



Research Article

## THE ROLE OF COOPERATIVISM IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF BADEMLER NATURAL LIFE VILLAGE\*

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### ABSTRACT

Cooperatives represent a powerful and viable economic alternative at the stage when people seek a way to change their lives in economic, social and cultural terms. In addition to being established to meet the needs of its members, cooperatives have responsibilities to society in a wider sense. In this study, the role of cooperatives in economic development of societies is examined. Purpose of the study; to explore how cooperatives can act towards the sustainable development of society. In this context, Bademler Natural Life Village, which was established by the Bademler Village Agricultural Development Cooperative, is examined by case study method. In order to explain the role of cooperatives in economic development of societies, interview and observation techniques were used to collect detailed data about Bademler Village Agricultural Development Cooperative. As a result of the study, it was understood that all employees working in Bademler Natural Life Village consisted of people living in Bademler village. In this way, it has been demonstrated that employment opportunities are created for the people of the village and it increases the income level. Recommendations developed by the analysis of data obtained in rural development in Turkey is intended to contribute to the development of cooperatives.

**Keywords:** Cooperatives, Rural Development, Agriculture, Bademler Village.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important differences of agriculture from industry is that it is riskier both in terms of markets and in terms of environmental impacts during the production process. The losses caused by this affect the producer on the one hand and affect the consumer on the other. In this context, the organization of farmers is an activity that can benefit at every stage, from the beginning to the end of production and even the social

\* This research was presented as a full-text paper at the International Gastronomy Tourism Studies Congress in 2019.

<sup>1</sup>To cite this document: Bucak, T., Güven, P. and Rahimi, R. (2019). The Role of Cooperativism in Rural Development: The Case of Bademler Natural Life Village, Journal of Gastronomy Hospitality and Travel, 2(2), 112-119. DOI: 10.33083/joghat.2019.20

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life of producers. Being an agricultural country, Turkey is increasing the importance of agricultural cooperatives. Especially for the villagers living in rural areas and having difficulty in adapting to the conditions of the market economy, cooperatives are an important institution (Şahin et al., 2013; Semerci, 2015). As people-oriented enterprises, cooperatives also have the potential to create significant employment.

Although there are some studies explaining the social and economic effects of cooperatives as a result of the literature review, a very limited study has been found on the concretization of these effects in the society in line with the projects realized by cooperatives.

In this study, the importance of rural development for the countries is given first. Then cooperatives and the principles of cooperatives are defined. The past contributions to economic development are briefly evaluated. In addition, these contributions are at present needs and priorities in Turkey emphasized how they are related.

In the findings section; General information about Bademler Village Agricultural Development Cooperative is shared in accordance with literature researches, interviews and observations. The establishment process, structure and contribution of Bademler Natural Life Village to rural development are examined.

In the conclusion, the effects of cooperatives on rural development are examined by making comparisons with previous studies. Bademler Village Agricultural Development Cooperative's future projects and potential contributions to the region are proposed.

## **1.1. RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Rural development activities to date, increasing the income and welfare of the people living in rural areas, contributing to their social and cultural development, reducing the differences between rural and urban self-sustaining in rural areas to create sustainable economic and social units and rural life level of urban life level to make it more contemporary (Kuşat, 2014). Rural development and economic development are used very closely. Rural development is a strategy and agricultural policy in general in order to improve the social and economic life of people living in rural areas. Basic elements of rural development; increasing per capita national income, changing the efficiency and amount of production factors, increasing the share of industry and service sector in national income and exports (Erdönmez, 2005).

Agricultural cooperatives play a very important role in rural development. Because, one of the most important ways to increase agricultural production, to obtain quality products and to increase the level of life of those engaged in agriculture is to organize the producers effectively. Although numerically it operates in various areas of agricultural cooperatives 4-5 million partner in Turkey who are not as effective as it is in western countries (Yılmaz and Gül, 2010; Kuşat, 2014).

Today, reduce unemployment, which is one of the most important problems in Turkey, thus ensuring rural development and rural-urban migration is possible with prevention. The existence and development of agricultural cooperatives that will ensure the development of rural areas are decisive in preventing this migration (Tan and Karaönder, 2013).

## **1.2. DESCRIPTION AND PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATIVITY**

Cooperatives can be divided into five main sections. These are production, consumption, credit and building cooperatives. Production cooperatives consist of people who come together to produce jointly. There are agricultural cooperatives, industrial production cooperatives, labor cooperatives, sales cooperatives. Consumption cooperative is the type of cooperative established by consumers to meet the needs of consumers in a cheaper way. Credit cooperatives were established to provide credit to its partners and the market. Building cooperatives are cooperatives established to meet the needs of partners such as housing or workplace at lower cost. Other cooperatives include transportation, training and pharmaceutical cooperatives (Çetin, 2009; Koçtürk, 2006).

In 1995, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the top organization representing global cooperatives, defined the cooperative as follows: an autonomous unity and a democratic unity of individuals who voluntarily unite to fulfill their common economic, social and cultural needs, is controlled. In this

definition, as the core values of cooperatives; self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, justice, honesty and solidarity (Can and Sakarya, 2012; ICA, 2012).

ICA has adopted the cooperative identity, including the definition of the cooperative, the values of the cooperatives and the seven cooperative principles described below. These principles are as follows: (Çetin, 2009)

- Voluntary and Free Access
- Democratic Control of the Partner
- Partner's Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Training and Information
- Cooperation between cooperatives
- Social Responsibility Principle

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study was examined with a case study of qualitative research methods. Case study; a detailed examination of an event (or a small number of events) by any suitable method. The reason for choosing this method is to have a deep understanding of the research by considering the natural environment of the research area (Punch and Oancea, 2014).

Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative was chosen as the research area. Bademler Natural Life Village is located in the town of Seferihisar in Izmir province in western Turkey. In this context, information about the establishment, historical development and members of the cooperative was obtained through an in-depth interview with the chairman of the cooperative. The reason for choosing an in-depth interview is that this method is a data collection technique that covers all aspects of the subject under investigation and allows detailed answers with open-ended questions (Tekin, 2006). Bademler Natural Life Village was selected because it is the first ecological village built in Turkey. In addition, within the framework of Bademler Natural Life Village established within the cooperative, the details of the interviews were made and the data was tried to be used by using observation technique. The reason for the use of observation technique is that if the observation focuses on individual or group behaviors during the normal course of life, the data obtained are closer to reality (Altunışık et al., 2005).

## **3. RESULTS**

In order to obtain information about Bademler Village Agricultural Development Cooperative, Mehmet Sever, head of Bademler Village Agricultural Development Cooperative, is the main data source. We interviewed face-to-face and asked semi-structured questions to Mehmet Sever. Furthermore, the following findings were obtained by observing the activities carried out throughout the cooperative.

### **Could you tell us about the development of Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative from its establishment to the present?**

Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative was established in 1962, it is one of Turkey's oldest cooperative. There are 7 founding members. As Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative, we united around the project of creating an ecological village in order to deliver healthy and reliable products produced by local producers to the consumers. In 2015, in the workshop held to support local development of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, we talked to Aziz Kocaoğlu, the former mayor of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, and the establishment of the Natural Life Village was started.

Bademler Natural Life Village which we established as a result of our project is located on an area of 365 decares. 4-5% of this area consists of administrative and accommodation areas, warehouses, common areas, restaurant, cafeteria, Avlu Market, multi-purpose meeting room. The 95% area is production areas. 10%

of this consists of olive trees, 60% consists of fruit trees, vegetable production areas and the remaining part consists of greenhouses.

**Can you give us information about your activities in Bademler Natural Life Village?**

In the kitchen in our administrative building, we provide food service to our employees with the vegetables we produce in our cooperative. The cafeteria serves outside guests. There is also a separate restaurant for guests who come to stay. All of the dishes in these kitchens are prepared with the vegetables we produce in our cooperative. The products that we can not produce we offer to our guests by supplying from other cooperatives. In our multi-purpose meeting room, we provide various trainings to the local people. Our Courtyard Market are realizing the sales of the products we brought from other cooperatives in Turkey. There are various workshops where we organize trainings for our guests coming for accommodation.

**How many members of Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative are there and which products are produced?**

Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative has 252 partners. However, not all members are producers. Since the first time Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative was established, olive oil production is realized by processing the olives that we provide from the olive producers of Bademler village and olive trees in the land of our cooperative. We also produce products from our fruit trees, lavender garden, honey beehives and wine grapes. In addition, there are greenhouses where we produce seasonal flowers.

**Can you explain the characteristics of your employees in Bademler Natural Life Village and the criteria for choosing them?**

Our employees in Bademler Natural Life Village consist of people living in Bademler village. The people who provide training in the workshops are employed from Izmir Metropolitan Municipality Vocational Factory. Our Food Engineer, who provides training in the Food Workshop, works with us full time and is responsible for the control of our restaurants.

**Can you describe your target audience for Bademler Natural Life Village?**

Obviously, we are open to customers from all walks of life, we do not have any criteria. However, one of our goals is to ensure that the young generation, who is committed to urban life, actually understands the importance of conservation and maintenance of natural resources. For this reason, we want young people to come and live the life in Bademler Natural Life Village. Our guests coming from abroad are not interested in staying here, but because they are curious about the operation here. The highest interest in Bademler Natural Life Village comes from families.

**What are the factors that you consider in the selection of the products you sell in Bademler Natural Life Village?**

All of the products we sell in the Courtyard Market are the products we obtain from other cooperatives. We prefer products with production permission from the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock. However, our only main criterion is that the products come from cooperatives and are hand-made, reliable and quality products.

**Could you give us information about the projects you want to carry out in the future as Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative?**

The main project we are planning for the future is to ensure the active continuation of the cooperative during the current economic crisis.

We have a big project that we are currently carrying out. As Bademler Agricultural Cooperative, one of our main expenses is energy. In order to solve this problem, we established an energy cooperative to utilize solar energy. When we complete this project, our 20-25 years of energy will be free of charge.

**Are there any institutions and organizations that support you in bringing Bademler Natural Life Village to its current position?**

Thanks to Aziz Kocaoğlu, former mayor of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, we have actively implemented Bademler Natural Life Village. We are in contact with Urla and Seferihisar municipalities. Izmir Chamber of Commerce has also helped us to realize our projects.

**Picture 1. Bademler Natural Life Village Houses**



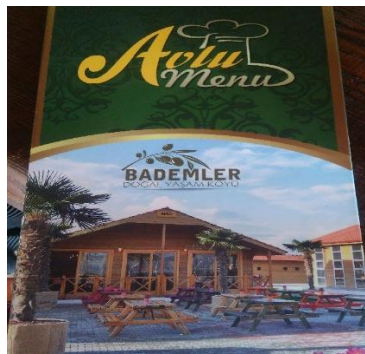
Apart from the findings reached after a face-to-face meeting with the President of Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative Mehmet Sever, the general functioning of Bademler Natural Life Village was observed. The houses built for the accommodation of the guests coming to Bademler Natural Life Village are constructed of wood materials compatible with nature as shown in Figure 1.

**Picture 2. Products Processed in Food Workshop**



The kitchen was prepared for the guests staying in the accommodation. In the menu created for the guests, it is observed that the local dishes are mostly local to Aegean Region. The employees of the Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative operate in the kitchen where they collect products from the gardens of the cooperative and which are reserved for the use of the employees in the cooperative building.

**Picture 3. Bademler Natural Village Cafeteria Menu**





**Picture 4. Drinks in Bademler Natural Life Village Cafeteria Menu**

The cafeteria menu serving the guests of Bademler Natural Life Village was examined. It is noteworthy that there is no carbonated beverage in the menu. It was seen that the service staff working in the cafeteria were not experienced and therefore there were some disruptions in service to the guests.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Bademler Natural Life Village project has come to the fore because of the first ecological village established in Turkey. One of the contributions of the project is that it has created employment for Bademler village. All the employees of Bademler Natural Life Village live in Bademler village. It is also a social facility which is in high demand for the Aegean region. On weekends, it provides accommodation especially for people who want to get away from city life. Thus, a potential for Bademler village has been created for rural tourism. The positive effects of Bademler Natural Life Village in improving the income and welfare of the people living in the village of Bademler and the better utilization of agricultural products have been demonstrated with this study.

In this study, which was done with the work of Sahin and colleagues made similar results with all the Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Turkey was obtained. Not all members of Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative are farmers. There are also employees in different sectors. This is evaluated in a positive direction. In this way, it is ensured that agricultural cooperatives constitute an agenda in other sectors.

The fields in producing products sales share of 40% and a share of 0.8% includes ornamental plants in the Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Turkey is situated in the shares perform. Production in different areas also constitutes an important potential for Bademler village in terms of rural development. It not only realizes plant sales to the visitors coming from the production of ornamental plants, but also uses the products obtained by agriculture within the cooperative and provides economic development with the sale. This case serves as an example for other cooperatives in Turkey. The variety of products consumed and offered to the customers in Bademler Natural Life Village and being presented to the customers in a fresh way from field to table philosophy contribute to the recognition and preference of the region in gastronomic sense.

All employees of Bademler Natural Life Village also live in Bademler village. In parallel with Torun's work in 2013, creating a source of employment in rural areas creates an important factor in preventing rural migration. The creation of non-agricultural employment in rural areas prevents hidden unemployment. In this context, thanks to Bademler Natural Life Village, an important source of employment was provided to the people of Bademler village.

Since Bademler Natural Life Village is a one-year project, its benefits will be revealed more clearly in the future. For example; Terin and his friends in the study of the Central Development of the Kirklareli Erikler Village Agricultural Development Cooperative member of the dairy cattle producers 60.5% emphasized that the cooperative has an important contribution to the development of dairy cattle. Cooperatives are an important tool for the economic and social development of rural areas thanks to the economic advantages they provide to their members.

The importance of the cooperative members' share in the continuation of the activities of the cooperative is demonstrated in this study. Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative has been achieved with the support of its members during the periods when the cooperative has problems. In the study conducted by Ünal

and Yercan to the Fisheries Cooperatives, it was stated that the fishery cooperatives could not achieve the desired activity since 1940s due to reasons such as lack of support and incentives, lack of cooperative training and solidarity, mismanagement and wrong plans during the establishment of cooperatives. The importance of cooperative management and organization with members is better understood at this point. His Turkey Sahin et al Cooperative to shareholders in Being and Cooperatives When Success Factors Affecting Analysis of his work to investigate the effective factors in the cooperative partner with the highest average with propositions 'We are increasing our economic strength by acting together' has been. As a model of sustainable organization, it is seen that cooperatives create economic, social and political power by creating awareness of acting together. Turkey has used them in rural areas can be evaluated by means of cooperative potentials and contribute to rural tourism.

One of the limitation of the study is; the aim is to make interviews with only one person who has knowledge about the establishment, development and activities of the Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative and to improve the work in line with this information. Also Bademler Natural Life Village forming the subject of the study, comparisons could not be made because it is unique in Turkey.

According to the research, some suggestions can be made to Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative:

- Festivals that can contribute to gastronomic tourism can be organized in different concepts. In this way, Bademler Natural Life Village can be recognized in a wider area.
- Areas where local food can be purchased and tasted can be created.
- Highlighting the specific tastes of the Aegean region and Bademler village can enable guests coming from outside the Aegean region to prefer Bademler Natural Life Village as a gastronomic point.

For further studies, the following recommendations may be made to the researchers:

- In this study, Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative was investigated using qualitative research methods. Subsequent studies may apply quantitative research methods.
- The study was carried out with Bademler Agricultural Development Cooperative. Other studies of Izmir, in the Aegean region and Turkey made some.

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