

# Construction of the Neoliberal Subject through Rural Development Planning in Türkiye

## Türkiye'de Kırsal Kalkınma Planlaması Aracılığıyla Neoliberal Öznenin İnşası

Öykü ŞAFAK  
ÇUBUKÇU



Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi, Siyaset Bilimi  
ve Kamu Yönetimi, Ankara, Türkiye  
e-mail: oykusafakcubukcu@aybu.edu.tr

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Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding Author:  
Öykü ŞAFAK ÇUBUKÇU  
oykusafakcubukcu@aybu.edu.tr

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### Öz

Türkiye'de tarım sektöründe neoliberal politikaların uygulanması kırsal nüfus açısından olumsuz sonuçlar doğurmuş ve bu durum kırsal kalkınma politikalarında değişiklik yapılmasını zorunlu kılmıştır. Bu çalışma, yeni politika biçiminin kırsal alanda neoliberal öznenin inşasını içerdiğini ileri sürerek literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı bu süreçte planlamanın dinamiklerini analiz etmektir, çalışmanın yöntemi ise neoliberal öznellik odaklı eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla ulusal ve bölgesel kalkınma planlarının niteliksel analizini içermektedir. Ayrıca, ortaya çıkan kırsal aktörler olarak kadınların yeri de incelenmektedir. Yeni politikalar, kırsal aktörleri ekonomik açıdan daha gelişmiş bölgelere göç etmeye zorlamak yerine, bireylerin kendi bağlamları içerisinde dönüşümlerini teşvik etmektedir. Bu, kırsal kesimdeki bireyleri, bu çalışmada da gösterildiği gibi, piyasa dinamikleriyle uyumlu gerekli becerileri kazanmaya itmektedir. Beşerî sermayelerine yatırım yaparak istihdam edilebilirliklerini ve girişimcilik kapasitelerini geliştirmeleri beklenmektedir. Çalışma aynı zamanda devletin sorumluluğu hem bireylere hem de yerel kurumlara devrederek ve aynı zamanda farklı bölgesel uygulamaların ulusal düzeyde uyumlaştırılmasını sağlayarak kolaylaştırıcı bir rol oynadığını da ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kırsal Kalkınma, Neoliberal Özne, Planlama, Türkiye, Toplumsal Cinsiyet

### Abstract

The implementation of neoliberal policies in the agricultural sector in Türkiye has yielded adverse consequences for rural population, which necessitated a change in rural development policies. This study contributes to the literature by asserting that the new form of policies involves construction of the neoliberal subject in rural areas. The objective is analysing the dynamics of planning in this process, the method includes a qualitative analysis of national and regional development plans from a critical lens focused on neoliberal subjectivity. Furthermore, it examines the place of women, as emerging rural actors. Under new policies, rather than compelling rural actors to migrate to economically more developed regions, individuals are encouraged to transform within their own context. This leads rural individuals to acquire the requisite skills aligned with market dynamics, as evidenced in this study. They should enhance their employability and entrepreneurial capacities, by investing in their human capital. The study also reveals that the state plays a facilitating role, by shifting responsibility to both individuals and local institutions, while also ensuring the harmonization of diverse regional practices at the national level.

**Keywords:** Rural Development, Neoliberal Subject, Planning, Türkiye, Gender

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## Introduction

The implementation of neoliberal policies has found its reflection in rural Türkiye, increasingly since 2000s. Privatisations and retrenchment of populist support mechanisms provided by the state resulted in a change in rural relations, as many peasants finding it challenging to maintain agricultural production have quit farming (Aydın, 2010). Migration to urban areas, combined with a decline in agricultural production, necessitated the introduction of a new set of development policies targeting agricultural sector and rural places, following the second half of 2000s.

The new development policies are compatible with neoliberalism<sup>1</sup>, both in its content and its targeted population. While the meaning of the term development changes in line with neoliberalism, the rural population is also in the process of gaining a new agency. The public sector has left its place to the private sector, through privatisation of state economic enterprises in agricultural markets, and increasing domination of multinational companies in both inputs and outputs of farming, namely seed, fertilizers and agricultural crops (Keyder & Yenil, 2011). The vacuum resulting from the changing role of the state is now needed to be filled by the rural people themselves as actors in the market, equipped with those characteristics fitting to market rules that have increasingly become influential in agricultural production process and rural relations.

Moving from this, the main argument put forward in this study is that the new rural development policies involve a significant process of construction of a neoliberal subject. In addition, the state still plays an important role in shifting responsibility to rural population. This process is not limited to domestic policies, which have themselves been shaped in line with the international context and institutions. However, changes in the legal structure, the institutional structure, the policymaking, and implementation processes at the domestic level should be scrutinized to observe how the creation of a neoliberal agency in Turkish rural places has been planned. Another important component of these changes is the increasing emphasis on female agency. Therefore, it is further argued in this work that a new framework under the discourse of women's empowerment has been developed, fitting perfectly to the broader attempt of construction of the neoliberal subject.

Understanding to what extent this attempt has been realized requires an accumulation of literature based on fieldworks in rural areas conducted with a perspective of construction of subjectivity. This, in return, requires development of the necessary conceptual tools for such further research. The objective of this study is to evaluate the official documents recently published mainly with regards to rural development, in terms of the impact of the above-mentioned set of development policies on formation of a new subjectivity. The method applied here includes a qualitative analysis of development plans and selected regional plans, with a lens built upon the contribution of existing literature on neoliberal subject. An additional emphasis is given on the place of rural women.

The next section, which will provide an introduction of the conceptual framework used here, focuses on the issue of the construction of the neoliberal subject. Following that, the actors of rural development policies in their neoliberal form are identified. Then, changing image of rural women is discussed. A detailed analysis of development plans and regional plans, in terms of how this construction process has been planned, is made in the fifth and sixth sections, respectively. The article concludes by a summary of the arguments, findings and contributions, and suggestions for further research.

### 1. Construction of a Neoliberal Subject

During his lectures on 21 February 1979, Foucault mentioned "the formalization of society on the model of the enterprise" (2008: 160), for which the government becomes "a provider of rules for an economic game in which

<sup>1</sup> A detailed theoretical discussion on neoliberalism is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, the term refers to the practices of privatizations, deregulation, and restructuring of state-market relations, which have been applied in capitalist countries 1980s onwards; see (Harvey, 2005: 2-3).

the only players, the only real agents, must be individuals, or [...] enterprises" (ibid: 173); necessitating the emergence of "a new art of government" (ibid: 176). Later, on March 14<sup>th</sup>, he defined the "*homo oeconomicus*" as "an entrepreneur of himself" (Foucault, 2008: 226).

Building on Foucault's work, a literature on governmentality emerged discussing how this term, referring to the "conduct of conduct", involves leading actors to govern themselves (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991; Dean, 1999). In this way, governments shift the responsibility to individual agents (Pyysiäinen, Halpin, & Guilfoyle, 2017), by "liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" (Harvey, 2005: 2). Under neoliberalism, these freedoms and skills become instruments of directing individuals towards an appreciated subjectivity (Lorenzini, 2020). By developing their market-driven skills, individuals become themselves their own capital, own producer, and the source of their income (Foucault, 2008: 226). In other words, they become entrepreneurs of themselves by investing in their human capital.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the individual subject of a neoliberal society should be not only free -to act in line with his will and from the protection of the state-, but also well-equipped with the desired capacity to reproduce himself. This subject is "required to exercise increased self-control" and engage in "continual self-improvement" (Spohrer, Stahl & Bowers-Brown, 2017: 329). The emphasis on the self shows that the process backed by the state institutions is a transitional one. In a way, rather than being directly shaped by the state, the neoliberal subject is assumed to be constructing himself as an active subject (Houghton, 2019: 617), although the institutional mechanisms through which this self-construction takes place also matter (Weidner, 2011: 29).<sup>3</sup>

The success of the institutional mechanisms applied in the creation of a neoliberal subject is associated with the proliferation of the neoliberal discourse. The quick reflection of the paradigmatic shift in development-related discourse on the rural areas owes to the fact that neoliberalism has been accepted as the dominant framework in the country for over four decades. The effective use of media plays an important role in bringing the discourses to a larger audience. Türken et al. argue that media becomes a technology of neoliberal subjectification, through conveying the messages of the dominant discourse, with regards to different frameworks including rationality, responsibility, and entrepreneurship (Türken, Nafstad, Blakar, & Roen, 2015). Individuals' investment in their self-development to become autonomous, responsible, entrepreneurial subjects increasingly becomes "a prerequisite for success" (ibid: 36).<sup>4</sup> The neoliberal subject can be hesitant in agreeing with the neoliberal discourse, can even be critical of it at the personal level, however the discourse has proven to be successful in terms of changing the behaviours of the individuals in line with the idea of responsibility-shifting (Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017: 230).

Responsibility in turn has its own limits, as the neoliberal subject is constructed as a financialized, financially literate, and financially responsible one (Gilbert, 2021). In this sense, the investments into own human capital should be compatible with the requirements of neoliberalism, involving increasing financialization at the global level. The rational, economically thinking subject, is expected to form his life within monetary boundaries; however, the responses vary (Verdouw, 2016). In addition, the multiplicity of entrepreneurial acts (Christiaens, 2019), that also enables the rural reflection of entrepreneurialism, cannot be denied. In the rural contexts, provision of microcredits for the new subject responsive to the new developmental discourse has been influential in the Third World (Brigg, 2006), also in Turkish rural areas.<sup>5</sup> This underlines the range of entrepreneurial acts, including the institutions through which the microcredits targeting rural population are

<sup>2</sup> See (Becker, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Although political opposition of the individual against neoliberalism is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that the understanding of the self as enterprise in Foucault's work enables us to overcome the simplified dichotomy of domination vs. resistance (McNay, 2009). Also, see (Chandler & Reid, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Through social media, the neoliberal subject involves in objectivization of the self as well (Flisfeder, 2015: 556).

<sup>5</sup> The influence on construction of the subject is not in parallel with the influence on alleviating poverty. See, for example, (Ari & Diner, 2016) for women's experiences under microcredits in Batman.

provided or women's agricultural development cooperatives established by a handful of women. The common characteristic is responsibility-shifting, leading local communities, as well as organizations and individuals, to take up the responsibility for local or regional issues (Nousiainen & Pylkkänen, 2013).<sup>6</sup> Among the issues to be resolved, an important one is unemployment. Self-development is an instrument of achieving individual success, as stated above. Intersecting with different class positions, the interpretation of success varies. For white collar workers, it can be associated with gaining a promotion or self-realization in social life. For rural-to-urban migrants, finding a job, in other words turning into a wage labourer, can be perceived as an accomplishment; and developing entrepreneurial characteristics increases employability.<sup>7</sup> For the rural population, no longer engaging in agricultural production, moving to a different sector such as tourism or going back to farming through the above-mentioned mechanisms can be regarded as success. In either way, success is defined at the individual level and becoming a neoliberal subject has become a major criterion of it.

In addition to different class positions, gender becomes a factor affecting experiences of the neoliberal subjectivity. The critique of the development theory for its exclusion of gender dynamics (Boserup, 2013) has created responses emphasizing continued gender inequalities as an obstacle for achieving development. However, as the content of development changes under neoliberalism; including women as targets or actors of development does not result in a decline in gender inequality. The mechanisms like microfinance, used to "empower" women and thereby contribute to gender equality, in fact, deepen already existing hierarchies (Wilson, 2015: 809). In other words, rather than eradicating social inequalities, development, and rural development in specific, targets achieving economic growth, with increased levels of financialization and entrepreneurship. Therefore, the gender-sensitive policies of development are limited with the general framework, this limitation is inevitably reflected in the construction of the female neoliberal subject.

The neoliberal subject assumedly rational, entrepreneurial, self-regulating finds its reflection in the to be empowered women, gaining even a new femininity (Gill, 2008: 436). Under neoliberal governmentality, the subjects are increasingly homogenized; and alongside the characteristics fitting the broad neoliberal subjectivity, the femininity is also regarded as a tool of investing in human capital (Oksala, 2011: 115). Responsibility-shifting to individuals for self-regulation through becoming entrepreneurs of themselves is also related to class dynamics, because this enables upward mobility for lower-class women (Walkerdine, 2003: 241-2).<sup>8</sup> More importantly, it is perceived as enabling mobility by women, and they carry individual responsibility for achieving success by empowering themselves. In a way, their *feeling empowered* matters more than their *being empowered* (Rutherford, 2018: 624). Consequently, the gender-sensitive development policies target making women feel empowered as well; this feeling feeds the female neoliberal subject, even if the outcomes of these policies fail to eliminate gender inequality.

To sum up, implementation of neoliberal policies goes hand in hand with discourses effective in the construction of the neoliberal subject. This subject needs to act rationally, to invest in his own human capital, to be responsible for his own actions, and to become the entrepreneur of himself. In line with the changing understanding of development at the broad level, the new set of rural development policies are compatible with both implementation of neoliberal policies, and construction of subjectivity. The specific emphasis on the place of rural women is also shaped within the same framework. As already underlined above, the neoliberal subject is not a passive recipient of the overall transformation, but the mechanisms preparing the socio-economic environment where the self-construction takes place define and strengthen the rules of subjectification. The rest

<sup>6</sup> Increasing use of governance mechanisms point to the fact that responsibility-shifting is happening in urban contexts as well. For example, see (Sletto & Nygren, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> See (Deuchar & Dyson, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Walkerdine warns us against the fiction of the possibility of achieving success through these means, but also states that it is "constantly held up as possible" (ibid).

of the article focuses on Turkish rural context and takes a closer look at the dynamics of neoliberalism and of the formulation and formation of the neoliberal subject in this context.

## 2. Actors Involved

While the rural individuals are gaining a new subjectivity, many actors were involved in the formation of a new understanding of rural development under neoliberalism. Changing international context with increasing emphases on privatization, individualization, and decentralization, has played a role in the reshaping of the domestic rural context, and worked well in construction of a new subjectivity through capacity-building mechanisms (Phillips & Ilcan, 2004: 397). Although the framework was defined by the international institutions, restructuring of existing domestic institutions or establishment of new ones helped in the management of the process of responsibility-shifting.

In 2001, the World Bank started the Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP) in Türkiye. The main objective of the project was “reducing subsidies”, in this way retrenching the role of the public sector in agriculture; as well as increasing the “institutional capacity” of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs<sup>9</sup>, by strengthening local and provincial offices, and taking legal measures for the restructuring of cooperatives (WorldBank, 2001). Provision of training is not limited to relevant local institutions but extended to the local communities, as well documented in the co-publication of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank. In the new understanding of rural development, it is necessary that the rural population is trained, or in other words, “the community members” are “empowered” so that they can “take responsibility for their own future by assuming ownership of the development process” (Dixon, Gulliver & Gibbon, 2001: 331). This requires a rise in investment in human capital at the local level through effective training programmes that would target a higher level of entrepreneurship (Aerni, 2007: 438).

Although Aerni argues that Türkiye’s EU accession process lacks an emphasis on these aspects (ibid), the contribution of the EU-funded programmes developed later in the construction of neoliberal subjects in rural areas cannot be ignored. The report published following the EU-Türkiye Joint Consultative Committee states that measures should be taken to promote “entrepreneurship”, “education and training”, and “gender equality”, among others (Allen & Özcan, 2006: 3). The solution suggested here is implementation of the IPARD<sup>10</sup> programme, upon the preparation of a Rural Development Plan by Türkiye. Rural Development Strategies based on the National Development Plans, which will be examined below, were prepared. As the implementing agency, the Agricultural and Rural Support Institution (TKDK), affiliated to the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, was established in 2007. The institution directs the granting of financial support in various areas by announcing calls for application and organizes meetings and training sessions. Through its emphasis on regional development projects, the programme introduces a “project culture” in rural areas (Olgun & Sevilmiş, 2017). “Enhancing entrepreneurial capacity” in rural areas is among the main objectives of the IPARD programme (MoFAL, 2014: 51). Accordingly, this theme comes forward in the activities of TKDK (Yontar & Söztutar, 2018; Gülçubuk, Köksal, Ataseven, Gül, & Kan, 2016; Uslu & Kaya, 2015). In addition to IPARD, the Ministry itself conducts projects of rural development including funding agricultural development cooperatives or providing social support in rural areas (MoAF, 2023a).

Another important institutional structure is the Development Agencies, established in 2006, as affiliated to the Ministry of Industry and Technology. There are currently 26 Development Agencies in Türkiye, responsible for contributing to regional development and thereby to a better integration at the national level (DAs, 2023a). The fact that rural development constitutes a significant pillar within the scope of these institutions underlines how

<sup>9</sup> In 2011, The Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Livestock was established. In 2018, it was merged with the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs and was called the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

<sup>10</sup> Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development. IPARD I covers the years 2007-2013, IPARD II covers the years 2014-2020, started to be implemented in 2017, and IPARD III was approved in 2022.



the specific target of IPARD regarding agriculture-industry integration (MoFAL, 2014: 51) has effectively been institutionalized. “Increasing innovation and entrepreneurship” is among the rural development goals pursued by Development Agencies (DAs, 2023b). This creates a limited perception of rural development based on entrepreneurship and competition, documented by the projects and statements of the experts working in these agencies (Işıkçı, 2018: 438). The Development Agencies play an important role in enhancing cooperation among public sector, private sector, and civil society organizations, and improving the effective use of local resources (MoIA, 2023); facilitating, on the one hand, the involvement of the private sector in regional investments, and responsibility-shifting, on the other hand, to local communities. Put differently, the Development Agencies have become effective instruments of the processes of decentralization, privatization, and individualization, mentioned above.

The regional planning is done in accordance with the national Five-Year Development Plans. Whereas these plans had been made by State Planning Organization previously, the Ministry of Development took over this task after 2011. From 2018 onwards, with the transition to the new presidential system, the office of Strategy and Budget has been authorized for drafting the plans. This office is directly affiliated to the Turkish Presidency. Therefore, decentralization goes, in practice, hand in hand with further centralization of decision-making, as the executive has been strengthened. To prevent any discrepancies between the local and national activities, National Rural Development Strategies are prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, which balance IPARD programme with national development plans (MoAF, 2023b).

In short, there are many institutions involved in rural development, and thereby in construction of rural actors. The process of self-construction of subjectivity has thus been supported by institutional actors, which have already been equipped with the required characteristics of neoliberalism. Whether this complexity of institutions facilitate or create obstacles for rural development can be understood by looking at their activities more closely. The documents of national and regional planning will be analysed below, with an emphasis of construction of new subjects. However, before that, the place of women in this overall picture is described in the next section, to consider the gendered dynamics of the process and other institutions/actors involved.

### 3. Women as Emerging Rural Actors

October 15<sup>th</sup> is celebrated as the International Day of Rural Women. On this occasion, TKDK opened a stand in Ankara and invited women from all provinces of Türkiye this year, to promote the institutional activities for rural entrepreneurship (TKDK, 2023). The neoliberal policies implemented in the agricultural sector, like further liberalization of trade, increasing emphasis on export crops and competitiveness, have negatively affected small peasantry in general and necessitated “corrective policies”, however, this impact has also been unevenly distributed among genders (Önder et al, 2022: 677). Self-exploitation of women is deepened, as the pressures of market are also combined with unpaid family labour in rural areas (ibid). Furthermore, other global developments like climate change, too, unevenly affect men and women, because of the social reproductive duties of women. The “feminization of poverty” is a widely accepted term by international institutions, and accordingly, they have suggested solutions for this problem (UN, 2000). The strategies used for fighting against feminization of poverty, in developing countries, include microcredits for enterprises owned by women, agricultural projects targeting rural women, funding for the establishment of commercial enterprises (ibid.) Among the indexes used to measure feminization of poverty are Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure. This shows that, on the one hand, development policies should take into consideration the ongoing gender inequality; on the other hand, women are perceived as actors in need of being empowered. Therefore, the new rural development policies cannot be fully grasped without paying attention to the gender aspect. The activity organized by TKDK makes sense only if it is contextualized in the rising global attention to rural women.

In collaboration with the EU and the UN, ILO conducted a project to promote women’s economic empowerment

in both public and private sector in G7 countries (ILO, 2017). The objectives of this project include “women’s skills development”, “facilitate women’s labour force participation”, and “stimulate women’s entrepreneurship” (ibid). The OECD Guidance Handbook on this issue underlines the interdependence of women’s empowerment and gender equality and the importance of policy frameworks, stating that “support for gender equality starts with the planning and design of development programmes” (OECD, 2022). The World Bank emphasizes the significance of helping women releasing their “human capital” and turning into “leaders, entrepreneurs, and agents of change”, and of supporting their “empowerment” for effective development (WorldBank, 2023). The international context is compatible with the attempt of creating the neoliberal subject reflected in rural development policies. Empowerment of women is mostly understood as economic empowerment with a focus on entrepreneurship, to increase employability. A Foucauldian perspective of investing in human capital and of subjects becoming their own entrepreneurs come forward in the discourse of the necessity of self-development in line with the market-appreciated skills.

The status of women in agricultural sector in Türkiye is characterized by harsher working conditions and lower payment, plus ongoing responsibilities stemming from the gender roles in the existing social structure; and increasing “access to resources and credits” has been defined as a means for encouraging women’s entrepreneurship in rural areas (Gülçubuk, 2010: 148). The microcredits in this context have been a widely used and influential method, in both empowering women economically and contributing to their social status (Özmen, 2012; Yıldız & Özbey, 2022). In touristic rural places, new investments in agro-tourism or eco-tourism provide opportunities for increased female participation in the labour market and improvement of women’s conditions (Boyacıoğlu, 2014; Başaran & Ateş, 2019; Civelek, Dalgın, & Çeken, 2014; Fidan & Nam, 2012; Yönet & Yirmibesoglu, 2022). As part of villages becoming touristic destinations, the local food is commercialized, on the one hand, and the traditional female wisdom regarding both the content and production methods of these food gains a new value, on the other. Although this have a potential of creating entrepreneurs among rural women, a “multidimensional planning” is required for more effective implementation of these policies (Gençler & Artukoğlu, 2010: 11). Furthermore, while involving in local food production for the market, the task of producing food traditionally assigned to women reproduces the perception of women as “rural mothers” (Bilgiç, 2020: 89). While women become more visible in the public sphere through these activities and feel themselves liberated and happier, the obstacles to take active part in decision-making processes underline persisting male agency (ibid: 104-105). The recent phenomenon of women’s agricultural development cooperatives can be considered as a positive step towards increasing the agency of women at the organizational level.<sup>11</sup> Having a say in administration strengthens women’s status, which is beyond the provision of economic independence (Yıldırım, 2020: 166).<sup>12</sup>

The common objective of these different mechanisms of women’s involvement is achieving a higher level of entrepreneurship in rural areas. Women’s entrepreneurship has been a popular term among studies focusing on rural development, and rural women have become a new research interest for management studies (Karaturhan, Ünsal, Issabek, & Güler, 2017; Yavuz, Güler, & Engindeniz, 2022; Bakay, Müftüoğlu, Nalbantoğlu, & Çoçan, 2020; İltar, Kundak, & Cenikli, 2019; Acar, 2018). While the limitations in practice have been addressed, like problems stemming from lack of sufficient education or of financial resources, entrepreneurship itself is mostly perceived as an important target, which would assumedly be positive for improving rural women’s status.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, for the grants provided by TKDK as well, rural female entrepreneurship is considered both as an objective and as a precondition for further grants (Acar & Çağlar, 2019; Aslan, Demirhan, & Ertaş, 2016; Demirbük & Ayyıldız, 2021). Among the projects, provided by the actors that were defined in the previous

<sup>11</sup> For the contribution of women’s associations in this respect, see (Erdoğan, 2021; Kasap & Eroğlu, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> See also (Ozdemir, 2013; Kustepeli, Gülcan, Yercan, & Yıldırım, 2019; Özdoğan & Kesgin, 2021; Kutay, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> For critical analyses of the terms women’s empowerment and entrepreneurship, see (Ecevit, 2007; KurtegeSefer, 2020).

section, the mechanisms of construction of the neoliberal subject are promoted. The gender-sensitive rural development projects are not immune from this overall process. The following sections are devoted to the analysis of the main documents of national and regional planning within this context, which also includes references to women's place.

#### 4. Development Plans under the New Mentality

To begin with, the relations among the planning strategies at varying scales should be clarified, to understand both the broader framework and the specificities of certain areas. In this sense, looking at the Five-Year Development Plans (FYDP) is useful, as they constitute the general framework, within which the national rural development policies are determined. As already discussed above, rising decentralization, through which local actors gain control over the processes in their regions, goes hand in hand with further centralization of decision-making to produce balanced policies country wide.

Reflecting the early phase of neoliberal restructuring of the agricultural sector, the 8<sup>th</sup> FYDP targets reducing government intervention in line with the commitments given to international actors (SPO, 2001: 148). Enhancing productivity and competitiveness and decreasing dependency on state support are among the main aims (ibid: 257), and to achieve these, the need for the restructuring of administrative organization is underlined (ibid: 76). This restructuring involves responsibility-shifting, as the state intervention becomes limited. The objective of the consideration of "participation and responsibility of the producer" in rural development projects (ibid: 149) shows initial steps of the construction of individually responsible actors in rural areas. To take an active part and carry responsibility, individuals should be equipped with the desired characteristics. In this sense, "development of human capital resources" is emphasized, which also requires coordination of actors at varying scales (ibid: 76). Specifying the desired characteristics further, the plan states that "entrepreneurs shall be supported" (ibid: 76), and encouraging female entrepreneurship is suggested for increasing women's status (ibid: 102).

In the 9<sup>th</sup> FYDP, in addition to improving productivity and competitiveness, food security and sustainability emerge as the main aims (SPO, 2007: 90). The plan states that the inclusion of "young and women farmers by producer organizations" will be emphasized (ibid: 91). Rather than including these sections as they are, the necessary investments in their education should be made. Active labour policies will be developed, according to the plan, and several trainings, "primarily entrepreneurship and employment guaranteed programs", will be provided (ibid: 99). To increase the employability of rural population, their human capital should be reshaped in line with the neoliberal context.<sup>14</sup> As a continuation of the administrative restructuring, "coordination among relevant institutions" is targeted in achieving the objectives of the plan (ibid: 92). In this sense, integration of actors at different scales is highly important to "ensure regional development" (ibid: 105). The local dynamics will be taken into consideration, and development agencies become leading actors in the drafting and implementation of regional plans (ibid: 106). The basis of the development projects will be "participation and cost sharing" (ibid: 108), reflecting the strategy of responsibility-shifting.

The regional projects constitute a turning point in rural development planning. Starting from the 10<sup>th</sup> FYDP, the construction of the neoliberal subject in rural areas becomes a full-fledged process. The previous plan also overlaps with significant developments like the establishment of Development Agencies, that of TKDK and implementation of IPARD programmes. The context, within which the 10<sup>th</sup> plan is drafted, is therefore differs from the previous terms. The objectives of the plan firstly include achieving "qualified people, strong society", "maximization of the participation of all individuals and all regions" is targeted (MoD, 2014: 29). This view underlines the need for empowering the human capital as a precondition for the development of the country. As

<sup>14</sup> In rural areas, "human resources and social capital" will be developed, so that "specialization at the local scale" is achieved to meet the requirements of the labour market; "special training programs to develop entrepreneurship will be supported" (SPO, 2007: 106).



part of empowering individuals, “entrepreneurial culture will be further improved”, through mechanisms like qualified education and rewarding of the role models, and women are among the prioritized groups in this respect (ibid: 93). Ironically, there is also an emphasis on cooperatives, but they are considered as tools for “the culture of doing business together, accumulation of capital and income distribution” (ibid: 92), rather than as the institutional form of solidarity and sharing. “Strengthening of the rural economy and employment” and “developing human resources” are among the main pillars of the rural development policy; and diversification of economic activities comes to the fore, explaining the current trend in rural areas towards tourism or food industry (ibid: 135-136).

In the 11<sup>th</sup> FYDP, agriculture is among the priority development areas. Given the weakness of data collection on the impact of rural transformation in general, one interesting point is the attempt to develop information systems for the sector, with “digitalization, artificial intelligence and data-based business models” (PSB, 2019: 95). In a way, the state institutions create a role model for rural actors in the use of technology. Provision of trainings “for the reduction of production costs, use of technology, production of high-quality and healthy products, especially for women and young farmers” is planned (ibid: 100). Embracing the technological developments is added to the remaining objectives of productivity and competitiveness. Targeting female and younger rural population particularly points to how planners attempt to have immediate access to the most crucial actors for the construction of the neoliberal subjects. Education of especially younger and female “entrepreneurs” appears as a method of investment in the “human capital of the rural community (ibid: 185-186). These groups also utilize from positive discrimination in terms of the “institutional and local capacity” (ibid: 185). While shifting responsibility to rural actors themselves and local institutions, unity of different programmes applied nationwide is also of concern (ibid). In the drafting of regional plans, local dynamics are taken into consideration. Protection of “cultural assets in the villages” through supporting traditional crafts, geographically marked goods or agro-tourism is also targeted; however, the local products are regarded as valuable to the extent that they are “high value added” goods (ibid: 186). More importantly than the development of rural areas themselves, transformation of the activities and actors in these places so that they can be more compatible with the national economic environment, and thus contribute to it better, is the goal of regional planning.

In line with the Development Plans at the national scale, and as required by the IPARD programmes, National Rural Development Strategy (NRDS) documents have been prepared as to cover each consecutive planning duration. Because these documents directly deal with the rural development field, they provide focused information about the dynamics of the construction of neoliberal subjects in the rural context. NRDS I was prepared during the 9<sup>th</sup> FYDP (2007-2013), NRDS II was prepared during the 10<sup>th</sup> FYDP (2014-2018) as to cover the time until 2020, NRDS III covers the years 2021-2023. The main objective of the first strategy document is eliminating the gap between urban and rural places and thereby reducing migration (SPO, 2006: 4). Achieving a wholistic approach regarding rural development activities, which will be crucial in later harmonization of regional and national policies, is also underlined (ibid: 3). In the second strategy document, modernization of farming and increasing efficiency in agricultural production come to the agenda (MoFAL, 2015: 16). This reflects the tendency toward transformation of rural actors in their own context, as increased productivity would motivate them to remain and take active part in improvement of their own regions. Whereas NRDS I mostly defines the existing structural problems in rural areas, NRDS II sets a more concrete framework for the restructuring that also includes construction of the neoliberal subject, evident in the emergence of concepts like entrepreneurship, in the second document (ibid). The strategic objectives of the last NRDS include “development of rural economy and increasing employment opportunities”, “human capital development in rural society” and “institutional capacity enhancement for local development” (MoAF, 2020: 42-52). Although the general framework is consistent over the years, with each new document, the mechanisms to achieve the overall objectives are further detailed. Regarding the economic measures, enhancing competitiveness, diversification,

and entrepreneurship are prominent (ibid: 44); in terms of human capital, provision of training and consultancy services, creation of an awareness for rural development and digitalization are on the agenda (ibid: 49); and concerning institutional capacity, collaboration with private sector and NGOs comes to the fore (ibid: 51). In this sense, the objectives are in parallel with the overall process of responsibility-shifting and empowering individuals by investing in appreciated skills under neoliberalism. The more specific emphasis on women is clear only in the last NRDS, as a reflection of the proliferation of the concept of economic empowerment of women.

## 5. A Critical Analysis of the Regional Plans

The role of Development Agencies in rural development had been mentioned above. They contribute to local development by designing plans specific to their own regions, and thereby to the overall development of the country. In this section, selected regional plans are analysed in the light of the conceptualization of the construction of neoliberal subjectivity, and of the strategies followed at the national scale.

As part of the national economic goal of enhancing employment, different mechanisms have been put into practice in rural areas. The responsibility-shifting argument put forward above underlines a transition from the state providing more employment opportunities towards facilitating individuals becoming more employable. Accordingly, local actors invest in those areas, which will help individuals to increase their own employability. After all, the neoliberal subject strives toward becoming more employable, rather than being dependent on the state support in terms of creating job opportunities with high wages. This perspective is reflected in regional documents, as insufficient levels of employment is expressed as the failure of local population in meeting the requirements of the labour market. İzmir Development Agency defines the need for qualified human capital (İZKA, 2010: 33) and the insufficiency of vocational education for labour market demand (İZKA, 2015: 34). Similarly, Bursa, Eskişehir, Bilecik Development Agency points to the insufficient level of vocational trainings to meet the labour demands of the firms in the region (BEBKA, 2011: 59). Low labour force participation in Eskişehir is explained by the fact that university students constitute a significant part of the population in the city (BEBKA, 2015: 52). Ironically, an indicator of development, higher education, turns into an obstacle for the labour market. For improvement of employment opportunities in Konya region, investments in human capital are regarded as necessary, and education should be restructured as to meet the labour market demands (MEVKA, 2010: 120-121). Eastern Black Sea Development Agency states that the employability of disadvantaged groups should be increased, to alleviate poverty in the region, and to achieve social integration (DOKA, 2011: 6). Being employable -not simply being employed- becomes a criterion for integrating with the social life, it is then dependent on the success/failure of the individual in complying with the rules of the market.

While making himself more employable, the neoliberal subject also needs to turn into an entrepreneur. Development of the entrepreneurship skills of the local population is among the main objectives defined in all regional plans. Karacadağ Development Agency, covering the cities Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır, complains about the failure of small enterprises in the region to achieve a desired level of entrepreneurship in the preliminary plan (KKA, 2010: 105). This limitation of the region is addressed in the regional plans later, firstly, “construction of an entrepreneurship culture” is suggested to enhance the employment capacity (KKA, 2015: 8), and then the ongoing need for increasing awareness about entrepreneurship is underlined (KKA, 2020: 15). Serhat Development Agency, that covers the cities Ağrı, Ardahan, Iğdır and Kars, also addresses the insufficient level of “entrepreneurship infrastructure and culture” in the region, and the need for increasing access to financial resources or providing training services targeting entrepreneurs (SERKA, 2014: 58-59). Central Anatolia Development Agency, that covers Kayseri, Yozgat, Sivas, has similar goals (ORANKA, 2015: 26). Whereas for eastern parts of the Türkiye, lack of an entrepreneurship culture creates an obstacle to development, existence of it in the western parts is regarded as an opportunity, but still, improving entrepreneurial activities is an objective (İZKA, 2015: 69).

As already discussed above, female entrepreneurship is among the goals of the new understanding of development. This perspective is reflected in the regional plans. Eastern Black Sea Development Agency states that women are mostly employed in the agricultural sector in the region (DOKA, 2015: 44). The younger population and women should be prioritized in having access to entrepreneurship funds (ibid: 199). According to the regional plan by Serhat Development Agency, support mechanisms will be developed to proliferate female entrepreneurship (SERKA, 2014: 43). In addition, entrepreneurship is perceived as a means of economic diversification in rural areas (ibid: 46). Support for the female entrepreneurship is also on the agenda of other Agencies (MEVKA, 2010: 132; BEBKA, 2015: 235). Women and the youth are crucial actors in the emergence of a new form of agency.

The use of innovative methods in agricultural production is another common emphasis of the regional plans. Karacadağ Development Agency prioritizes the use of recent technology in farming and modernization of the agricultural enterprises (KKA, 2015: 52). For the Eastern Black Sea Development Agency, innovative methods would create a significant progress in tea and hazelnut production (DOKA, 2015: 85). For Bursa, Eskişehir, Bilecik Development Agency, there already is a growing tendency for innovative production, proliferating among sectors (BEBKA, 2015: 96-97). This means that the rural people, who remain in farming, should adapt to the new technologies, should engage in sustainable farming, with an increased environmental awareness. All these new requirements play a role in the construction of a new subjectivity.

As more and more people quit farming, diversification of the economic activities is crucial for preventing further migration from rural areas. The regional plans aim to keep the rural population in their own locations, while improving these places. At this point, again entrepreneurship comes to the fore. Zafer Development Agency, covering the cities Kütahya, Afyon, Manisa, Uşak, published a commodification guideline for the products with geographical indication, mostly local food, that thus create opportunities like establishment of women's cooperatives (ZAFER, 2021: 23). Geographical indication also supports traditional production processes, which are highly dependent on female labour (DOKA, 2019: 47), as the exotic products are commodified so does the labour power, as another step towards becoming the neoliberal subject. Another method of economic diversification is the improvement of the tourism capacity of the regions. In addition to agro-tourism, which was discussed above, there are alternative ventures. The new trend of "green tourism" in the Black Sea region even creates expectations for remigration (DOKA, 2015: 172). Karacadağ Development Agency supports thermal tourism in the district of Çermik, with the hope of improving entrepreneurship here (KKA, 2020: 66); their plan also involves making a village called Sinek a destination for ecotourism (ibid: 44). In this way, new employment opportunities emerge for the rural population, so long as they invest well in their human capital and act entrepreneurial enough.

The discussion about the national strategy of development had shown that making the most of local dynamics and resources is the main pillar of the new form of rural development. Turning rural areas into attractive places to prevent migration will assumedly provide a more balanced development nationwide. This new perspective is also reflected in the regional plans. In this sense, the plans emphasize the sustainability of rural life (BEBKA, 2015: 151), and considers rural development investments as mechanisms of preventing migration (ibid: 127). Sustainability also includes protection of the environment, which redirects rural development policies in line with the new emphases at the global scale. The use of environment-friendly farming techniques or strengthening the legal structure in accordance with international standards for new fields like organic farming (İZKA, 2015: 252) are among the strategies for the maintenance of the rural life. It should be noted that the implementation of neoliberal policies had had devastating effects for the rural population. In a way, the new understanding of rural development is an attempt to reverse the negative impacts of neoliberalism. However, the process of the construction of the neoliberal subject is ongoing, it is only happening on-site now.

At this point, the balance between centralization and decentralization should be revisited, since national actors

have transferred their authority to local, regional, private sector actors. In addition to the institutional actors, individuals themselves must carry a higher responsibility. This, on the one hand, creates opportunities for increased accountability, participation into decision-making processes, strengthening through the cooperation of many actors; but results in the need of a better coordination, on the other. Institutional capacity of local agents should be improved for more effective functioning, a relation of trust should be established between individuals and institutions (KKA, 2015: 69); and coordination among different actors involved in agriculture and rural development should be achieved (BEBKA, 2015: 124). Effective governance requires stronger institutional capacity and human capital (ORANKA, 2015: 20), both of which should be compatible with the requirements of the market, and thus again point to the construction of the neoliberal subjectivity, at the individual and institutional levels.

There are undeniably distinctions among the regions and specific characteristics of each, ranging from geographical variety and climate conditions to economic opportunities and the level of human capital. All these factors cause differences in terms of rural development. This affects the volume and sequence of the policies and strategies. However, the common characteristics in regional plans portray how the construction of the neoliberal subject is, in fact, centrally planned. The planning at the national scale, which was examined in the previous section, plays an important role in the integration of policies and mechanisms of their implementation at the regional scale. As importantly, though, the rules of the market under neoliberalism leads different rural people to gain similar characteristics, like becoming responsible, employable, highly entrepreneurial, able to divert traditional assets into high value products.

## **Conclusion**

This article focuses on the new form of rural development under neoliberalism in Türkiye. It is suggested that this new form involves a process of the construction of neoliberal subjects in rural areas. Through a critical analysis of the major documents of rural development planning at the national and regional scales, it showed that rural population are reframed as individual actors, who should be equipped with the desired skills under neoliberalism.

The neoliberal subjects are responsible from their self-development. They should increase their own employability, by investing in their human capital. In other words, they should become entrepreneurs of themselves in the Foucauldian sense. To facilitate this process, the state aims to achieve an integrated understanding of rural development nationwide, while transferring its authority to local institutions. By utilizing from local dynamics, increasing the attractiveness of rural places is attempted, to prevent further migration due to the negative impacts of neoliberal policies. Instead, the rural population gains a new agency that is compatible with neoliberalism in their own locations.

As the actors of rural areas in need of empowerment, women have a distinct place in this construction process. Their individual transformation would assumedly trigger proliferation of neoliberal subjectivity. Prioritizing women in providing educational services point to their disadvantaged status especially in rural areas; however, it also stems from ongoing gender inequality, resulting in the portrayal of women as raisers of future generations.

The skills a neoliberal subject should obtain are usually considered as preconditions for overall development of the society. This perspective is clear in the national and regional development plans. By looking at this new mentality with a critical lens and operationalizing the concept of neoliberal subject in the rural development planning context, the article contributes to the literature. Analysing the experiences of these subjects through fieldworks, conducted with the conceptualization provided here, could be the work of further studies.



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