

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS AS AN APPROACH TO REGIONAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF MERSIN

1. Introduction

Mersin is one of Turkey's most important regions, notable for its natural beauty and agricultural diversity. Thanks to the advantages of the Mediterranean climate, Mersin allows for the cultivation of various agricultural products. This region offers opportunities not only in agricultural production but also for the implementation of innovative models in the agricultural sector. This study aims to explore the concept of "institutional agricultural districts" through the case of Mersin, with goals of strengthening local agricultural production, supporting rural development, and ensuring economic sustainability. The study investigates the applicability of the concept of "institutional cultural districts" to increase agricultural production capacity in Mersin.

2. Definition of Cultural Districts

The concept of localization, defined by Alfred Marshall, refers to a social and economic experience combined with the unique nature of culture and cultural products (Marshall, 1890 [1920]). According to Santagata's studies, cultural districts create significant impacts on local economic development by supporting local culture and production (Santagata, 2002, 2004, 2006; 2011; Scott, 2000; Cuccia et al., 2008, Lavanga, 2009). The term 'cultural districts' in its modern sense dates back only to the early 1980s (Montgomery, 2003). Cultural districts have many important effects, including local economic development, increased income, job creation, and changing demographic structures. Such places are used as a tool to revitalize art and culture and invigorate many local communities (Noonan, 2013).

3. Institutional Agricultural Districts

Walter Santagata (2002) proposes four categories with distinctive spatial expressions and governance characteristics for cultural industry clusters: Industrial Cultural Districts, Institutional Cultural Districts, Museum Cultural Districts, and Metropolitan Cultural Districts. Among these categories, institutional cultural districts are supported by a theoretical structure that strengthens the competitive position of a specific industrial cultural district. The government's establishment of a common trademark and the allocation of property rights for a limited production area provide significant incentives by granting local producers the right to protect their products. Examples of such institutional cultural phenomena exist in regions of Italy such as Piedmont-Langhe and Tuscany-Chianti, and the "Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée" areas in France demonstrate successful applications of this model (Kloosterman, 2009).

Institutional cultural districts can be defined as structures that reinforce market-oriented incentives that support local economic development. The allocation of property rights and trademarks to a specific production area is a key feature of such districts (Santagata, 2006). Legal protection encourages producers to invest in their reputation and high product quality, leading to significant increases in product quality through better control of the production and distribution process. Institutional cultural districts present a modern agricultural approach for

the production of specialized and branded products within specific geographical areas. Successful applications of this model have been observed in various regions of Europe and America.

4. Potential of Mersin's Institutional Agricultural Districts

Mersin has a favorable structure for agricultural production due to its geopolitical position and climatic features. The temperate weather conditions provided by the Mediterranean climate allow for the simultaneous cultivation of various agricultural products in Mersin. Especially local products like Anamur Banana and Silifke Yogurt have been certified with geographical indications, contributing to the recognition of the region's agricultural production in not only local but also national and international markets. Mersin's rich variety of agricultural products holds significant potential for strengthening the rural economy and local development.

5. Research Methodology

This study is built upon a two-phase methodology. In the first phase, geographical indications products and specialized agricultural products in Mersin will be statistically analyzed using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This method will enable the detailed mapping of the areas where these products are cultivated, showcasing their potentials visually. Examples of geographical indication products include Anamur Banana, Anamur Strawberry, Erdemli Lamas Lemon, Silifke Yogurt, Tarsus White Grape, and Mut Olive Oil. The current status and roles of these products in the city economy will be unveiled through detailed analyses.

In the second phase, data obtained from official institutions such as the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) and the Ministry of Agriculture will be combined with surveys and interviews conducted with local farmers to gather information on agricultural production processes. This data will assist in identifying institutional agricultural districts while also contributing to the development of agricultural strategies specific to Mersin.

6. Results and Expectations

Beyond identifying Mersin's agricultural potential, this study aims to make a significant contribution to the identification of possible locations for institutional cultural districts. The findings will play a crucial role in improving the economic conditions of local farmers and enhancing the understanding of agricultural wealth. The implementation of institutional cultural districts presents an opportunity to strengthen local production and support rural development.

The Mersin example could serve as a model for other regions in Turkey. These approaches in various fields of agriculture will not only contribute to strengthening local agricultural policies but will also provide a useful tool for increasing efficiency in production. Furthermore, the data obtained from the research will serve as a vital resource for creating necessary policies for both economic development and the improvement of agricultural production processes.

It is known that institutional cultural districts offer an effective method to increase economic activities in rural areas and raise the living standards of local farmers. Development projects

to be carried out in Mersin aim to make significant contributions to both regional and national development goals. In this context, the establishment of institutional cultural districts aims to increase agricultural production, strengthen the local economy, and contribute to national development.

In conclusion, the findings of this study will serve as an important source to reveal the potential of institutional cultural district applications in Mersin. Mersin presents an innovative and effective model for encouraging specialization, branding, and local production in the agricultural sector. With the implementation of this model, it will be possible to increase agricultural production and strengthen the local economy. Therefore, the Mersin example can be inspiring for other regions and contribute to the development of agricultural policies across the country.

7. Discussion

Institutional cultural districts are critically important for supporting and strengthening agricultural production on both national and local levels. The success story of this model to be implemented in Mersin can improve not only the economic situation of local farmers but also their social lives. Increasing agricultural production can ensure the sustainability of the rural population and lead to innovative approaches to integrating the youth into the agricultural sector. This situation can turn into a significant model in many regions of Turkey, including Mersin.

Moreover, the active role of local governments in this process, the establishment of supportive policies, and monitoring development processes will enhance the impact of institutional cultural districts. Activities such as informational seminars for local farmers and agricultural innovation projects can increase the success of such districts. The creation of legal regulations and the strengthening of existing laws will also be a significant factor in opening local products to international markets.

In summary, development projects to be realized through institutional cultural districts will shed light on Mersin's agricultural potential while also being an important step toward achieving regional development goals. Thus, the approach of institutional cultural districts could serve as an important reference point for agricultural production and rural development issues in other provinces.

Keywords: Institutional Cultural District, Rural and regional development, Mersin.

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