery and urban members and markets. Unlike the dominant food system, cooperatives attempt to find a place in the market by offering products that prioritize the health of consumers while protecting the interests of small producers through fair prices. Thus, cooperatives operating within the framework of governance mechanisms can support sustainable production and offer flexibility in reaching vulnerable groups in the rural and urban periphery, positively contributing to resilience.

Collaborations between ministries, international organizations, and NGOs, which have created multi-dimensional partnerships, prefer more inclusive business models, such as cooperatives, over companies and markets for production, processing, and establishing distribution channels. Joint projects carried out by institutions in cooperation with small producers, women's organizations, and cooperatives enable the application of more flexible policies that are responsive to local needs such as food security, new livelihood and employment opportunities, and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. It is widely accepted that multi-stakeholder, participatory food production, processing, and supply models are more inclusive compared to traditional, hierarchical methods of service delivery, which are typically top-down, as seen in central governments and companies.

Various groups, including women, small family producers, and refugee women, are able to participate in the local-scale production and processing of food through governance processes and cooperatives. This model, in which cooperatives play intermediary roles from production to consumption, is shaped around extensive support from numerous institutions at a higher level (Table 1).

4.4. Supply Chains and Localization

The cooperatives are established and operated within the social networks in local food systems extending from nearby rural/agricultural areas to kitchens and restaurants, sales points in urban centers, and digital platforms. In this sense, cooperatives are structured on a local scale, linking rural/agricultural areas located on the peripheries of cities to urban centers, where food is processed in kitchens, restaurants, and sales points. Most cooperatives continue to work with women, refugees, and small producers who remain connected to agricultural activities in rural areas but have been heavily affected by the recent food crisis. These groups often face challenges in bringing their products to the market at prices that ensure their livelihoods.

One employee of a cooperative in the center of Mardin explained the purchases they make from nearby small producers as follows: “Pepper producers from Siverek, tomato growers from Karacadağ, and later, small farmers cultivating 1–2 acres of land in villages started coming to us. Currently, our cooperative has 48 farmers producing 170 different products” (TCÇSGB & GIZ, 2024, p. 30). Cooperatives like the Mardin ‘Topraktan Tabağa’ Agricultural Development Cooperative, the Kahramanmaraş ‘Mutlu Besinler’ Agricultural Development Cooperative, and the Adana ‘Meryem Kadın’ Cooperative make regular purchases from small producers who cannot sell their products at sustainable prices. During field visits, we observed that many producers were struggling to sell their products at fair prices, while intermediaries, moneylenders and supermarket chains buy their goods at much lower rates. In places like İskenderun, İslahiye, Defne, and Kırıkhan, many cooperatives active in food production and processing regularly purchase from producers in nearby rural areas. In some instances, cooperatives have chosen to produce items that were previously not grown in their region, rather than sourcing from geographically distant agricultural areas. For example, a cooperative in Hatay’s Yayladağ district has started mushroom and flower production, while another cooperative in Nurdağı has initiated the cultivation of moringa, a new crop for the area, on 50–60 acre of land, contributing to the local economy.

4.4.1. Food Produced Through Local Knowledge and Methods

Moreover, one of the core elements of local food systems is traditional and additive-free production methods and knowledge that women transfer from their homes to the cooperative. In this regard, women’s traditional, additive-free production methods are considered a key component of food security.⁵ In another example, the municipalities of Adana and Mersin are collaborating with small producers

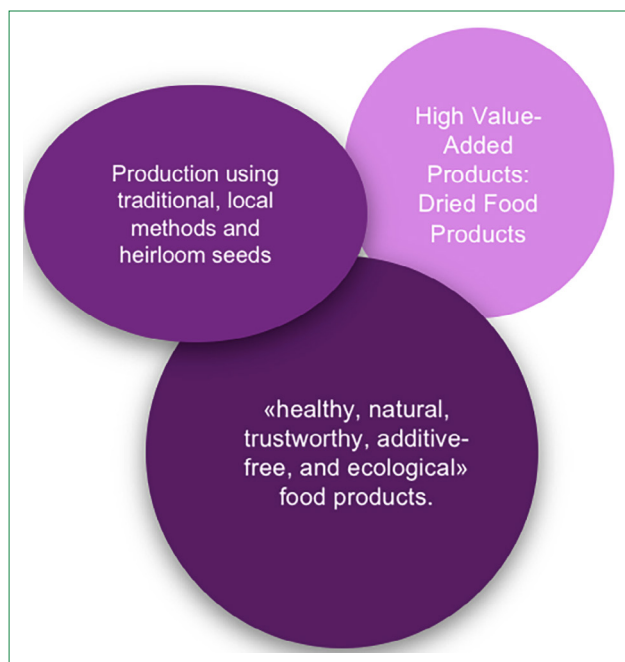


Figure 2. General characteristics of food products in local food systems.

to support production using agroecological methods and local heirloom seeds, taking steps to promote food security. Such ‘healthy, additive-free’ products provide significant advantages to cooperatives in a food market dominated by large supermarket chains. The differentiated products of cooperatives include dried, processed, and high value-added packaged foods. For instance, a cooperative member in Mersin mentioned that they produce nine different products, including banana chips, banana flour, and banana mixtures, as well as sports drinks, all made from dried and processed bananas. Pasta, noodles, breakfast jams, tomato paste, and sauces are among the most commonly produced and sold items at cooperatives. Additionally, local cooperatives mostly purchase heirloom seeds, local wheat varieties, and fruits grown without chemical fertilizers (Fig. 2).

4.4.2. Supply, Distribution, and Sales Processes

The subject of our research follows a policy of delivering goods directly to consumers without intermediaries, and this has been followed up in the supply, distribution, and sales processes. The production and supply chains, centered around cooperatives, women’s organizations, small producers, and refugees, extend from fields to kitchens and restaurants, and from sales outlets (shops) to e-commerce platforms. Particularly, e-commerce platforms and stores/sales points allocated by institutions like governorates and municipalities play a crucial role in ensuring that products are ‘additive-free’ and

⁵ In this study, the concept of food security has been employed within the framework defined by Şık (2018). According to this definition, food security refers to approaches that prevent, neutralize, or eliminate various risk factors of physical, biological, and chemical nature that may cause foodborne illnesses or diseases during the processes of harvesting, transporting, processing, preparing, storing, and delivering food to the end consumer. Thus, efforts made to delay the spoilage of food are also considered an essential component of food security initiatives (Şık, 2018).

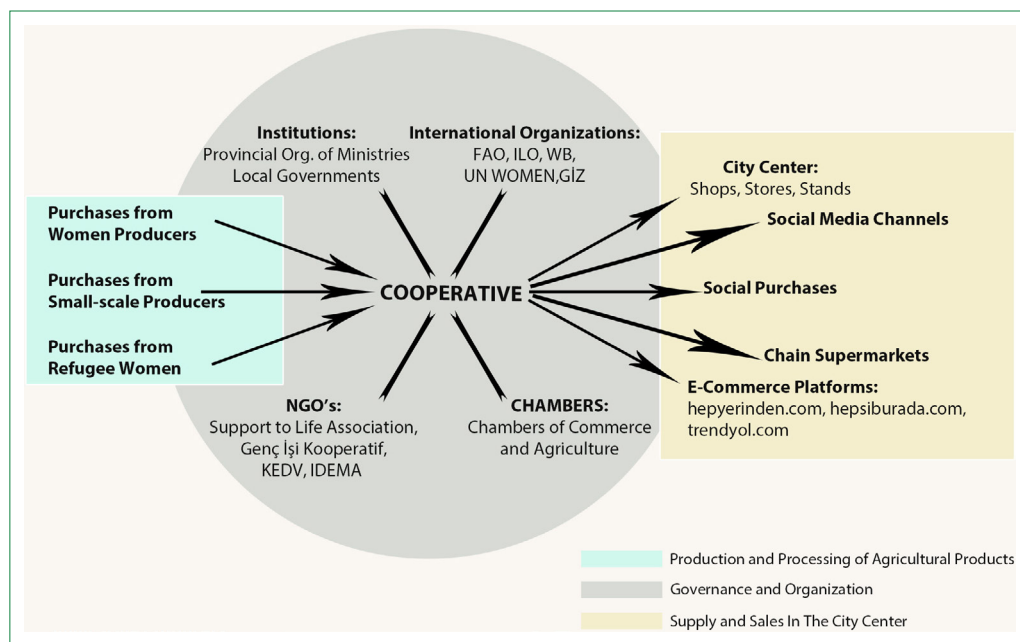


Figure 3. Local food systems from production to sale.

'healthy', especially for those who apply traditional household methods and reach the food market and consumers. Therefore, the final stage of local food system is the sales/marketing phase, which involves the following channels: Digital platforms through which cooperatives sell their products include social media channels, Instagram, e-commerce platforms like Hepsiburada and Trendyol, and cooperative e-commerce sites like hepyerinden.coop. Some cooperatives in Hatay have expanded their markets by making agreements with consumer cooperatives even in other cities. Therefore, the new food systems developing locally are nourished not only by collaborations between different institutions, organizations, and NGOs but also by solidarity relationships among cooperatives (Fig. 3).

It has been observed that both cooperatives and NGOs often make supportive social purchases through quite diverse sales channels, and a large portion of the financial cycle of cooperatives comes from purchases made by supporting institutions. Many cooperatives have developed a high dependence on external support in the production, processing, and sales processes, but this is not to say that the connections between cooperative production and marketing/sales channels are strong and stable. Indeed, the supportive position of numerous institutions in the establishment of local food systems is a risk in terms of the financial independence of producers and cooperatives. Nevertheless, cooperatives still place great importance on product promotion and advertising, including the use social media effectively, and they even work with experts who can quickly increase their sales without the support of other institutions.

Some of the principles specific to the market economy, such as profitability, efficiency, branding, and entrepreneurship, and

institutions, have been adopted within the local food systems by experts from NGOs and official institutions, as well as cooperative members. Cooperatives themselves also attempt to enter the market with food products produced and branded under discourses of 'healthy, additive-free, organic, traditional'.

It was also observed in cities such as Mersin, Gaziantep's İslahiye, and Hatay's Defne and Yayladağı, that some cooperatives conduct production activities with "zero waste" goals. Many cooperatives are working to compost their waste products and reuse them in production, demonstrating a commitment to sustainability. The integration of local knowledge and production methods based on ecological principles and inclusivity into branding and market adaptation is one of the leading characteristics of these local food systems. In addition, branding and market integration, the support of disadvantaged groups, the revitalization of local traditional production knowledge and flavors, and the focus on food safety-driven production, as well as the utilization of vacant lands, constitute other defining aspects of local food systems.

5. Conclusion

Many crises in the world, such as the 2008 Crisis financial crash, COVID-19, sudden climate events, and earthquakes have given rise to new debates, in which strengthening cities against sudden shocks, and making them resilient are commonly discussed. In these discussions, and especially those on resilient and inclusive cities, there are some recurring topics; ensuring food security against shocks, establishing supply chains for food suitable for human health, supporting small-scale producers, and expanding food communities

strengthened by cooperatives. While there is general agreement on these topics, at the regional level, we encounter heterogeneous and diverse solutions, policies, and models in response to the multiple challenges, since despite the crises and problems it generates, the industrial food system continues to dominate and thus compels a wide range of actors to develop new coping strategies, models, and policies.

One of the characteristics of such a crisis is that central government seeks new policies for local food systems. Similarly, in Türkiye, in recent years, urban areas have become spaces where various actors—ranging from the central government, local administrations, social movements active in food and ecology, various NGOs, and global organizations—are striving to produce policies and projects related to food. We have focused on the local food systems being built at the urban level by international organizations, ministries, local administrations, and NGOs, along with local social initiatives. The study utilizes data from field research conducted and documented by the Ministry of Labor and the German International Cooperation Agency in cities such as Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Adana, and Hatay. The central focus of the research is on the newly- evolving local food systems and cooperatives shaped in recent years by governance processes in these cities. The food systems constructed along the line of relationships spanning production to sale, encompassing city centers, surrounding districts and rural regions, are examined in this study in terms of governance, supply processes, and localization dimensions.

Based on the field research conducted between 2021 and 2022, as well as observations from visits to the same region in 2024, the data and findings highlight that, particularly in the post-COVID-19 period, a new cooperative dynamic system has emerged within a multi-actor structure extending from global to local levels. The efforts of institutions to build resilient systems in agriculture and food, policies aimed at strengthening small-scale family farming and women, and policies targeting employment and social integration for refugees are the primary drivers of these efforts.

This study has attempted to conceptualize local food systems, since the activities of the aforementioned institutions in cities like Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, and Mardin specifically emerged out of the relationships and processes all the way from production and processing, to supply to sale of food between rural and urban areas. Therefore, we suggest that the cooperative dynamic in these cities may only be understood in terms of the roles these organizations play within the local food systems. In other words, cooperatives established for agricultural development and women's entrepreneurship are not independently functioning units, but rather institutions founded and operated in line with the policies and extensive supports of various institutions. The construction of resilient, inclusive, and locally distinctive food

systems, spanning rural to urban, from production to sale, develops and is nurtured by collaborations, projects, and social networks between institutions, NGOs, and cooperatives.

Local food systems are built on a broad institutional structure that includes rural branches of central government, local administrations, international organizations, and NGOs. These projects, based on large-scale funding, grants, and equipment support, are largely structured by international organizations and the rural branches of ministries. However, local civil initiatives—composed of women, small-scale producers, and refugees—are able to participate in these structures only in a limited way. The stronger institutional structure at higher spatial scales results in weaker organic connections with the dynamics of the local community. In brief, we found that the relative weakness of local initiatives and the dependence of food systems on the support of national and global institutions negatively impact the system's resilience capacity.

We have observed in the field that women participants in food production and management tasks learn from each other, and try to create new public spaces for themselves. Therefore, the role of women's organizations in the construction of local food systems is quite significant. Additionally, we have mentioned various reports indicating that the rate of informal employment among women working in agriculture in the region is notably high (İpekyolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2015). In the cooperative examples we have addressed here, membership requires legal procedures, and in many cases, the supporting institutions have included women members actively involved in the production and management work of cooperatives within the social security system. Thus, the strengthening of local food systems in the future may not only mean the inclusion of more producer and refugee women, but also may create positive effects on women working in informal employment.

However, excessive dependence on multi-actor funding and grant support raises concerns about the capacity of small producers, women, and refugee organizations to develop and implement their own policies. In other words, governance structures operating with the backing of substantial budgets and expertise from global, national, and local organizations and institutions should progress in a way that strengthens the potential of vulnerable groups—particularly those most affected by existing crises and shocks in the region—to develop food policies and organize themselves.

In the cities we visited during our research, the majority of the products derived from traditional local knowledge and methods of production had a significant place within the local food systems built around cooperatives. Women producers' knowledge of home-based, 'additive-free' production, heirloom seeds, agroecological methods, and the food processing and culinary culture of Syrian refugees are recognized as

the core components of local food. Cooperative members and experts place great emphasis on the safety of food produced using traditional, healthy, and additive-free methods. As concerns about products filling supermarket shelves under the industrial food system grow among the general public, interest in women producers' and cooperatives' products is increasing. Along with the importance placed on sustainable production methods, marketing these products through nearby retail stores, restaurants, and shops also provides opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint.

Based on the discussions thus far, it may be argued that the construction of resilient and sustainable food systems within multi-actor governance structures evolves as an inherently contradictory process. While a bureaucratically and financially powerful institutional framework exists at the top, we observe the emergence of new, dependent, and struggling social initiatives at the grassroots level. This process provides significant opportunities for the inclusion of women producers and refugees in food systems, enabling these actors to carve out a place in the market by producing niche products. In other words, compared to the dominant food system characterized by strong patriarchal production and ownership structures, local food systems exhibit more inclusive characteristics. However, the social policies produced by multinational organizations, state-affiliated institutions, and NGOs, accompanied by financial support mechanisms, significantly shape local social and economic networks as well as self-organized structures. The influence of higher-level actors in shaping local contexts raises concerns about the independence of cooperatives. Therefore, implementing support policies that provide greater space for local knowledge, experiences, and self-organized initiatives in food policies and planning processes tailored to the local context is crucial for strengthening resilience. Hence, to conclude, while multi-actor support policies have served as an important starting point in the cities under study, looking to the future, it would appear that fostering horizontal, solidarity-based networks among small-scale producers, women, and cooperatives—both within and across cities—through collaboration with other emerging cooperatives and food initiatives would serve to further enhance their resilience potential.

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