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BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION THROUGH AN AGROECOTOURISM PROJECT

The case of Ovacık Village, Turkey

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Introduction

The tourism sector has the potential to contribute to sustainable development at all levels and help us live in a more sustainable world. Within the sustainable development agenda, tourism has a role in empowering local and indigenous communities, including women and youth, promoting local cultures and supporting change for more sustainable consumption and production patterns (United Nations, 2016). Many nations started integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their tourism policy frameworks (UNWTO, 2018), and ecotourism and community-based tourism are promoted as tools for achieving some of these goals, like biodiversity conservation (UNDP, 2020). Developing methodological approaches for evaluating the results of tourism interventions and sharing best case examples among stakeholders through open exchanges can accelerate the change towards sustainable development.

The purposes of this chapter are twofold, to broadly examine how a community-based agroecotourism project contributes to biodiversity conservation in a small forest town in Turkey, and to develop an approach for evaluating the benefits of agroecotourism in community-based projects. The literature suggests conducting studies that are reflecting the views of the locals and that are culturally embedded for investigating the benefits of ecotourism (Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019). Thus, we utilise a participative action research methodology, and we base our evaluation on participant observations, semi-structured interviews, surveys, and group meetings that we conducted before and after project implementation.

Background to the study

In the literature, small-scale ecotourism projects are presented as a means for improving the livelihoods of people living in and around protected areas (Choo & Jamal, 2009; Hunt, Durham, Driscoll, & Honey, 2015; Nyaupane & Poudel, 2011) and biodiversity conservation (Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Kiss, 2004). Buckley (1994) described ecotourism to offer nature-based products and services, sustainably managed to lower negative impacts of tourism, provide
financial support for conservation efforts, and alter the environmental attitudes of the people. More recently, the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defined ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). Overall, the literature implies that ecotourism as a strategy should broadly satisfy four interconnected criteria that are: 1) diversify livelihoods and support socio-economic development and wellbeing of residents living in and around protected areas, 2) contribute to the conservation of the wildlife and protected areas, 3) focus on learning and education of visitors through nature-based activities, and 4) strengthen resource management institutions (Blamey, 2001; Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Fennell, 2012; Hunt et al., 2015; Nyaupane & Poudel, 2011; Stronza et al., 2019). For ecotourism projects to be considered highly successful, they should also affect land-use policies and tourism policies and plans (Hunt et al., 2015).

Ecotourism has been investigated widely within different settings (Duffy, Kline, Swanson, Best, & McKinnon, 2017; Stone, 2015; Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Wondirad, Tolkach, & King, 2020), resulting in diverse conclusions about the benefits (Buckley, 2009). For instance, in Nepal, the economic benefits of ecotourism to the residents living near the Royal Chitwan National Park were found to be limited (Bookbinder, Dinerstein, Rijal, Cauley, & Rajouria, 1998). Conversely, some studies reported more positive outcomes. For instance, in a comparative study in the Amazon region (Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia), Stronza and Gordillo (2008) showed both economic (e.g., direct employment and income from the sale of products and services) and non-economic gains from ecotourism (e.g., learning opportunities and networking). Hunt et al. (2015) compared the effects of ecotourism as opposed to the other forms of tourism in the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica. Their study displayed that ecotourism offered the best employment opportunity on the peninsula, and at the same time, ecotourism improved attitudinal support for conservation. Likewise, Choo and Jamal (2009) investigated the organic farms in South Korea and assessed their potential for being involved in ecotourism and environmental conservation. They concluded that tourism in farms provided additional income to the farmers, and the organic management encouraged the use of indigenous seeds and livestock as well as local products.

Discussing the reasons for failure in achieving environmental conservation through ecotourism, Kiss (2004) argued that the incentives for ecotourism are short-lived, involve small areas, and few people with limited economic income. Therefore, it cannot truly contribute to conservation. After an overview of the literature, Das and Chatterjee (2015) listed some of the reasons for failure as negative socio-economic results (e.g., revenue leakages, unequal distribution of income, joblessness, and social problems), negative environmental results (damage to the crop and livestock by wildlife), insensitive visitor behaviours, and limited learning outcomes for the visitors and the locals.

Scholars proposed that there should be co-ownership, and co-management of the projects shared between the operators and the communities to improve local support for conservation (Bookbinder et al., 1998; Coria & Calfucura, 2012). Furthermore, some income gained from ecotourism should be re-invested in conservation efforts (Fennell, 2012; Kiss, 2004). The involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in ecotourism operations helped achieve community development and nature conservation outcomes (Buckley, 2009), especially when community-based approaches are employed (Romero-Brito, Buckley, & Byrne, 2016; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). In support of these findings, a recent review of the articles that examined the biodiversity hotspots displayed that ecotourism facilitates conservation when these four criteria are met: (a) a specific forest conservation mechanism is in place; (b) there is a spatial boundary delineating the area governed by the conservation mechanism; (c) local
families receive direct economic benefits; and (d) strong community-oriented monitoring and enforcement (Brandt & Buckley, 2018, p. 114).

Despite fruitful discussions on the definition of ecotourism, its role in improving livelihoods and conservation, and the reasons for failure and success, there is a paucity of research in defining its benefits and measuring its outcomes objectively and reliably (Buckley, 2009). In a review of the academic articles, Agrawal and Redford (2006) noted that many case studies reported on the programs without focusing on the important elements of the context (e.g., population, distance from the markets, how residents value biodiversity) that could have significant explanatory power for the variety of results recorded in different settings. The authors proposed to collect data before and after the interventions, adopt a longitudinal approach to research design, and to conduct comparative studies using objective measures. The need for observing and measuring effects over time has been recorded by other scholars as well (Stronza et al., 2019). Furthermore, reviewing the literature, Stronza et al. (2019) highlighted that there was a need for studies that are reflecting the views of the locals and that are culturally embedded. They advocated that participatory approaches could close this gap. The authors recommended developing indicators of success in collaboration with the participants and to use them together with theoretically developed indicators.

**Methods**

**Study site—Ovacık Village**

Ovacık Village is one of the 57 villages of Şile, a large-sized district of Istanbul next to the Black Sea. Şile, unlike many other areas of the city, is underpopulated as a result of its distance from the Istanbul city center (60 km) and its vast forests (80% of the land). In the winter months, the town has under 50,000 residents, and it is mostly visited by university students that reside in the nearby campuses, patrons for the few fish restaurants on the shore, and nature lovers visiting the hikes in the nearby forests. However, in the summer months, the town is flooded by the daily visitors (on average, 1 million on the weekends) from nearby cities for its sandy beaches. Unfortunately, the overtourism in this period places incredible stress on the infrastructure of the town, causing the Municipality and the residents concern.

On the other hand, this mass type of tourism does not economically benefit tourism businesses nor the residents (Interview with the Municipality). Thus, in recent years, the Şile Municipality has been highly supportive of alternative tourism types that will change the tourism type of the city towards more sustainable forms. For instance, in 2014, an Earth Market has been set up in the town centre resulting from a collaboration between the Şile Slow Food Convivium and the Municipality. Earth Market is an activity of Slow Food Network and promotes good, clean, and fair food production and consumption (Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, 2020).

Ovacık is a small forest village with 165 residents, and it is 10 kilometres away from the Şile town centre. There is a mix of ethnicities in the village as in other parts of Şile (e.g., Bosniaks). Furthermore, there are those people who bought large-sized land and moved to the village after retiring from their professional lives in the Istanbul center. The residents’ average age is 50, and there are 10 children and 3 youth in the village (interview with Ovacık Mukhtar). Family income in the village is low, and it is mostly derived from family farming and animal raising (poultry, buffalos, and bees). The surroundings of the village are covered with chestnut trees, and chestnut honey is a unique product of the area. Unfortunately, quarries, that pop up in nearby villages, pose a threat to the forest land and the natural
The central government gives permits for these quarries, and the local municipality has little power to stop their operations but to raise awareness and place an appeal to stop the activities.

The farmers in Ovacık village are mostly following traditional forms of agriculture. It is a self-regulated, sustainable form of agriculture. They replant heirloom seeds (heritage seeds), grow a variety of crops, use natural fertilisers, pesticides, and herbicides and utilise outdoor grazing for the livestock. The seed law of Turkey (Law No 5553), which was enacted in 2006, differentiates between the “genetic resources” and “plant varieties” for seed production and sales (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2006). According to the law, farmers cannot commercially sell the genetic varieties (local varieties) that they have saved and improved over generations. In contrast, the plant varieties (e.g., hybrids), that are developed by breeders and scientists can be commercially sold after registration and certification. The law allows the genetic verities to be used by the farmers and only to be exchanged among farmers as long as there is no commercial exchange (Grain, 2007). This new law raises much concern for the small-scale farmers and environmentalists as it risks the local varieties to be lost and makes the farmers dependent on large-sized multinational companies. Since the enactment of the law, environmental NGOs (e.g., Buğday Association), local authorities (e.g., Eskisehir Municipality) and communities have been involved in creating a database of heritage seeds and organised many local seed exchange events and festivals.

Similarly, the residents of Ovacık Village were also concerned about the implications of the new law. In the year 2012, with the leadership of the second author, the women of Ovacık Village founded the Women’s Seed Exchange Association. The same year, they organised their first seed exchange activity in Ovacık Village. The event attracted more than 7000 visitors from out of town, and it was considered a milestone for Şile as it was the beginning of other nature-based activities in the district.

**Future is in Tourism Program**

Future is in Tourism—Sustainable Tourism Support Fund (FIIT) is a national program in Turkey that was founded by a multi-stakeholder partnership. Since 2012, Anadolu Efes Company (alcoholic beverages), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism collaborate to support small-scale sustainable tourism projects in rural areas (Hatipoglu, Ertuna, & Salman, 2019a). Each year they provide approximately 20,000 €s to three projects that are chosen among many applications (e.g., 400 applications in 2015). Besides providing financial capital for a year, the partnership offers technical assistance, know-how, and public relations activities during and after a project’s completion. It is the longest-running sustainable tourism support program in the country (Hatipoglu, Ertuna, & Salman, 2019b). Until the year 2020, including the first rural tourism project in the Eastern Anadolu Region of Turkey, 19 projects have been supported by the FIIT partnership.

**Research design**

This chapter employs a participatory action research approach (PAR) to investigate a community-based ecotourism project supported by the Future is in Tourism (FIIT) program in Turkey. Researchers that utilise PAR methodology accept that there could be multiple interpretations of the phenomenon being studied and that when they collaborate with practitioners, they can work together to change it for the better (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007). The
data gathered during PAR research can aid in understanding the complexity of applying for community development programmes and bring explanations into behaviors of the examined actors (Bertella, 2019; Stronza et al., 2019). Furthermore, PAR can help close the gap between academia and practice (Moscardo, Konovalov, Murphy, McGehee, & Schurmann, 2017). PAR was previously used by other scholars investigating ecotourism (Gutiérrez-Montes, 2005; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). It is recommended for studying the link between ecotourism and conservation because it integrates the views of the residents into the research design (Stronza et al., 2019).

**Data collection and the sample**

Initially, the second (Ovacık Village Seed Association) and third authors approached the first author (Șile Tourism Association) for sharing expertise on sustainable tourism development in rural areas. Previously, the first author had investigated the Slow Food Earth Market in Șile and knew the region well. The graduate students of the first author were involved with the Ovacık community for a term, and as a result, they developed a tourism project proposal in the year 2017. The same year, the two associations, together with Șile Municipality, formed a partnership, and applied for the FIIT program. Their community-based ecotourism project was chosen as one of the three projects to be supported during 2017–2018.

It is recommended to conduct on-site audits, collect data from internal and external documentary sources, and to follow interviews with staff for the rigorous evaluation of an ecotourism project (Buckley, 2009). Previously scholars examined ecotourism and organic operations utilising content analysis on websites (Choo & Jamal, 2009; Fennell & Markwell, 2015), semi-structured (Duffy et al., 2017; Morgan & Winkler, 2020) and in-depth interviews (Choo & Jamal, 2009), and participant observations (Duffy et al., 2017; Morgan & Winkler, 2020). Thus, to increase the trustworthiness, the data collection was triangulated by source, methods, and investigators, and the period included both before and after project implementation phases (2016–2020). In addition to secondary data (e.g., project documents), primary data included informal discussions, participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended surveys with community members, local authorities, and visitors (Table 25.1). The first author visited the village since 2016 and acted as both an observer and facilitator in the meetings. The data through interviews and open-ended surveys are collected by the second and third authors and audited by the first author.

We gathered the questions around two themes that are 1) the benefits of the tourism project for the community members, their families, and visitors, and 2) attitudes for biodiversity conservation. In this research, biodiversity is taken as the “variability among living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems” (Stronza et al., 2019, p. 231). The questions were structured open-ended to capture how the respondents defined the benefits of ecotourism. Including demographic questions, there were 16 questions for the community members, eight questions for the other residents, the Mukhtar, and the group visitors each.

**Data analysis**

We analysed data through thematic analysis in the guidance of theory-based indicators. We transferred the transcribed interviews and the surveys into the qualitative software
program NVivo V12, and we conducted coding and analysis of data by using the program. Based on the themes discussed in the literature (Choo & Jamal, 2009; Nyaupane & Poudel, 2011; Stronza et al., 2019), we used the broad indicators of biodiversity conservation, diversified livelihoods, environmental interpretations, and strengthened resource institutions to analyse the results. During the thematic analysis, we also recorded the emerging themes to answer the research questions.

### Findings

#### Needs assessment

Ovacik Seed Association and Sile Tourism Association, in collaboration with Sile Municipality, applied for the FIIT program in 2017. Before the application, they conducted a needs assessment that identified the social and economic needs of the community as alternative sources of income for women, access to short food supply chains, and a way to stop the migration of youth to city centres (Group meeting with women, 2017). During the informal discussions with the women of the village and the Ovacik Village Mukhtar, the women informed the two associations that they would like to participate in a tourism model, which operates one or two days a week, and visitors are to be served at a communal area with no overnight stays.
Project activities

The goals of the “A day in the Ovacık Village” were to provide nature-based tourism services that economically benefited the farmers and facilitated visitors to experience the village life, become aware of sustainable agriculture principles and sustainable living, and understand local cultures through food (Project application document). The one-year program included activities that would build on the local assets and enable the achievement of these goals. We can group the activities as: infrastructure improvements (roads in the village, renovation of an old school as a community centre, installation of a kitchen, rainwater collection and bokashi compost bins, and establishment of vegetable and plant gardens based on permaculture principles); capacity building (skill-building in food preparation, food service, marketing, and local recipe development, personal development, and embroidery on traditional Şile cloth) and marketing of the project. Eleven women from the village participated in the training modules of the program, and later they worked in the community centre. The second author organised all the project activities and took part in managing and delivering of the tourism services.

Description of tourism services

The tourism services started during the project implementation with smaller groups, which enabled the women to learn and practice. The promotion of the events was made via social media, FIIT program partners, and extended network of the founders of the project. The activities were structured in and around the community center and extended to the village and the forest trail nearby. Visitor groups needed to make a reservation ahead, indicating which type of activity they wanted to participate in.

After the project was completed in 2018, the centre continued to accept visitor groups (e.g., schools, Rotary Club groups, special-interest groups, and corporations) mostly on the weekends and occasionally on the weekdays. Walk-in visitors are only accepted if there is availability. The capacity of the centre was set at less than 40 visitors during the winter months, and women worked in groups of four to deliver the services. A typical daily program starts with a breakfast at the community centre, followed by presentations on the zero-waste kitchen, compost making and production of organic fertilizers (e.g., worm castings using kitchen waste). The day continues with a one-hour walk in the forest accompanied by explanations on local plants and species (e.g., mushrooms and bees) and ends with a demonstration session at the centre. The demonstrations include local food making (e.g., pasta, vinegar, pickles, milk jam, and cheese) and eco-friendly products (e.g., toothpaste).

Benefits of the ecotourism project

The benefits of the project are gathered and evaluated by using the views of multiple beneficiaries. We have identified the direct beneficiaries as the women working in the project, residents of the village, mukhtar, local municipality, visitors and workshop organisers, and women from nearby villages that have taken part in workshops at the centre.

The ecotourism project was implemented in a village that had a certain awareness of biodiversity conservation and applied the principles of sustainable agriculture at their farms. Through the introduction of tourism in the village, the community was able to sell their products directly to consumers at a fair price. As a result, they recognised that consumers valued sustainably produced food. The positive valuation of their efforts strengthened their willingness to continue with these good farming practices and ignited their desire to learn more about biodiversity conservation (Table 25.2).
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<th>Dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Biodiversity conservation</strong></td>
<td>Preserve and use heirloom seeds (OWSA &amp; STA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Slow down contamination of soil and water through using natural fertilisers and avoiding the extensive use of agrochemicals (OWSA &amp; STA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Protection of bees (OWSA &amp; STA)</td>
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<td><strong>2. Diversified livelihoods</strong></td>
<td>“Through the center, we sell what we produce, and we gain additional income for our family.” (CR)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“We sell our produce at a fair price.” (CR)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Even if I do not directly work at the center, I gain income from the sales of my products.” (OR)</td>
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<td>Alternative income</td>
<td>“Through the project activities, we are more informed.” (CR)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I have developed my interpersonal skills.” (CR)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“We can spend our extra income on self-development activities for women.” (CR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity building</td>
<td>“For our students, the walk in the forest and meeting with the local children were valuable as an experience.” (VG)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I am happy to work at the center because I can get together with other women of the village.” (CR)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I am happy to meet new people living out of our village.” (CR)</td>
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<td>Social capital development</td>
<td>“Through the Ovacık project, we visit festivals and events in Şile and other towns.” (CR)</td>
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<td>“We meet celebrities and media through the center.” (CR)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“The center provides a place to socialize for the women; I wish we had a similar center at our village.” (PR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food heritage &amp; culture conservation</td>
<td>“We co-host sessions with Ovacık Workshop that involve bringing local women of different ethnicity, together with from surrounding villages. The women prepare their traditional foods, which we serve and enjoyed together at the Workshop. Food is the catalyst for the conversation we have during the session.” (VG).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“We visited Ovacık to learn about village life and examine the socio-economic dynamics of life in villages.” (VG)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Visitors enjoy learning to cook our traditional recipes with us using local products.” (CR)</td>
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<td>Community development</td>
<td>“I wished my village to be known by others, and I wanted to meet new people from other cultures as a result of the project.” (CR)</td>
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<td>“I never expected the results to be this positive; the project contributed to our village and us.” (CR)</td>
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<td>Women empowerment</td>
<td>“We feel psychologically stronger.” (CR)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“As women, we have proven to ourselves that we can stand on our own feet.” (CR)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Women from the nearby villages envy our success in Ovacık; they ask local authorities to coordinate similar projects in other parts of Şile.” (MR)</td>
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The ecotourism activities had tangible (e.g., alternative income and infrastructure development) and intangible (e.g., capacity building and women empowerment) effects. The alternative income opportunities were not restricted to the 11 women that took part in the project, but the community, in general, benefitted from tourism. Even if only a small group of community members worked at the centre and gained direct income, the other community members could still sell their products through the centre and benefit economically (Table 25.2). This approach aimed to lessen the economic inequalities resulting from the initiative within the community.

An equally significant outcome of the project was the development of social capital. Women got together at the community centre, attended capacity building and self-development workshops, and worked around a common goal (bonding social capital), and they hosted visitors from other towns and even other countries (bridging social capital). The children of the village also connected with the youth from the visiting schools (bridging social capital). The project gained visibility in the social and printed media and also on the national TV. Consequently, the project partners and the community members gained further access to experts, NGOs, and local authorities (linking social capital).

The capacity development activities of the project resulted in the women to change their conservation and waste management behaviours beyond the community centre, at their daily lives (Table 25.2). They also started to appreciate natural resources more than before. For instance, after a workshop, one of the community respondents recognised that she could find

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<td>3. Environmental interpretations Environmental ethics in destination communities</td>
<td>“We learned not to waste any organic waste from our kitchens and to use it in our gardens as fertilizers.” (CR) “I make my toothpaste, vinegar, and soap at home.” (CR) “During making home-made pasta, we used the branches of the quince tree to give form to pasta; I recognized that many ingredients for food are available in the nearby forest.” (CR) “I learned that home-made vinegar is better for our health.” (CR) “I demonstrate to the visitors how we make compost.” (CR)</td>
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<td>Impact beyond destination</td>
<td>“This project can be a role model to the nearby villages in Şile.” (SR) “Our group members learned that it is easy to make ecological consumer products at home.” (VG) “Our group members appreciated the value of cooking traditional food with sustainably grown local produce.” (VG) “The participants in the event learned they could start composting and better manage waste at their homes.” (VG)</td>
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<td>4. Strengthened resource institutions and amenities</td>
<td>“We are happy that an idle building (school) is renovated and used by our community.” (CR) “The permaculture and eco-conscious approach, combined with the traditional values of the village, provides the perfect location for educational and nature immersed experience.” (VG)</td>
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OWSA = Ovacık Women’s Seed Association, STA = Şile Tourism Association, CR = Community Center Respondent, OR = Ovacık Village Respondent, VG = Visitor Group, PR = Participant from the nearby village, SR = Şile Municipality Respondent, MR = Mukhtar of Ovacık Village.

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materials from the forest to use as tools in her kitchen. The enjoyment and appreciation of nature were also mirrored in the visitor groups. Furthermore, the learning activities that the visitors have participated in increased their awareness of biodiversity conservation, sustainable consumption, and waste management.

Discussion and conclusions

This chapter firstly examined the ways a community-based agroecotourism project contributes to biodiversity conservation in a small forest town in Turkey. Secondly, the chapter developed a participatory approach for evaluating the benefits of ecotourism in community-based projects. The awareness of the community on biodiversity conservation (preserving and using of heirloom seeds, growing a variety of crops and using of natural fertilizers) together with the women’s willingness to take part in tourism formed a suitable setting for ecotourism to be implemented as a tool for social wellbeing and biodiversity conservation in Ovacık (Choo & Jamal, 2009; Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Nyaupane & Poudel, 2011).

The project coordinators implemented the ecotourism project in Ovacık by considering the significant contextual elements of the town (Agrawal & Redford, 2006). Given that the coordinators exercised a community-based approach, they considered the views of multiple stakeholders from the start. The gendered expectations of the community effectively shaped where the project would be applied in the village, how it would be managed, and the frequency of the events (Morgan & Winkler, 2020). The co-ownership and co-management of the ecotourism project by the women of the village facilitated local support for the project goals (Bookbinder et al., 1998; Coria & Calfucura, 2012). This is not to say that all community members agreed, as some refrained from taking part in the project.

When planning ecotourism, the project coordinators considered the carrying capacity of their ecosystem, limiting the activities only to small groups (Buckley, 1994). Working with smaller groups enabled the community center to provide individualized service to visitors and to develop personal relationships between the visitors and the community. Furthermore, they charged a fair price for the tourism services and the products, signalling the good production and quality services they provide to the visitors. Indeed, the prices and the quality helped them to differentiate themselves from other food-service providers in Şile, placing them at the top end of the market. Consequently, the fairness in prices motivated the farmers to continue with sustainable agriculture production methods and be interested to learn more. Ecotourism did not replace farming as an economic activity but supported its existence. Thus, confirming the literature, we observed a positive feedback loop between sustainable agriculture, ecotourism, and biodiversity conservation in the “A day in the Ovacık Village” project (Stronza et al., 2019).

The ecotourism activities modified the ecological behaviors of the destination community and created awareness in the visitors through learning (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). The learning component combined elements of natural habitat (e.g., a walk in the forest), environmental conservation (e.g., waste management and rainwater collection), and heritage and cultural interest (e.g., local recipes) (Choo & Jamal, 2009; Duffy et al., 2017). The visitors were pleased because they were spending quality time in the village and learning, and at the same time, they were directly contributing to the livelihoods of the community (Coria & Calfucura, 2012).

In this research, we wanted to reflect the views of the locals in evaluating the outcomes of the ecotourism activity rather than imposing our ideas on what social wellbeing and
biodiversity conservation should be (Stronza et al., 2019). Accordingly, we asked key stakeholders of the project, whether they found the results of the ecotourism activity successful, without defining what success is. Based on their answers, we gather the benefits of ecotourism in Ovacık Village as 1) provides alternative income to the community, 2) develops social capital, 3) builds capacity and empowers women, 4) helps to conserve heritage and culture, 5) changes the behaviors of community and the visitors through learning, and 6) develops infrastructure and amenities. This definition of the benefits is grounded in empirical data, reflecting the views of multiple stakeholders. Nevertheless, it is context-specific and culturally embedded, and a similar inquiry in another setting may result in different dimensions. Meanwhile, these dimensions are in line with the broader definition of ecotourism found in the recent literature (Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Stronza et al., 2019; TIES, 2015).

There are certain implications of this research for practitioners and policymakers. Ecotourism development is often seen as a policy tool for improving the livelihoods of people living in rural areas. In Turkey, alternative tourism types are also viewed as a tool for rural development. The tourism strategy plan of Turkey 2023 identifies new ecotourism cities and corridors to be developed throughout the country (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007).

Relying on how the stakeholders view the benefits of the project in Ovacık, agroeco-tourism can be linked to multiple UN SDGs. In particular, the results contribute to SDG 12, which is responsible consumption and production, and SDG 5, which is gender equality. The chapter also displays the essential elements of ecotourism development for it to contribute to sustainable development. First, the continued collaboration between several stakeholders and participation of the community in the planning and implementation stages contributes to the positive outcomes of the project (Wondirad et al., 2020). Second, the existence of powerful grassroots organisations for raising awareness and improving local support for ecotourism development is vital (Buckley, 2009). Moreover, land development and natural area conservation policies of the government must be in alliance with ecotourism development (Hunt et al., 2015; Stone, 2015) and not prioritise immediate gains from other sectors like mining or real estate development. Last, natural resources should not be seen as an asset to be exploited for the sake of tourism development, but tourism should be approached as a tool for conservation and sustainable development.

In the case of Ovacık, the Şile Municipality acknowledged the significance of “A Day in Ovacık Project” for displaying a best example case for other villages around Şile. The Municipality should use this opportunity to prove its cause for terminating quarry permits and ask the central government to back ecotourism development in Şile and the surrounding forest land. In Ovacık, the community centre gained extra income from their tourism activities; however, the women are divided between spending the money for social responsibility, visits to other towns, and capacity development. We can recommend women to use some of the money for biodiversity conservation to maintain the sustainability of the natural environment. These activities could be designed in line with the goals of the project, such as establishing a local heirloom seed bank and extending the educational programs to other farmers, installing new waste management equipment for demonstrations, or networking with other centres that support seed preservation.

Finally, the collaboration with practitioners and PAR methodology applied in this chapter has proven to be instrumental in gathering data for a broader understanding of the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, the approach enabled the recommendations of the chapter to be more specific and provide improved guidance for action.
References


