The Role of Regional Agencies (Tourism as an Instrument for Development)

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Chapter 6

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AGENCIES
Tourism Development in Turkey

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Abstract: Regional development agencies (RDAs) have recently been established in Turkey as a policy vehicle to support local governments and coordinate stakeholders’ activities. In compliance with the European Union policy guidelines, regional-level planning and policymaking are introduced for the first time in Turkey. Within the new system, tourism is designated as one of the critical development tools and thus the RDAs have become actively involved in tourism planning and development. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the role of these organizations in the enhancement of tourism in less developed areas, examining the case of Thrace and North Anatolia regions in Turkey, and the activities of these respective agencies. Keywords: Regional development agencies, decentralization, regional planning, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been receiving increasing attention as an instrument for development and poverty alleviation, since it is usually seen as beneficial to
promote local economic growth and encourage job creation (Rylance, 2008). However, the focus of tourism development is usually on economic expansion rather than sustainability, and in many cases the benefits obtained from this industry are not shared by the local communities (Zapata, Hall, Lindo & Vanderschaeghe, 2011). In order to address this issue, recent development initiatives are now paying attention to the extent that the needs of the community are being fulfilled by tourism. Consequently, the involvement of the residents, especially the poor, has become a given condition for the acceptance and implementation of tourism projects conducive to development.

Within this perspective, the question of governance, and in particular the management of tourism resources and allocation of responsibilities for planning and decisionmaking, become important. Thus, the literature has examined whether centralized or decentralized forms of governance are more conducive to sustainable development and to what extent these systems of administration are applicable to various contexts. In general, decentralization of tourism management has been associated with sustainability, and a more democratic and fair allocation of resources (Çetinel & Yolal, 2009; Yüksel et al., 2005). However, some authors challenge the applicability of decentralized governance forms in developing countries, since local authorities may not have access to knowledge and expertise at the destination level, and they may also lack the necessary resources or autonomy to be truly effective (Tosun, 2001; Yüksel et al., 2005; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2000).

The benefits of decentralized governance—namely increased efficiency in the use of resources, greater equity in the distribution of the gains obtained from tourism, and superior responsiveness to the needs of the local community (Agrawal & Gupta, 2005)—are exhibited through current examples of best practices, such as the Torres Strait (Australia) case discussed in Chapter 9. Seeing these successful experiences, other destinations in different countries are striving to adapt these solutions to their particular situations. In Turkey, tourism planning is also moving from a centralized perspective toward a more decentralized model through the creation of regional development agencies (RDAs). These agencies have been established in 2006 as part of the European Union regional policy guidelines. They are responsible for the planning, development, and implementation of policies at the regional level. As their establishment is fairly new, the territories for which these institutions are responsible are undergoing significant transformations.

Tourism is designated as one of the critical development tools and therefore several of the RDAs are already involved in its development. This
chapter analyzes the role of regional organizations in the enhancement of tourism in less developed areas in Turkey. It examines the activities of the two development agencies in the Thrace and North Anatolia regions, which are both characterized by a low level of tourism development, despite being endowed with rich natural, historical, and cultural resources. Thus, the chapter focuses on the capacity of the Thrace and North Anatolia development agencies to increase the competitiveness of tourism and its contribution to the development of the local communities in their respective regions. This investigation assists in determining the advantages and disadvantages of the current model of organization, outlining both benefits and drawbacks of interest to other regions within and outside Turkey.

GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1990s, most international organizations have formally recognized the economic significance of tourism for developing countries as a means of generating earnings, attracting foreign investment, and creating employment opportunities (Zhao & Ritchie, 2007). However, only recently attention has been paid to the sustainability of the tourism initiatives and to the specific effect of these projects on the community. Researchers in the developing world have remarked on the unequal distribution of tourism benefits and on the paternalistic nature of the decisionmaking, as the richer constituents take an active role in shaping strategies while the poor are encouraged to participate mainly as laborers. Furthermore, as the destination develops and investments start to flow, local businesses face the threat of being replaced by larger institutionalized organizations that are no longer run by the locals (Tosun, 2000).

In order for tourism to contribute to the alleviation of poverty in the area, Zhao and Ritchie (2007) stress the importance of empowerment and local participation, which is thought to create more positive attitude toward tourism and facilitate its development within sustainability principles. Since tourism needs to be planned in a sustainable manner, while taking into account the desires of the local community, policy development and governance gain importance. Thus, the relationships among different stakeholders, the responsibilities of the state, and the selection of policy instruments also become central (Hall, 2011a).

The growth of different practices worldwide to regulate the state’s responsibilities in relation to tourism planning has led to a multitude of
research that examines tourism governance from the perspective of centralization versus decentralization. Yüksel and Yüksel (2000) determine that the former is more common in developing countries for which tourism is an issue of national concern, as it may help bring foreign currency and investments into the country. On the other hand, developed countries have been keener to apply more decentralized models, such as Australia where tourism organizations are present at every governmental level (Jenkins, 2000). One of the main disadvantages of centralization is related to the decisions being taken from a top-down perspective in which the local people have no or little to say. Consequently, the planning and decisionmaking may disregard the needs and the realities of the community (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2000). The centralized model also has drawbacks in connection to the implementation of the decisions, since these are taken by the central administration but implemented by the local government.

The general tendency in the literature, as well as in the practice of developed countries, is toward decentralization and multiple levels of governance. According to Weiss (2005, cited in Zahra, 2011), good governance is characterized by the return of the resources and decisionmaking to the local actors and the facilitation of the involvement of the citizens in the planning process. Decentralization involves transfer of power from the central bodies to other agencies at a lower level, government or not, motivated to reach remote areas in order to improve the effectiveness of the central government. Decentralization also increases the perceived fairness, legitimacy, and accountability (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2000). Furthermore, sustainable tourism practices can only be planned and coordinated at the regional level where a single point of contact can be available for support and advice of the required actions (Çetinel & Yolal, 2009). In the case of India, Crook and Manor (1994) state that decentralization has resulted in a greater effectiveness of projects, a better mobilization of local resources, and improved coordination in the region.

However, changes in the structure of the local tourism community need to match the general socioeconomic and political structure of the locality (Tosun, 2000). For decentralization to be successful in developing countries, certain conditions need to occur (Rondinelli, 1981, p. 138, cited in Yüksel & Yüksel, 2000). The first condition refers to the local government being autonomous and independent from the central authority. Furthermore, an adequate budget with resources, as well as the capacity to hire its own personnel and to have access to local expertise, are important (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2000). Decentralization may have drawbacks, including the focus of the regional actors on local interests and the disregard for the
national priorities (Go & Trunfio, 2012). Further, models which allow tourism to be governed at various levels (central, regional, and local) may run the risk of diverging from the goals or in the projected image of the destination (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003).

Despite various criticisms of decentralized governance, the consensus today is that new modes should be participatory. This includes involvement of private and public stakeholders in the decisionmaking process while favoring multi-level integration or coordination among different levels of government (Hall, 2011a). Additionally, development through tourism is determined to be more effective when a local rather than a central government is involved, as local governments are closer to the communities and may better understand their needs (Atkinson, 2002). In order to avoid the situation where the development of tourism and the access to the area’s resources is mainly controlled by outside investors, deliberate actions need to be taken at the early development stages of the destination. These efforts should focus on guaranteeing continuous local participation and ensuring that control is not taken over by large capital owners once the destination becomes more attractive (Tosun, 2000).

Within this perspective, regional tourism governance is considered important, as it has the capacity of bringing different community, local government, and industry stakeholders together (Zahra, 2011). Within the European Union (EU), multi-level governance and bottom-up regional policy has become widespread (Halkier, 2011). Turkey’s recently established model of regional development attempts to follow such European regional policy.

Tourism Governance in Turkey

Turkey has been characterized by a high level of state-centric policy and planning system since its foundation. In such a system, the existing provinces have served primarily to carry out basic administrative tasks under central authority. Since the 1960s, regional and national development plans have been centrally made and implemented by the State Planning Organization, based on sectoral plans prepared by each of the ministries. The strong-state tradition, national developmentalism, and the republican model of citizenship, together established the foundational basis for the state-centric governing system of the country (Keyman, 2005).

In line with Turkey’s centralized system, planning and policymaking for its tourism industry have been traditionally performed by the Ministry of Tourism (Goymen, 2000). The local tourism-related bodies have been used as an extension of the ruling party to facilitate implementation of the
central governments’ priorities, or they have been forced to follow central
government decisions via various economic and political pressures
(Tosun & Timothy, 1998). Furthermore, while strategic tourism planning is
carried out by the Ministry, the municipalities are expected to implement
these plans in each individual destination (Erkuş-Öztürk, 2010). However,
local authorities have never been permitted to develop their independent
policies free from the strict central government control (Ersoy, 1992).

It was only during the 1980s that Turkey witnessed the emergence of
different civil society organizations as the actors of a new associational life
and a vital area for democratization (Keyman, 2005). During this and the
subsequent decades, there was a steady increase in the mainly quantitative
development of civil society organizations and societal calls for the need to
democratize state—society relations in Turkey were made (Türkiye Tarih
Vakfı, 2000). In this period, while the Ministry of Tourism was still the main
organization which indulged in sectoral planning and policymaking, new
actors such as the Turkish Tourism Investors’ Association, the Touristic
Hotels and Investors Association, and the Tourism Development and
Education Foundation emerged, so that the role of the state would be gra-
dually restricted (Goymen, 2000). In spite of some structural and functional
deficiencies, these new actors formed platforms, made goal-oriented
arrangements, developed partnership networks, and indulged in lobbying.
However, during this period, the quantitative development of civil society
was not transformed into qualitative importance, partly due to the organiza-
tional and financial capacity problems of civil society organizations. The
strong-state tradition posed an obstruction to the establishment of a strong
civil society and systematic forms of regional governance, until the early
stages of Turkey’s European Union candidacy at the end of the 1990s.

Since 2001, Turkey has fully committed itself to conforming its govern-
ance structures and procedures to those of the EU policy framework, includ-
ing regional-level policymaking (Bilen, 2005). The context for civil society
and regional policy changed radically with the intensification of the collabora-
tion between Turkey and the European Union. During the 2000s, the
state facilitated the development of structures of regional governance across
the country, in line with the principles of good governance adopted by
the EU legislations. In a structural sense, the union has forced the state to
overlay a historically evolved vertical and sectoral planning and policy sys-
tem with a more horizontal, territorially oriented structure (Loewendahl-
Ertugal, 2005). Turkey’s step by step alignment with the EU regulation and
practices has put the issue of regional development and institution building
prominently on the agenda (Loewendahl-Ertugal, 2005). Within this scope,
the necessary infrastructure has been created at the central and local levels to enable radical changes in the regional development policies and their implementation (DPT, 2006).

Parallel to macro-level developments in the political, economic, and social spheres, there has been a gradual transformation in the dynamics of tourism governance from a basically state-sponsored and managed development to different forms of public and private cooperation and partnership. The Ministry of Tourism was renamed as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2003. The Europeanization process has led to restructuring of national tourism administrations and emergence of new players, as well as new patterns of cooperation and partnership, true to the spirit of governance (Goymen, 2000).

The Ninth Development Plan (2007–2013) has aimed for an active and participatory regional development policy, supported by adequate financing, and an institutional structure to be implemented from bottom to top. According to this plan, an integrated regional development policy would lead to improve the imbalances in socioeconomic structure and income level, both across rural and urban settlements and across regions in Turkey. The plan also aims to foster the existing physical and social infrastructure and the employment opportunities in cities, as these remain insufficient in meeting the population pressure created by intense migration movements (DPT, 2006). In parallel to the development approaches and the changes in the local institutional structure, the need to review planning approaches and mechanisms, including spatial planning, in such a way as to eliminate the authority dissonance existing in this field, emerged (DPT, 2006).

In response to the demands brought forth by the need to align with the EU legislation, the Ministry of Development was introduced into Turkish policy and planning system. Established in 2011, it builds on the competences previously accumulated by the State Planning Organization, which was working under the orders of the Prime Minister and was authorized to make national plans (Ovgun, 2011). The establishment of the Ministry of Development is a process of transformation from a planning organization to a ministry and entails developing a new understanding of planning in line with the EU membership process (Ovgun, 2011).

In addition, as establishment of connections among plans, clarification of authority and responsibilities, and coordination among organizations at central and local levels became inevitable, a new legislation came into force in 2006 (Turkish Government, 2006) with the remit to facilitate and regulate the establishment of RDAs. These are defined as semi-departmental agencies established by the central government, with strategic and general
operational functions to improve collaboration among the public agencies, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations. These institutions are given competencies in local and regional development, to ensure an efficient use of resources and provide regional development with a new impetus by activating local dynamics and internal potential (Turkish Government, 2006). Under this framework, the Ministry of Development functions as an umbrella organization over the RDAs (Ovgun, 2011), with more strategic capacity and resources granted to RDAs as part of the adoption of EU regional policy guidelines (Lagendijk, Kayasu & Yasar, 2009). Presently, RDAs stand for planning, development, and implementation of policies at the regional level, being the arms of the central authority.

**Responsibilities, Structure, and Sources of Finance**

According to the Law on the Establishment, Coordination, and Tasks of Development Agencies (Turkish Government, 2006), RDAs are set up as state-based semi-public bodies not self-reliant through a combination of providing semi-commercial services to businesses, participation in a variety of joined-up projects and strategies at the regional level, and the capacity to acquire external funding, including from the EU. However, the law did not prescribe to what extent RDAs should be engaged in, for instance, the preparation of regional development strategies and plans at a more detailed level. In this law, the State Planning Organization (and later the Ministry of Development) was identified as the organization responsible for the coordination of RDAs, and for the allocation of external funds. In other words, in a formal sense, regional agencies were not granted the tasks of preparing regional strategies, project coordination, or financial allocation (Lagendijk et al., 2009).

The governance of the RDAs rests with three bodies: Development Board, Management Board, and General Secretariat. The first one is constituted of members from representatives of various public and private agencies, nongovernment organizations, and universities. It primarily plays an advisory role and thus serves to gain broad regional support and legitimization. The Management Board is composed of provincial governors, mayors from metropolitan municipalities, the chairmen of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and three representatives from nongovernmental organizations and universities or the private sector. The General Secretariat serves as the executive body.

The RDAs receive contributions from the central government, special province administrations, local municipalities, chambers of commerce, and
industry. The agencies also expect to receive funds from the European Union through applying for various projects. The substantial amount of the RDA budget is used for financing the regional development projects. Such undertakings can be carried out through technical support, direct financial aid, and direct operational support programs (Ministry of Development, 2009). The technical support (upper limit is 2% of the budget) is aimed at helping not-for-profit organizations with specialized assistance, while they are preparing local and regional development projects. The support is given for hiring technical people, consultants, and trainers on short-term basis. The RDAs also utilize this budget item to organize trainings for the local investors (Ministry of Development, 2009).

The direct financial aid programs (major part of RDA expense budgets) and credit aid can be given to projects with no back payment (Ministry of Development, 2009). Both private and not-for-profit organizations can apply for these programs, which have a longer project completion date than the other ones (up to a year). The themes for the project calls are chosen according to the strategic priorities of each RDA. The operational support (upper limit is 2% of the budget) can be used by not-for-profit organizations for the preparation of feasibility and research reports as well as strategic and action plans. The reports, to be completed in less than three months, should aim to contribute to the development of the region (Ministry of Development, 2009).

Regional Planning and Tourism Development in Turkey

As already discussed, the move from a centralized perspective toward a more decentralized model is recent in Turkey. Within this new governance framework, RDAs offer a policy instrument and an institutional structure for implementing the centrally determined policies at the regional level. They are responsible for the planning, development, and implementation of policies intended to increase the pace of regional development and decrease the differences in development levels between and within regions. Responsibilities include the support of local governments and the coordination of all stakeholders, including the regional private sector, public agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and universities in relation to specific development projects. Consequently, the regions for which these institutions have been established are undergoing significant transformations.

Regional-level planning and policymaking is introduced for the first time in Turkey through these organizations. However, RDAs do not represent a novel institutional structure. This model has been prevalent in Europe (Doğruel, 2012) and represents an increasingly accepted framework as it
embraces most of the generally accepted principles of development, such as participation, locality, transparency, and flexibility (Tamer, 2008). Utilizing and improving local resources, contributing to regional social and human capital, increasing the innovative capabilities, and creating the necessary conditions for a self-supporting economic growth stem out as important attributes of new perspectives on regional development (Uzbay & Lenger, 2012).

There are 26 agencies that operate under 12 main regions in Turkey. This study focuses on the activities and the operations of two: the Thrace and the North Anatolia development agencies, viewing them from the perspective of their roles in tourism development. These regions were chosen because they both include significant resources and potential for tourism, despite the fact that currently this activity in these areas is very limited. Furthermore, both in Thrace and in Northern Anatolia, shares of agricultural activity that were traditionally strong have decreased, leading to migration from the rural areas. Given these regions’ natural resources, there is the potential for rural and agritourism, in combination with other types of tourism such as cultural. Of the regions studied, Thrace cities are considered to be more developed than those in Northern Anatolia.

A combination of methods was used to obtain information on the activities and potential for local tourism policy setting of the chosen RDAs, including documentary analysis, interviews, and observations of the researchers. First, examination of documentary evidence was utilized: annual reports, minutes of the board meetings, written accounts of workshops held at different cities with different stakeholders, budgeted and actual financial reports, and the like. Second, data was collected through observation based on the participation of the authors in meetings with the agencies within their involvement as external consultants in different tourism projects in the regions. These meetings brought forth the specific nature of the agencies’ operations. Furthermore, officials in both agencies and local government officials were interviewed to access other particular facts not included in the documents and to gather information regarding the issues facing these organizations.

Characteristics of the Regions

Following the enactment of the Law on Regional Development Agencies in 2006, 2 development agencies were established in the same year, 8 agencies were instituted in 2008, followed by a group of 16 agencies in 2009. The Thrace and the North Anatolia agencies were among this last group, as they were founded in July 2009 by the Decree number 15236 of the Council of Ministers. After their establishment, they rapidly started their
operations and hired qualified experts and employees. They prepared their regional agendas and announced calls for projects according to their respective plans. Thrace completed its regional plan in October 2010 (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2010b), while North Anatolia finalized its plan in May 2011 (Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2011b). Both agencies employed a highly participatory process in preparing their regional plans. A wide array of stakeholders was involved in the process and the agencies tried hard to create awareness about the planning mechanisms among the public. Stakeholders participated in the process, through various means, such as workshops, information meetings, individual visits, and interviews. As a result, these agencies aimed to build their plans on the unique competencies in the region and on the priorities identified by their stakeholders.

Although these regions have unique attributes, they also share common characteristics. They have natural, historical, and cultural resources that offer a great potential for tourism, but they are both characterized by low level of existing tourism development. Additionally, tourism is perceived among the possible solutions to the challenging socioeconomic problems of the rural communities in both regions, which have undergone significant economic and social transformations in the last decades.

According to a study of the State Planning Organization on the socioeconomic development rankings of cities and regions (DPT, 2003), cities in Thrace are categorized under the second level of development, while cities in North Anatolia are in the fourth (Figure 1). In spite of these differences,
there is a wide variation in the development levels between the provinces of the cities of both regions. A similar pattern is observed in the competitiveness rankings of the cities of the two regions. The International Competitiveness Research Institute (URAK, 2011) ranks 81 cities according to their competitiveness scores based on four main criteria. Cities in Thrace have better rankings than those in North Anatolia. Furthermore, ranks of the cities in Thrace have improved over the last three years, while those in North Anatolia have deteriorated. The competitiveness index rankings of the cities in the regions analyzed are presented in Table 1.

### The Case of the Thrace Region

Thrace consists of the cities of Edirne, Kırklareli, and Tekirdağ, which include a total of 83 municipalities, 26 districts, and 678 villages. The region covers 18,665 km², which corresponds to 2.4% of the total area of the country. Its population in 2012 was 1.59 million, or 2.1% of Turkey’s. Population density is lower than the average of the country and exhibits wide variation in the region. Areas with significant industry development have received migration from different parts of Turkey, while population decreased in other parts of the region with little industrial development.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, in 2010 the share of agriculture in total economic output has been 11%, while the shares of industry and services have been 37% and 52%, respectively. As compared to 2006, the share of agriculture decreased from 12.5% while the share of industry increased from 34%. Following the general trend in the Turkish economy,
there has been a structural change in the last five years in the composition of economic output, namely, a decrease in the revenue derived from agriculture. These changes have followed a similar pattern to that of other countries and regions of the world, as the agriculture sector has been experiencing problems and decline (Kasimis, Papadopoulos & Pappas, 2010). In consequence, the diversification of the sources of livelihood from agriculture to services has had a transformative impact on the environment and the social structure of the concerned areas (Gray, 2009). This is also the case in the Thrace region in Turkey, where following the decline in income from the traditional agriculture base, the rural economic and social landscape has changed significantly. Migration has also contributed to this change and unemployment has become a significant problem in the area.

The region has competitive strength due to its proximity to Istanbul, the largest city and trading center in Turkey. The rich natural, historical, and cultural resources of the area offer a great promise for tourism development. However, this is currently limited in the region and income generated from tourism is well below its potential. Furthermore, rural tourism development may generate solutions to the challenging socioeconomic problems of these communities. Consequently, the Thrace Regional Development Agency has identified tourism as one of the priority areas for increasing its competitive position (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2010b).

After its establishment in 2009, the agency (also referred to as Trakyaka) was very active in getting organized, writing a master development plan, determining the sectors of primary importance, and initiating the preparation of strategic sector plans. They identified “logistics” and “tourism” as strategically important sectors to be expanded and supported in the region. The agency organized numerous workshops in three cities during 2011 and 2012. With the inclusion of municipalities, investors, business owners, and not-for-profit organizations, the strengths and weaknesses of the region were discussed and identified, with their suggestions for improvement recorded. The strategic plans for the two sectors were completed by the end of 2013. The individual strategic plans aim to present a general view of the region in their own fields and identify specific areas to be further developed.

The actualized budget of Trakyaka was US$1.8 million (2.8 million TL) in 2009 (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2009), $11 million (16.5 million TL) in 2010 (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2010a), $14 million (23.4 million TL) in 2011 (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı 2011), $12.9 million (23 million TL) in 2012 (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2012a), and $10.5 million (19.1 million TL) in the first six months of 2013. In 2010, 71% of the planned budget was reserved for the “Direct Financial Aid and Operational Support Programs”;
however, this item was not used during the year as project approvals were only completed in the first months of 2011. Consequently, this budget item rolled over to the following year. In 2011, the central government lowered their contribution to the RDA budget and thus most of the agencies had to rely on their rolled-over income from the previous years and revenue coming from sources other than the central government. This trend continued in 2012 and 2013.

The accepted “Competitiveness Enhancement Projects” by profit organizations include research and development activities and productivity improvements. The projects are owned by producers from a variety of local sectors. The list includes food and beverage producers (dairy, poultry, local sweets, meat, and wine), chemicals manufacturers, forestry product producers, fiber producers and recycling of water plants, electrical equipment plants, and machine parts manufacturers. It can be assumed that the enhancements that are made by the food and beverage producers will indirectly affect the local food quality in the region. In the near future, the wine quality of a local producer from the Şarköy wine region will improve through the financial aid given by Trakyaka for research and development activities.

A project that was offered by a not-for-profit organization under the “Competitiveness Enhancement Projects” theme entails developing tourism-related activities in Kırklareli. The project owned by the Kırklareli Environment Protection Foundation aims to develop eco-agro tourism in the Kırklareli region. This foundation plans to determine and develop eco-routes (for walking and biking), determine businesses with eco-agro potential on these routes, form new recreation areas in the region, prepare maps and guides for eco-tourists, and train tourist guides.

The small size infrastructure improvement projects mostly include development plans proposed by not-for-profit organizations. A project that was offered by the Vize Municipality will directly aid the tourism activity in the region as it aims to improve the infrastructure and the streetscape around an archaeological site in Vize. Initially, the project will improve the life quality of the residents living nearby, but later on it will make the area more attractive for the cultural tourists visiting the archaeological site. The improvements will also contribute to the city as a slow city member (currently member of the “citta slow” network since 2012).

Trakyaka has chosen “economic development”, “socioeconomic development”, and “small size infrastructure improvements” as the three themes for the 2011—2013 Financial Aid Programs (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2012b; Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2013). The agency has given support for more
than $10.2 million (17 million TL) in 2011 and $ 8.3 million (14.9 million TL) in 2012. The project supports range between $25,000 and 235,000 (40,000—400,000 TL). Tourism-related projects may be submitted under these topics. Trakyaka also accepted projects for Direct Operational Support Programs between 2011 and 2013. In 2011, five projects offered by various not-for-profit organizations for feasibility reports and inventory studies were approved, while nine were accepted in 2012 (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2012b). The city of Kırklareli has been very active in their project applications and their feasibility studies for the food producers and the revival of culture tourism will certainly benefit the region’s tourism activity.

Trakyaka was also active in using the technical aid funds to organize the necessary trainings for the potential investors. So far entrepreneurship, project process management, and international trade trainings have been provided. In 2010 more than 1,100 individuals received project management trainings given by the Thrace Development Agency. These programs helped the potential applicants during the project application process and writing of proposals. Additionally, the project owners received two-day project management trainings after their projects were approved (Trakya Kalkınma Ajansı, 2011).

The Case of the North Anatolia Region

North Anatolia includes the cities of Çankırı, Kastamonu, and Sinop. The cities encompass a total of 41 districts and 1,905 villages. The region is among those with highest number of villages; in fact, 5.5% of the total number of villages in Turkey are located in North Anatolia. It covers an extension of 13,152 km², which represents 1.7% of the total area of the country. Its population is 745,525 as of 2012, making North Anatolia the only region with a population less than 1 million among the 26 regions represented by development agencies. In the last three decades, there has been a massive migration from the region to the big cities, and from the villages to the city centers within the locality. During this period, there has been a significant decline in the population of the region, as well as a change in its composition due to decreasing share of the young population.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, in 2010 the share of agriculture in the total economic output was around 23% in North Anatolia. This figure is much higher than the average for Turkey, which is around 9% and it has increased by 1% over its level in 2006. The shares of industry and services are 20% and 57%, respectively. Forestry is an important economic activity for the region (over 50% of the area is covered by forests).
The socioeconomic problems associated with migration, the decline in income from agriculture, and the increasing inequality in income distribution have made rural development an important issue in North Anatolia.

The area has a great potential for tourism development due to its natural resources, its history and cultural heritage, but such development is presently limited. The need to diversify the tourism product and to develop alternative forms is widely recognized in the region, and rural tourism development is designated as a priority by various government agencies, such as the Ministry of Development, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

The city of Kastamonu is one of the areas identified for rural tourism development, according to the “Turkish Tourism Strategy, 2023” (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007). The region also has various natural attractions and is in the list of protected spaces of the World Wildlife Forum. Consequently, the North Anatolia development agency has identified tourism as one of its priority issues in its regional plan (Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2011b).

After its establishment in 2009, the North Anatolia Development Agency (also referred to as Kuzka) started to organize its central office in 2010. The following year, the regional offices were established and the masterplan was completed by May 2011 (Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2010). The budget of Kuzka was $5.5 million (8.5 million TL) in 2010 (Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2010), $2.6 million (4.3 million TL) in 2011 (Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2011a), and $11.9 million (16.5 million TL) in 2012 (Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2012a). The agency only used a portion of its budget in 2011; thus, $6.6 million (million TL) rolled over to the next year.

In 2010, the agency called for “Direct Operational Support” program only and waited for the completion of the masterplan for Direct Financial Aid program calls. Out of the 43 proposals for operational support, 6 were accepted and $140,000 (233,000 TL) was reserved for allocation during 2011 (Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2012a). The projects include feasibility plans and strategic reports. A project offered by the Çerkes Culture, Tourism, Nature, and Environment Society aims to gather local recipes in a cookbook and will set a good example for future tourism-related projects.

The two project themes that Kuzka chose for the 2011 Direct Financial Aid Program were “Environment and Tourism Infrastructure Investments” and “Small and Medium Size Business Investments” (Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı, 2012b). For the first call, 19 projects offered by the not-for-profit organizations were approved. The topics include park and
recreation areas development, a historical *hamam* (bath) restoration project, sewage treatment plant, and several other natural environment related projects. Some directly and some indirectly will help the development of tourism in the region. For instance, a project received $32,500 (55,000 TL) to restore a local vineyard and serve regional food.

The number of projects which applied under the Small and Medium Size Business Investments theme was 161, out of which 56 were approved for support in 2011. Of proposals received, 25 were tourism-related projects, but only one hotel renovation proposal was approved (*Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı*, 2012b). The Agency was disappointed that other investors could not use this opportunity appropriately and for this reason, they called for only tourism-related projects during 2012. For Tourism Development and Alternative Tourism Development project call they have approved 21 projects and have provided $1.6 million (2.9 million TL) financial aid during 2012/2013 (*Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı*, 2013). Kuzka offered entrepreneurship (74 hours long) and project writing seminars for the local people. Only in 2011, a total of six trainings for project writing were provided, with 554 participants (*Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı*, 2012a), whereas in 2012 a total of 820 did so in similar trainings offered by Kuzka (*Kuzey Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı*, 2013).

**Evaluation of the Thrace and North Anatolia Regional Planning Model**

A comparison of the two RDA cases shows that they both work within a similar system in which a regional plan is first elaborated to define the primary areas of action for the region. Following this initial step in the regional planning process, other specific sectoral plans (such as the tourism plan) are devised based on the identified priorities. However, although both of the agencies were established at the same time, the initial regional planning process has been lengthier for Kuzka than for Trakyaka. Moreover, the Thrace agency has not been willing to wait for the sectoral plans in order to start allocating its resources. Thus, acceptance decisions for the different projects submitted for financial aid have not considered the merit of the project in the overall regional plan. In contrast, Kuzka has delayed the call for projects in its region in order to allocate the financial support to those projects more in line with the priorities identified within the sectoral plan.

The importance given by both agencies to education and training illustrates another similarity in their approaches. This is an important advantage of the current system, as the literature has stressed the importance of education and access to expertise at the local level for the participation of
the community to take place (Tosun, 2000; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2000). Currently, some of the local stakeholders experience difficulties in writing the project proposals and in conforming to the format requirements. Both Trakyaka and Kuzka have instituted courses on project writing and are providing help to the applicants to overcome this problem. The two agencies have also organized several informative meetings to provide specific information about the different project calls, in accordance to the requirement of the RDAs for transparency and their legal need to provide information to all local stakeholders on the project bidding process.

There exists a certain coordination of the different RDAs at the regional planning level. On the other hand, there is a lack of contact and sharing of experiences in relation to the sectoral plans, including tourism, confirming the coordination problems attributed to RDAs in the literature (Doğruel, 2012). It seems that the current structure may be improved with an increased coordination between the agencies, both for the sectoral plans and in relation to more specific topics, such as tourism products. In this sense, the agencies have identified rural tourism as a priority in their respective regions, since it is thought that it might provide the solution for the problems of the communities. Thus, these two agencies would ideally benefit from a platform in which best practices and experiences might be shared, and collaboration among different regions might be achieved.

CONCLUSION

The centralized model for tourism planning and decisionmaking prevalent earlier in Turkey has resulted in a prioritization of certain regions deemed by the central government as key areas. Under this system, the aim was to increase in the short term the number of tourists and the resulting foreign currency. Consequently, regions such as Antalya, Cappadocia, and Istanbul have received priority for tourism investments and incentives, while other destinations in Turkey with high potential but lower capacity to provide short-term returns were disregarded. Moreover, this centralized model has also been detrimental to the implementation of sustainability principles in tourism development, since a strong local governance is required for planning and decisionmaking of sustainable tourism (Çetinel & Yolal, 2009; Tosun, 2001). Those cases in which local structures have been created for ad hoc projects have failed due to the lack of any regional governmental institution available to manage the programs (Tosun & Jenkins, 1996).
Thus, the creation of the RDAs has been an important step in addressing these issues. Through the RDAs, the regions have been provided the capacity to make decisions that affect their constituents, and provide coordination for a more effective implementation of the decisions at the local level.

The newly created RDAs show some advantages related to their mixed legal personality (private/governmental), which may result on a greater degree of flexibility. This also applies to the sources of funding; together with governmental sources, the RDAs are expected to obtain additional financing from carrying out commercial activities and from other external sources, such as those coming from the EU. However, currently, the agencies obtain their budget solely from the government; sometimes they experience difficulties in collecting the funds allocated to the agencies from the local municipalities. In part, due to these budgetary concerns, despite the potential for flexibility, the RDAs are heavily bureaucratic and need to undergo a lengthy process in order to obtain approval for many decisions, as inferred by the researchers during the meetings with these agencies.

Additionally, the RDAs in Turkey do not have responsibility for all the planning carried out at the regional level. Decisionmaking concerning local issues that are considered of strategic importance, such as energy, are not delegated and remain the responsibility of the central government. Thus, coordination issues may arise, since the effect of these decisions at the central level may impact on other local resolutions. For instance, actions introduced by the central government concerning renewable energy sources may have an effect on the tourism policies in the region. Other examples include the plans made by the central government to create a new harbor in the Thrace region; this in turn can have negative environmental impacts and affect the viability of tourism in the area.

Although RDAs are able to devise plans and determine priorities for the region, their capacity for acting is limited to the allocation of funding to those projects deemed in accordance to the strategic objectives identified. Thus, the current system in place is not an example of decentralized governance, but at most a mitigation of the centralized model prevalent in Turkey. In order for the local stakeholders to influence the development of the region, they need to conform to the project-oriented format introduced through these agencies, which is unfamiliar to most. In addition, there is a general lack of awareness of the different stakeholders regarding their participation in the local planning process. This newly introduced approach for planning needs to be assimilated and further developed. Moreover, the current project-based system may in many cases result on a narrow view
and impact allocation of funds to specific projects without consideration to their importance on the overall planning process for the region.

Despite these limitations, the newly created RDAs have increased the level of transparency and participation of the local stakeholders in the decision-making process for their regions. As part of their role, the RDAs are expected to provide coordination among different stakeholders and support to the local government. In the two cases of Thrace and Northern Anatolia analyzed in this chapter, a participatory approach in the development of regional plans is observed. However, this approach is top-down rather than bottom-up. Zapata et al. (2011) compare two community-based tourism approaches and conclude that bottom-up models are more successful than top-down in contributing to development and poverty alleviation. However, participation of the local community in tourism development is usually constrained by the lack of know-how of the locals and their dependence on outside expertise. The current model of regional development organizations represents a possible solution to this problem, as they are able to bring external expertise to the region. The creation of entrepreneurial capabilities and a pool of skilled labor through training and educational programs could be a specific benefit provided by the agencies. In the two regions discussed in this chapter, education and training, including entrepreneurship and project management programs, have been a major focus on the early activities of the concerned RDAs. Furthermore, due to limited statistical data, especially relating to tourism in these regions, it is difficult to analyze, forecast, and develop strategies. The two RDAs are working to overcome this deficiency and have allocated part of their funds to the collection of more comprehensive information on the region.

In Thrace and Northern Anatolia, tourism has been given priority and seen as an instrument for the development of the region. However, RDAs are not formed exclusively for tourism, so there is still a need for a local organization that will be responsible specifically for its development in the area. Nevertheless, it is within the ability of the RDAs to support the establishment of such an organization that can have freedom to manage the resources in the area within its role as coordinator of the local community and the stakeholders in the region.

In sum, the current Turkish model offers a mixed system in which the central authority and the local stakeholders, including the local government, can be brought together for planning and development of tourism. However, this system has drawbacks. For example, the regional agency is not autonomous and independent from the central authority and the RDAs are dependent on the budget allocated to them by the national government.
Hence, this system does not include the necessary conditions for decentralization to be successful as discussed by Rondinelli (1981, cited in Yüksel & Yüksel, 2000). The model in place is still in line with the currently accepted participatory approach (Weiss, 2005; Zahra, 2011; Zhao & Ritchie, 2007) that establishes the need for the local stakeholders to be involved in various stages of the destination planning and development process.

The newly instituted model for regional development has been examined in relation to its ability to carry out regional planning for tourism within a participatory and sustainable approach, while certain drawbacks and lessons have been outlined. This experience within the Turkish context may represent an example for other developing countries with similar characteristics, since these countries tend to follow a centralized form of tourism administration. The model, framed within the European Union’s regional policy guidelines, illustrates how the centralized tourism administration may be mitigated through the use of other instruments, such as RDAs. Despite its shortfalls, such as the lack of autonomy and independence from the central authority, this model has the potential to encourage participation of the local stakeholders in the definition of regional priorities. Whether the model may contribute to the development of less favored areas and the reduction of the inequalities between the regions still remains to be seen.
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