

Could Rural Tourism be a Good Generator of Women Workforce?: The Case of Kirazlı Town

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Abstract

One of the most important industries in the world is tourism because it is surely a great employment generator in many countries and at the same time it forms a basis for women employment. Rural tourism, on the other hand, could be considered as a much more effective way of supporting women labour force because it might appear in every single piece of a culture. Moreover, this type of tourism requires an active participation of local people in destinations because rural tourism products mainly depend on authentic traditions and tastes of different cultures. Many women living in villages of Turkey constitute passive workforce, and by its nature, rural tourism is especially attractive to women by providing them with decent employment.

This paper aims to emphasize the importance of rural tourism in generating women employment. In this regard, 8 in-depth interviews, one of the qualitative methods, were achieved both with women serving for rural tourism and the headman of the town in Kirazlı Town of Kuşadası. The impacts of rural tourism on women employment are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Kirazlı Town, Kuşadası, rural tourism, women employment

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is a tourism type that integrates nature, rural culture and agriculture and can be considered with the other types of tourism, as well [18]. Nowadays, almost all destinations around the world are highly overbuilt and as a result overcrowded. People have begun to seek for staying away from any crowded, urban atmosphere and visit naturally peaceful and virgin destinations more. Rural tourism seems to be a perfect choice for nature-seekers by providing them with different peaceful options [12]. It might be important here to emphasize the characteristics of a rural destination, Köse [13] underlined some clear features of a rural destination which are as follows: in a 1-km area, there should be less than 150 people living and the area should not be very modern and as a result, unemployment appears much more than modern areas. Unemployment is an issue to be emphasized here in terms of explaining the importance of rural tourism activities in a rural area.

It might be important to emphasize the general characteristics of rural tourism here. According to the study of Fidan and Nam [6]:

Rural tourism;

- Does not depend on seasons,
- Is supported by activities and festivals,
- Appeals to almost all social groups,
- Contributes to creating the entrepreneurship among local people,
- Revives local economies.

When it comes to the benefits of rural tourism in Turkey, Soykan [18] summarized them as follows in his study;

Rural tourism is important for Turkey because it:

- does not depend on seasons,
- balances the geographical distribution of tourism activities,

- is integrated with other tourism types,
- has a well-educated and high-income tourist profile,
- contributes to the protection of natural environment and cultural heritage,
- is important for the destination promotion of the country,
- helps balancing the diversity between regions.

Since tourism provides added value and employment for the receiving destinations, it is a vital line of business in many countries [14]. Moreover, with the super power of diversification, tourism offers a lot of direct or indirect job opportunities to both men and women in an economy. Peripheral and rural areas usually consider tourism as a tool for generating local jobs and raising the rate of economic welfare [5]; [7]; [17].

A fact about economic development via rural tourism is that, in many rural areas, its promotion is synonymous with arising small-business and the industry heavily depends on small, family-centred enterprises [8] which also highlights the importance of women role in a family and in family-based business. By its nature, rural tourism brings decent employment opportunities especially to women since it heavily depends on authenticity and traditionalism [14]. Women employment is much more important for countries such as Turkey because women in rural areas are usually passive workforce of the economy in these countries.

The main purpose of this study is to identify how rural tourism activities contribute to women workforce and how the way of life of women has changed in the light of rural tourism business. The study focuses on the role of rural tourism in generating female labour. There are some studies about the relationship between women and rural tourism [2]; [11]; [13]; [15], but a study directly focusing on the rural tourism effects on women employment could

not be encountered in the related literature. Kirazlı Town in Kuşadası is the base of this study since it is stated as one of the authentic destinations that could serve for rural tourism in Aegean Region by the only ecology association of Kuşadası-Ekodosd- and by the observations of the researcher about the tourism profile and activities in the town. This town is located in Aydın Province and Aydın's economy depends mainly on agriculture with a rate of 55%, and tourism sector is the second heading power in economy of this province [19]. Aydın Province is home to Kuşadası and Didim counties which are popular tourist destinations in Aegean Region, so integrating agriculture and tourism could lead to a perfect economic growth in terms of raising employment especially for women [1]. Emphasizing the power of rural tourism activities here is important because there is a pay gap between genders in almost all types of tourism business and women have less chance to get promoted in their tourism career than men [16], but rural tourism is more generous to women than other types of tourism thanks to its flexible working conditions [14].

Kirazlı serves nature lovers during the whole year, and tourists visiting here can join many activities from making their own yoghurt to attending the 'Cherry Festival' held here in June every year. The town is already named after the name of the fruit 'Cherry' in Turkish, which even reminds people nature at first blush.

Women Employment in Rural Tourism

Research has suggested that women employment is definitely basic and essential for rural and agricultural homesteads to remain alive. [4]; [10]. Women in rural areas serve tourists in many ways from welcoming guests in rural homes to promoting the values of the local culture and saving the environment. They sometimes cook and sell the local tastes, grow up and sell organic food, or they might make souvenirs and sell their craftwork. It is possible to say that women also have the chance to prefer how they will work for rural tourism business; they might either work full-time or part-time, which means they will not have difficulty in managing their work-life balance since they have many other responsibilities such as taking care of their children.

Another important factor about the support of rural tourism to women is that it might change the attitude of the younger in a family in terms of remaining on the farm and it might set up and improve the collaboration in a family [3]. For now, rural tourism is a relatively new term in Turkey, and its development may be slow, but the younger in a rural family might set up their career in rural tourism in the future. The government and some non-governmental establishments are also aware of the importance of rural tourism; under the leadership of Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Anadolu Efes Company launched Tourism is the Future Project and thus they have been funding sustainable, agricultural, rural forms of tourism since 2007 by training and certificating people especially women in tourism field. As part of the project, economic support for tourism in rural areas has been promoted, and many programmes have been oriented to give the women in farm families the opportunity to obtain supplementary employment and income. From the current results of this project, it is obvious that rural tourism activities have started to accelerate women employment, which was a result of a practical project.

When it comes to the related literature, it is clear that rural tourism will be an effective factor directing women life in the near future [3]; [9].

METHOD

Sampling and Population

A sampling frame was created with women who serve for rural tourism in many different ways in Kirazlı Town either by managing/ serving in rural houses, working on farms or by working as small retailers in the town. Since Kirazlı is a small town, there are not lots of small retailers of rural houses. As a result, it was not so difficult to reach women working in those houses. One in-depth interview was separately achieved with the headman of the town with the purpose of holding a control in-depth interview. That was important because he knows every single detail in the town, and he took the author on excursion in Kirazlı. His ideas about rural tourism and women workforce issue supported the results of the study, which was significant.

Data Collection and Analysis

A multiple-step in-depth interviews were held with the women working in rural tourism in Kirazlı Town, and 30 women were reached during these interviews. At first, 7 in-depth interviews with the women were achieved, and then the interview with the headman was held to check if there could be any different ideas about the issue. For the in-depth interviews, in the related literature, Köse [13] carried out a similar research in Beypazarı, Ankara to identify the relationship between rural tourism and women entrepreneurship, and the research questions used in her study were adapted to the case by the author. Each interview took about 30-40 minutes, and they were held separately. Since the participants did not want any voice record process, the author took notes of the key points.

'... Do not record me, please because I cannot talk that way, I am shy...' said a participant, and that was the common situation in all interviews. Although they felt shy, they stated that they did their jobs willingly. This might be a clue showing that women in this town are getting away from the traditional point of view since they are not escaping from tourists. As a woman remarked: '...I do not feel uncomfortable with tourists anymore because here is my hometown, and I know everybody around, I get help from my neighborhood when I need... It is unbelievable, but I have learnt a little bit English...'

The age range 40-50 has the highest rate and it could be thought that those women aged between 40-50 usually have grown up their children and have more free time to market what they have been doing at home for years.

Table 1: Age range of the participants

Educational Status	Number of Participants	%
Primary School	15	50
Secondary School	10	33
High School	5	17
Total	30	100

As stated by one of the participants: '...Being well-educated or not was not my choice, but now I feel proud to be able to stand on my own feet and contribute to my family...', so it seems clear that working in rural tourism generates not only labor force of women but also it encourages them to realize themselves.

Table 3: Marital status of the participants

Marital Status	Number of Participants	%
Married	25	83
Single	3	10
Divorced	2	7
Total	30	100

Another important quotation by a divorced woman to be emphasized here is: ‘...After getting divorced, I thought that I was nothing on earth, but now I feel my own strength... Thanks to my current job (selling craftwork), I have remembered to live on my own and more surprisingly with the things that I have been doing for many years...’

Another quotation from a married woman is that: ‘... I now feel that I can contribute to my family... I am a good model for my children...’

It is clear from the interviews and quotations given above that women living in Kirazlı Town are happy with rural tourism activities because those activities touch their lives. This statement can be supported by the population change in the town.

Table 4: Population change in Kirazlı by years, compiled by the author from the local authority of the town.

Year	Total Population
1985	898
1990	890
2000	981
2011	944
2012	937
2013	986
2014	985
2015	992
2016	1010
2017	1012

While lots of rural areas in Turkey typically suffer from a decrease of population, Kirazlı Town is getting more and more people year by year, which could be directly related to rural tourism activities. The positive impacts of tourism activities clearly encourage people to settle in the town. This idea is supported by the headman, as well ‘... Every year, a lot of foreign and domestic tourists visit our town and that makes us happy. Almost everybody in this town works for tourism directly or indirectly, and they earn money from it. We can say that even children are working by helping their mothers at home or on farm...’

The headman of the town also emphasizes that this town could be more and more attracting if some certain steps could be achieved. With its stone houses, organic food markets, cherry festivals, the town is already tempting. However, while wandering around the town, as uttered by the headman of it ‘... We have a cave here which is called ‘Aslanlı Mağara’ and now we are trying hard to offer this place to tourism. We have many projects including building a cable-car line near the lake area ...If we can succeed these, our town will be attracting for more and more tourists year by year...’

Code Development and Findings

To analyze 7 in-depth interviews with 30 different women and 1 interview with the headman of the town, a group of five researchers was created and we started the

code development process together but each created codes separately, and this action was held twice to create certain codes. Each of these two processes took about two hours and there was an agreement on dividing the main codes into two as Economic and Social codes under which there are sub-codes seen below.

CODE	DEFINITION
ECONOMIC CODES	Codes related to economic gains.
Economic Independence	As stated by all participants, it is important for them to earn money from what they are doing for rural tourism.
Family Economy	Women want to contribute to the budget of their family and share the load with their husbands thanks to tourism.
SOCIAL CODES	Codes related to social and cultural gains.
Self-confidence	Women in rural tourism business emphasize that they have gained their self-confidence and realized themselves because they can stand on their own feet.
Entrepreneurship	Rural tourism business sometimes does not need any fund because women do whatever they have been doing until now, so they are ready to start their business at home. This brings together that women in the area are now aware of their entrepreneurship skills.
Being a Role Model	Trying to earn money and contributing to family, women feel that they are now good models for their children. They want their children to stay on the farm in the village or put their career paths in rural tourism. Moreover, they especially encourage their daughters to stand on their own feet since they now see they can succeed this.
Family Relations	Contributing to family strengthens relations because women are now supporting the budget and their husbands have started to share the load, as well by taking care of children or doing the housework to some extent.
Improvement in attitude to life	Women have started to communicate with foreigners, and they have started to see different cultures. They also state that their clothing is more modern now. Some of them are learning a little bit English. While emphasizing these ideas, they also compare the situation with the past: they were not comfortable even to talk to their casual male friends on the street, but now they communicate even with foreigners.

CONCLUSION and SUGGESTIONS

The issue of women employment in every field in Turkey has been the hot agenda especially in recent years. Although Turkey pioneered enfranchisement of women in the world, women in the country still have difficulty in finding a place for themselves in business life. There are some possible obstacles that women face in business life such as glass ceiling effect, but despite everything they have always succeeded to take part in business sometimes only by doing housework or working on farms.

Especially for developing countries like Turkey, encouraging women to work is significant since women workforce constitutes a great deal for those economies because of their average age and population rates. Another crucial point to be considered is that women in rural areas actually do work even if they do not get paid for what they do such as working on farms.

Since in Turkish culture hospitality is very important, women usually have the role to welcome and host guests at home, this is a part of their daily life in the family. They can manage this process very well because they start to learn to entertain guests at home at the very early ages. When all these clues come together, it seems that working in service sector is a perfect choice for women in that culture. Service sector provides women with job opportunities in all fields but especially in rural areas. Rural tourism enables women to earn from their daily activities. It is clear from the research results that women do not have much difficulty in working for rural tourism activities because they usually do not have to care about working hours or work place. They can work at home to do and sell their craftwork or on farms to grow up and sell organic food, which means they also do not need to have a huge amount of fund to start their own business.

From our research results, it can be considered that women are highly motivated to take part in rural tourism activities because they now feel the power and confidence of earning their own money and supporting their family even if they are not well educated. They are also aware that tourism improves their points of view and this is a significant factor to be considered in terms of growing up their children. Those women now feel more encouraged to take part in life, and their effort to learn English or to dress up more modernly could be a good sign of this. Overall, all women are delighted at working and earning money from rural tourism, and they are also glad for improving themselves socially and economically thanks to tourism. Women not only want to go on working in rural tourism but also they also want their children to follow a career path in rural tourism, which is a sign of continuity of employment in this field.

In the light of the results of this research, the suggestions for the development of rural tourism activities as generator of women workforce are made above:

- Rural tourism areas in our country should be detected and turned into tourist destinations.
- Rural tourism activities in Kirazlı should be supported by different tourism policies and investments to be able to benefit from its added value more. However, this should be facilitated in a strategic and sustainable way.
- Promotion and branding of Kirazlı as a rural tourism area should be held by the government.
- Like all rural tourism destinations, Kirazlı also should be controlled regularly by officials to keep it sustainable.
- The Cherry Festival in Kirazlı should be promoted more via social media and other forms of communication, and some other festivals in different seasons could be added so that this could help increase the occupancy rate even in low seasons in Kirazlı.
- People in Kirazlı should be trained well about sustainability because it seems that they are not aware of the possible sustainability problems yet since they are new to rural tourism concept and happy with its current benefits.
- Maintenance of continuity of the traditional values such as local tastes or craftwork in Kirazlı should be provided with training.

- Since rural tourism in Kirazlı depends mostly on women, women here should be trained to create a more effective way of sales, marketing and communication so that employment of them could be more sustainable.

- Women in Kirazlı should be encouraged more to take part in rural tourism business. This could be provided either by government policies or some social responsibility projects of foundations.

- The research results show that the whole environment and neighborhood is important for the development of rural tourism activities in Kirazlı, so all people- whether they directly work for tourism or not- should be trained about tourists and tourism activities.

- Women in Kirazlı might sometimes need little funding to initiate their business, and they should be provided this funding by officials.

- The craftwork of women in the town and the local tastes should be advertised and promoted more to the whole world by the government.

- There could be some language courses offered free to the public so that they could communicate better with tourists.

- Some tourism offices could be built by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey especially for women to be able to get advice whenever they need.

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