

The role of a civil society organization in the development of the domestic organic market in Turkey

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Abstract

In this paper, we report of a case from Turkey where a civil society organization took an active role in influencing laws, regulations and their implementation regarding organic agriculture and the marketing of organic products. Although the country's climate and biodiversity is suitable for organic agriculture, the domestic market remained underdeveloped; the organic sector was directed mainly towards exports. By establishing the first marketplace solely for certified organic products in 2006, a non-governmental organization became the locomotive of the domestic sector. The process that leads to the 100% organic bazaar exhibits a contingent characteristic where particularly social and symbolic capital were mobilized by the NGO together with a framing of positive 'ecological living' discourse and therefore contributing to the 'organic' movement.

Introduction

Certified organic farming in Turkey started with the production of dried fruits for a German company in 1986, (Rapunzel 2012) and grew steadily since then. When the EU imposed conditions on the countries exporting organic products in 1992, (Aktar and Ananias 2005), Turkey had to develop her own regulations for organic production in 1994 and 1995 (Kenanoğlu and Karahan 2002). The Turkish Parliament passed the organic farming law in December 2004. However, throughout the process, production has been made vastly for export and domestic market could not develop till mid-2000s. This paper presents and analyses efforts of a civil society organization, Buğday Association for Supporting Ecological Living (Buğday), to build up a domestic market with mobilizing and meeting supply and demand within the country and organizing a space for trade, exchange and interaction among relevant stakeholders.

Material and methods

Research reported in this article is compiled from three sources of information. First data source is sales and participation data gathered at the bazaar by Buğday for the period between the launch of the first organic market in June 2006 and December 2009, the timing of the second marketplace. Secondly, unstructured interviews with farmers, middlemen, consumers and Buğday members have been conducted. Finally, participant observation at the bazaar and at the established consumer-producer committee meetings is used to understand the workings of the organic bazaar and the relationship between farmers, middlemen and Buğday.

Results: NGO aids in developing the domestic organic sector in Turkey

Buğday is a not-for-profit and non-governmental organization (NGO) working in all areas related to ecological living. Started as a movement in the 90s with a healthy food restaurant and institutionalized into an association in 2002, Buğday's activities include promoting production, marketing and consumption of organic produce; preserving local heirloom seeds; bringing together urban and rural people via eco-tourism and voluntary exchange and recovering lost tales of nomadic tribes in Turkey. Buğday utilized international networks such as IFOAM to learn about organic agriculture practices as well as about solutions to common problems in other countries and shared information with producers and consumers in Turkey. In the following list we categorize the activities of Buğday that led to the launch of the first organic bazaar:

Expanding the production base: Throughout its existence, Buğday team was contacted and invited by farmers located in different regions of Turkey to give insight for a farming practice that is "in peace with nature". Farmers had various economic, social and political motivations, but Buğday established a

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supporting relationship with them to convert to organic agriculture using knowledge accumulated throughout the years.

Efforts to expand the consumption potential: Two among Buğday's projects, a food box and a community supported agriculture project (GARDEN), targeted Istanbul's citizens in the period between 2002 and 2005. These projects, despite their limited scopes, contributed to the building up of an infrastructure and mobilization of consumers for community supported agriculture.

Raising awareness of organic farming and products using communication channels: Buğday used a diverse array of communication channels and methods to disseminate information and to build knowledge and awareness as well as to bring together interested individuals and parties. These channels included a well-known ecological magazine, a weekly e-bulletin, an internet portal, and a radio program, trainings and educational activities at its rural office and ecological research and education center, media campaigns, supporting production of documentaries and television programs.

Bringing together actors of organic agriculture: In 1999, Buğday organized the Bafa Congress on "A Healthy Market of Organic Products for Turkey", the first official meeting of actors of the organic sector: activists, farmers, consumers and entrepreneurs interested in trading organic products. This congress is the start of expanding organic agriculture beyond a few good men, (Anil, et al., 2004). A long list of decisions about all the phases that a product goes through from agriculture to its marketing and sales formed the basis of the future lobbying.

Legislative efforts: Buğday lobbied successfully in order to promote organic agriculture as well as providing consultancy to the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock for drafting of the organic farming law which the Turkish Parliament passed in December 2004. Due to lobbying efforts of Buğday, organic products are exempt from the wholesale food market law, therefore reducing costs and ensuring traceability of the products.

Turkey's first organic marketplace: During the time between December 2004 and June 2006, Buğday intensified its work with municipalities and sponsors. Two organic producer/retailer companies stepped in as sponsors and a local government (Şişli municipality) provided one of the local marketplaces. The rules for participation in the marketplace were collectively written down and Turkey's first organic bazaar has been launched in June 2006. Producers and consumers started meeting every Saturday at the market.

Consumers report that they can now purchase organic products, cook 100% organic meals and observed a mobilization of the organic sector; other organic marketplaces have been established, the number of organic stores and internet groceries has increased, several restaurants started to offer organic menus, well-known chefs started to use and mention organic ingredients on TV programs and the organic bazaar became much more crowded. Consumers also witnessed an expansion in the quantity and variety of products traded in time. Producers expressed pleasure in having the chance of trading directly to the consumers. Buğday employees report increases in the number of companies, the variety of marketing channels and the number of consumers. The increased supply and availability of organic products boosted up demand which naturally caused a further increase in organic production. Finally in 2011, the ministry for the first time published the list of enterprises active in organic agriculture. Besides providing a very much needed sales channel to organic farmers, Istanbul's organic bazaar and particularly the cafe areas within have social impacts; people interact, exchange ideas, meet old friends and form new friendships and collaborations. Consumer influences motivating farmers and examples of social learning, innovation and entrepreneurship are observable (Hunt 2006, Hinrichs et al. 2004). Some consumers reported partnerships with farmers whereas some farmers reported new business ventures to produce much desired products by consumers. Organic bazaar has been another venue and space for raising awareness of Buğday's activities as well.

In countries with developed organic markets, the majority of organic food sales are conducted through mainstream retailers, (Sahota 2007). This has not been the case for Turkey. Still, the development of the domestic market in Turkey bear some similarities to the initial stages of the development of Germany's organic market, in the sense that activists played a significant role, (Rottner 2007). The recent appearance of farmers' markets in Prague resulting in a new direction in the shopping behavior of Prague's citizens (Spilková et al. 2012) is also relevant, however these farmers' markets remain small (30-50 stalls compared to around 250 in Istanbul's organic bazaars) and offerings are not limited to organic products. The role of public institutions and civil society for promoting alternative food networks (Renting and Wiskerke 2010), has three axis: (i) short food chains with new relations between civil society and the food chain, (ii) public sector as buyer and consumer of food, (iii) municipalities and city-regions as food policy makers. Indeed, Turkey's

first organic bazaar is an example of a short food chain with a direct and indispensable role of civil society in the actual development of the domestic organic sector.

Discussion

The organic bazaar provided farmers a sales channel and consumers an access to organic products. The meeting of stakeholders at the bazaar facilitates collaborations, strategic alliances, innovations, information exchange and development of relationships. The process leading to the establishment of the bazaar is contingent; it's an action that was not planned already from the beginning, but was made possible as a consequence of former activities and accumulation of human, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1998). An NGO that planned and initiated the bazaar also manages the marketplace, with the consent and trust of both producers and consumers. The organic bazaar has provided a regular physical and intellectual space of interaction between different stakeholders and among those stakeholders themselves. Together with the framing of Buğday's ecological living discourse (Snow and Benford 1988), this space has contributed to the formation and consolidation of an 'organic' movement.

Suggestions to tackle the future challenges With the organic bazaar, a major obstacle of domestic accessibility of organic products has been overcome, however this effort needs to be supplemented by the government and the sector to further expand the domestic market. The diverse forms of power relations between stakeholders who have varying and possibly conflicting goals require further research. Finally, problem of lack of data on organic food sales in Turkey at large has to be solved to truly grasp the extent of expansion of the organic sector.

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