

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE: EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

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With the introduction of the concept of regional development agencies (RDAs), an institutional framework has been created that may take regional development in Turkey closer towards prevailing European approaches, both in terms of the nature of policy initiatives and the governance structures surrounding sub-national economic development activities. While the role of the new bodies in the Turkish regions remains to be worked out in more detail¹, it may be useful to reflect on the European experience with regionally-based development bodies because although it is possible to distil certain key features of RDAs which most organisations have in common, the degree of variation between nations and regions is striking and their role has evolved over time. In short, RDAs are not just RDAs but a group of development bodies with some shared features and significant degrees of spatial and temporal variation.

The aim of this text is to outline key features, variations and development trends among RDAs in Western Europe, in order to identify current and future challenges for this approach to regional policy, challenges many of which may also turn out to be relevant in the context of Turkey. The analysis is based on extensive surveys of both the existing academic literature and primary research undertaken in the form of in-depth case studies and a comparative survey², most recently in the context of *Eurodite*, an Integrated Project sponsored by the 6th framework programme of the European Commission³.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: DEFINING RDAS

A an RDA can be defined as,

a regionally based, publicly financed institution outside the mainstream of central and local government administration designed to promote indig-

enous economic development through an integrated use of predominantly ‘soft’ policy instruments⁴

and this approach to regional policy has often been defined in opposition to traditional central government measures, as illustrated by the adjoining Table 1.

Table 1. Regional policy approaches compared

<i>Key features</i>	<i>Top-down</i>	<i>Bottom-up</i>
Organisation	National designation	Regional designation
	Departmental	Semi-autonomous
Strategies	Redistribution of growth	Strengthen indigenous growth
	Interregional solidarity	Interregional competition
Policy instruments	‘Hard’ resources	‘Hard’ and ‘soft’ resources
	Non-selective, reactive	Selective, proactive

Source: Halkier 2006 Table 2.2, cf Halkier & Danson 1998.

Essentially, traditional top-down regional policies were attempts by central government to promote equality between regions by redistributing economic activity to problem areas by means of a system of ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’, primarily relying on ‘hard’ policy instruments such as infrastructure and financial subsidies. Bottom-up regional policies, on the other hand, have been conducted within individual regions, principally aiming to improve the competitiveness of indigenous firms, often through ‘soft’ policy instruments such as advice, networks, or training. Moreover, within the bottom-up approach responsibility for regional policy was frequently moved away from government departments and instead vested in semi-autonomous public bodies with responsibility for development and implementation of economic development initiatives.

Making regional policy the responsibility of public bodies operating at arm’s-length of government at the regional level was seen as having important advantages over the traditional redistributive policies of central government. Firstly, designing policies at the regional level would make it possible to target specific problems of individual localities and focus on strengthening indigenous firms. Secondly, being outside the mainstream structure of government would provide some degree of protection of policy implementation from party-political or parochial interests and thereby further long-term strategies at the expense of short-term gesturing or butter-spreading approaches. And thirdly, being outside the mainstream structure of government would allow recruitment of staff with relevant business experience that could implement the new knowledge-intensive ‘soft’ policy instruments such as advisory services, inter-firm networks, and public private partnerships and implement these in a proactive and integrated manner. All in all its key characteristics can in other words be summarised as

- *organisationally* being in a semi-autonomous position vis-à-vis its sponsoring political authority,
- *strategically* supporting mainly indigenous firms by means of ‘soft’ policy instruments, and
- *implementation* being integrated, i.e. drawing upon a broad range of policy instruments.

Clearly this is a Weberian ideal type which leaves plenty of scope for variation, and it will therefore be instructive to take a closer look at the way in which the idea of bottom-up arm’s-length regional policy has been put into practice across Europe.

RDA DIVERSITY: SPONSORSHIP, STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The rapid growth of bottom-up regional policy from the 1980s onwards has spawned a rich literature consisting primarily of detailed regional and national case-studies⁵. Till now the only systematic comparative research to have been published stem from the early 1980s and early 1990s respectively⁶, and below the most important results of the most recent Western European survey are reported⁷.

Political Sponsorship and Bureaucratic Autonomy

An ideal-type RDA is expected to be situated outside the mainstream government apparatus in a semi-autonomous position vis-à-vis its political sponsors, and a sequence of possible relationships can be defined between the authority legitimising development activities and the executive in the front-line of policy implementation, stretching from outright incorporation as part of the government administrative apparatus, via semi-department positions where the freedom of manoeuvre is strengthened by the introduction of external actors in a formal advisory structure,

to organisations positioned at arm’s-length with one or more political sponsors having agreed to provide resources without exercising close control of policy development and implementation⁸.

As illustrated by Figure 1, the vast majority of the organisations surveyed have been found to be in a semi-autonomous position, with 2/3 of the relying exclusively or predominantly

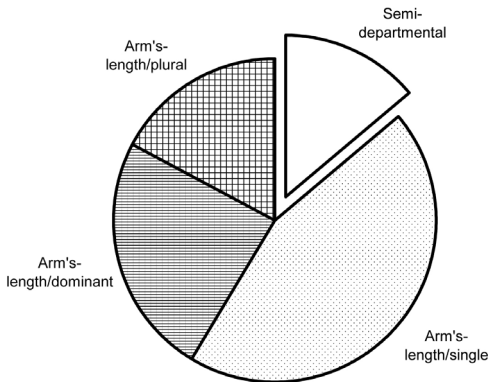


Figure 1. Bureaucratic Autonomy of RDAs

on one political sponsor, while the rest of the organisations were either in a semi-department position or arm’s-length bodies sponsored by a plurality of public (and sometimes also private) actors.

All in all it can be concluded that from an organisational perspective the development bodies surveyed comply remarkably well with the ideal-type expectations of an RDA, with more than 80% positioned at arm’s-length distance from the sponsoring political authority. At the same time the precarious nature of this semi-autonomous position was, however, also underlined by the fact that the vast majority of organisations rely exclusively or predominantly on one single economic and political sponsor, and hence the potential for extensive political interference in the activities of the legally independent RDAs is obvious.

Development Strategies and Policy Instruments

According to the RDA approach to regional policy, strengthening the indigenous sector by means of ‘soft’ policy instruments should be an important part of the policy profile of a development body. In order to operationalise this requirement, the activities in which the organisations engage have been classified according to their strategic orientation as well as the specific type of support provided, as illustrated by Figure 2. On the one hand we have the ‘traditional’ measures complementing or replacing the redistributive policies of central government by facilitating the import of growth from outside the region, and then follow the ‘new’ measures, not found in the traditional armoury of central government and primarily aimed at stimulating the growth and competitiveness of indigenous firms.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the three most common activities are all advisory services. Two of them clearly focus on indigenous firms through general manage-

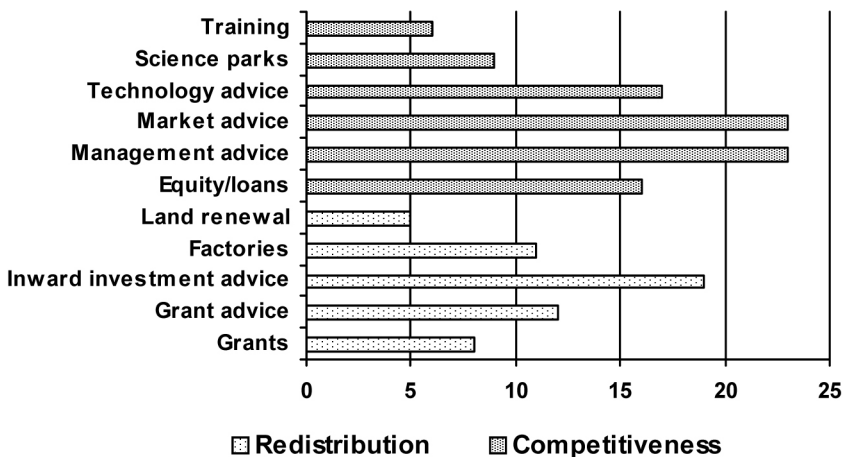


Figure 2. RDA strategies and policies

ment support, especially for SMEs, and information about market opportunities, e.g. promotion of subcontracting or trade fairs. Contrary to this the third most common advisory service, attraction of inward investment, entails a rather different perspective on regional development and its prominence underlines the diversity of the activities undertaken by the organisations investigated.

Table 2. Organisations by policy profile

		<i>Primary activity</i>	
		Traditional	New
<i>Degree of specialisation</i>	Specialised	8	13
	Mixed	4	5

In order to take both the relative weight and the overall distribution of different types of development activities into account, the character of the policy profile of each organisation in the sample was determined by combining two criteria, namely 1) the traditional/new nature of the most important policy area, and 2) the degree to which the organisation specialises in activities with a strategic perspective similar to that of its most important policy programme. This divides the sample into four groups according to priority activity and degree of specialisation⁹, and, as can be seen from Table 2, nearly half of the organisations surveyed specialise in new policy areas, while the remainder are evenly divided between those specialising in traditional measures and development bodies with a mixed policy profile. As RDAs are supposed to give an important, but not necessarily exclusive, role to policies focusing on the needs of indigenous firms, organisations that specialise in traditional policy areas cannot be said to comply with this requirement. From the perspective of policy profiles and strategic orientation, only those with either specialised-new or mixed policy profiles fulfil this criterion, amounting to 75% of the organisations surveyed.

Integrated implementation

An ideal-type RDA was not only expected to be involved in new types of policy areas but also to go about its task in a way that differed from that of the traditional regional incentive schemes of central government. Whereas the latter consisted primarily of a limited number of segregated programmes, RDAs were expected to operate in an integrated manner, being able to draw upon a range of policy instruments in order to tackle structural problems within the regional economy or specific difficulties faced by individual firms in an effective manner. The capacity for integrated implementation depends on two features: the number of policy areas in which an organisation is engaged, and the diversity of the policy resources at its disposal. In the survey only organisations involved in four or more different policy areas and having both ‘soft’ (advice) and ‘hard’ (finance, infrastructure) resources at their disposal were accepted as being able to tailor a specific incentive

structure that can induce private and other actors to adopt new patterns of behaviour and thereby address a particular weakness in the regional economy.

Table 3. RDAs capacity for integrated implementation

		<i>No. of policy areas</i>	
		<i>1-4</i>	<i>4+</i>
<i>Diversity of policy instruments</i>	<i>Either hard/soft</i>	3	1
	<i>Both hard/soft</i>	4	22

As can be seen from Table 3, involvement in too few policy areas appears to be a more common cause of non-compliance than is exclusive reliance on either hard or soft resources, while nearly 75% of the organisations surveyed fulfil both criteria. Although of course the extent to which this *potential* for integration has actually been fulfilled cannot be established on the basis of a survey approach¹⁰.

RDAs: Ideal-type and Otherwise

Having established that with regard to sponsorship, policy profile, and implementation a significant majority of the organisations surveyed comply with the ideal-type requirements for RDAs, attention is now turned on the extent to which individual organisations fulfil all of these criteria in order to get a fuller, multi-dimensional picture of bottom-up regional policy in Western Europe.

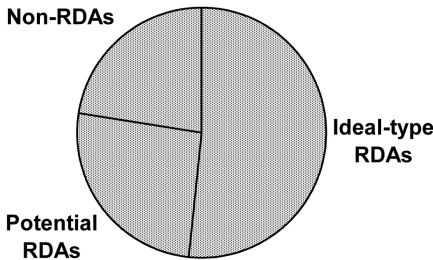


Figure 3. RDAs and other development bodies

By combining the three criteria, the 30 development bodies surveyed can be divided into three groups: ‘ideal-type RDAs’ fulfilling all three criteria, ‘potential RDAs’ fulfilling two out of three, and finally ‘non-RDAs’ complying with only one or none of them. As can be seen from Figure 3, more than half of the organisations can be classified as ‘ideal-type RDAs’, while the rest is evenly divided between

those failing by only one criterion and those clearly not complying with the expectations of an RDA. This of course does not imply that the current state of development policy in half of the regions surveyed is inherently superior to that in the other half, but merely that the existing patterns are in varying degree of accordance with the RDA approach to regional policy with its integrated implementation of competitiveness-oriented policies by an arm’s-length institution at the regional level.

Amongst the ideal-type RDAs, three distinct sub-groupings can be identified on the basis of particular combinations of policy profile and resources¹¹. Organisations

with a mixed-traditional policy profile are generally large, probably reflecting the relatively costly nature of many traditional policies with their reliance on grants and factory building, while most of those with mixed-new or specialised-new profiles generally operate on a much smaller scale. Although RDAs are by definition characterised by relatively broad policy profiles, this clearly does not necessarily require a large organisation in terms of financial resources.

A closer look at the group of organisations dubbed ‘potential RDAs’ justifies the adoption of this apparently prejudicing label, as the more diverse of the organisations specialising in traditional activities lack only one additional new policy area each to achieve a mixed profile and qualify as RDAs. A fairly large group of relatively small organisations in other words would appear to be capable of becoming ideal-type RDAs if they, and/or their political sponsors, should decide to go down this road - although the seemingly high degree of concentration on one particular activity may in many cases make it difficult to develop an integrated approach in practice. The non-RDA group is dominated by development bodies under relatively strict political supervision and organisations narrowly specialised in traditional regional policy activities, and as all of them comply with only one of the three criteria, major changes would have to be undertaken should it be decided to move these organisations in the direction of ideal-type RDAs.

RDAS IN REGIONAL POLICY: TOWARDS MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

Having established the presence of RDAs as a major element in regional development policies in Western Europe, it is, however, also important to stress that the role of this type of organisation has changed over the years, and thus in order to be able to identify the challenges currently faced by RDAs in Europe, it is necessary to introduce a historical perspective to the analysis.

Table 4. Four paradigms of regional policy

	<i>Spatially selective</i>	<i>Spatially inclusive</i>
<i>Single-tier</i>	National top-down	Regional bottom-up
<i>Multi-tier</i>	European Structural Funds	Growth partnerships

As illustrated by Table 4¹², it is possible to identify four different approaches to regional policy, depending on the specific combination of spatial and organisational characteristics:

- Some policies have been spatially selective by being applied exclusively to regions designated for support by national or European authorities, while

other policies have, potentially or actually, been applied throughout the national territory.

- Some policies have been designed and implemented by one tier of government, while other policies have involved inter-tier collaboration resulting in multi-level governance type of partnerships.

In brief, the development of European regional policy sees the main emphasis moving away from the top-left quadrant of national-level top-down policies, in direction of the bottom-right quadrant, although with great variations in the speed and relative importance of the three new forms of regional policy.

In Western Europe the first phase of regional policy, stretching from the post-war years through to the late 1970s, was near-exclusively dominated by central government measures of a top-down nature¹³. Financial and other ‘hard’ resources were employed to achieve interregional equality through redistribution of economic growth, especially through diversion of firms and investment from more prosperous part of the country to designated problem regions with high levels of unemployment. Policy programmes were generally only spatially selective, i.e. they did not focus on particular (manufacturing) industries or types of firms, and they operated in a reactive manner with government offices considering applications from individual firms for e.g. financial support for particular investments. In this form of regional policy, RDAs played no role at all: policies were designed and implemented by central government departments and did not take the specific development problems of individual regions as their point of departure.

From the 1980s onwards this situation changed dramatically, as, firstly, both regional and European actors came to play important roles in regional development alongside central government, and, secondly, an increasing number of policy programmes, not least those emanating from the European level, came to involve cooperation between several tiers of government. The regional programmes of central government were maintained in most countries¹⁴, but expenditure was reduced— in 1990/91 British real term expenditure constituted only 13% of the maximum recorded in 1975/76¹⁵ – and programmes became increasingly selective, not least with regard to the types of investment projects that were supported through financial incentives. Parallel to this, an explosive growth occurred in what became known as ‘bottom-up’ regional policy, i.e. initiatives specific to individual regions which often involved the setting up of separate development bodies¹⁶. Regionally-based institutions would be able to target the specific needs of individual areas and operate in a more proactive manner when devising programmes and projects, and policies tended to focus mainly, but not exclusively, on attempts to strengthen the competitiveness of the region by supporting indigenous firms by means of ‘soft’ policy instruments like advisory services, inter-firm networks, and public-private partnerships, although in many cases ‘harder’ forms of support, such as technological infrastructure or venture capital, were part of the armoury too.

In parallel with this mushrooming of economic development initiatives ‘from below’, the European level also emerged as a major actor in regional policy¹⁷. Developing gradually from being mainly a system for reimbursing national expenditure on regional policy and supporting basic infrastructure projects, the European Structural Funds came to constitute a regional policy programme in its own right with a separate system of designated ‘problem areas’ and development programmes from 1988 onwards. Although ‘hard’ policy instruments such as infrastructure and investment subsidies continued to play a major role, support for ‘softer’ measures such as advisory services and network building gradually became increasingly important, and the introduction of regional development programmes as the vehicle through which support is channelled to individual regions could also be interpreted as similar to the specific targeting entailed in the bottom-up approach.

Finally, it should be stressed that the three levels of regional policy have not only coexisted but also interacted in a variety of ways, something that in some EU member states have resulted in inter-tier partnership becoming the governance principle used to structure regional development activities throughout the national territory. Not only has the introduction of Structural Funds programming in the new CEE member states resulted in relatively homogenous systems of subnational development bodies relying primarily on EU funding, but also in relatively prosperous countries such as France, Austria, Sweden and Denmark have similar structures been created in order to ensure that the contribution of every region to national growth is maximised¹⁸.

Clearly, the emergence of extensive patterns of multi-level governance in regional policy has had important implications for RDAs in Europe¹⁹. Whereas many of the early regionally-based development bodies appear to have operated primarily on a stand-alone basis where squaring the ambitions of their political sponsors with the perceived needs of the regional economy was the central challenge, in the beginning of the 21st century RDAs find themselves in a dense network of public and private organisations with overlapping policy remits and potentially conflicting interests with regard to regional development. Paradoxically, it would appear that while the role of RDAs in the current networked governance of regional policy has been maintained in terms of strategy development, their role as policy implementers to some extent may have been reduced in some countries and regions, making the regionally-based development body a node in a strategic network that attempts to reach its goals by influencing other policy actors rather than posturing – like classical stand-alone RDAs with a wide range of policy instruments at their disposal - as being a cure-all solution to any regional development problem imaginable.

FUTURE CHALLENGES: NETWORKING RDAs

The current challenges faced by the new networked set-up can be summarised under the same three heading that were used to analyse the earlier phase dominated by stand-alone RDAs.

In terms of *sponsorship* the new circumstances clearly involve a more complex situation, with more political authorities the support of which must be maintained. While for some organisations this could result in greater degrees of operational freedom compared to a situation with one single or dominant sponsor, the balancing of potentially opposing demands may also result in difficulties with regard to maintaining a strategic focus. This would not only seem to make it even more important for RDAs to develop well-defined strategies – a challenge also faced by stand-alone bodies – but also to be clear about the potential importance of non-economic concerns with regard to e.g. territorial politics of their multitude of stakeholders.

With regard to *development strategies* the fact that regional policy has now become ubiquitous – i.e. practiced not only in declining industrial and remote rural regions but also in strong metropolitan areas – means that individual RDAs more than ever will have to be realistic about the possible impact of their policies. Obviously, many factors are outside the reach of regional actors in a globalising world, but now competing regions are more likely than ever to be engaged in similar activities. At the same time, unlike traditional stand-alone RDAs, contemporary development bodies will not have to rely solely on its own imagination and the inspiration from working with client firms in order to develop and refine its activities, the dense network relations may also serve as a source of inspiration and innovation.

Nonetheless, with regard to *policy instruments* the new situation would still seem to involve the risk of ‘copy-cat’ policies which import measures regarded as ‘best practice’ within the network without making the necessary allowances and adaptation to specific regional circumstances. Moreover, the need to maintain support from stakeholders and networking partners is likely to increase the importance of corporate PR and branding – it is not enough to ‘do the right thing’ but also to be *seen* to be doing so in order to maintain the flow of resources to the organisation.

On this reading, the decision to introduce RDAs in Turkey poses an interesting challenge for all actors involved:

- For *central government* which will have to give the new bodies some degree of authority in order to be able to design specific policies for regions in very different socio-economic circumstances – or run the risk of making little difference in practice, except of course making a token gesture in the direction of EU-agreeable decentralisation.

- For *European actors* which in the pre-accession period are likely to be seen as a potential source of additional resources and which, hopefully, will be able to benefit from lessons learned in regional development initiatives in and beyond the new CEE member states of the EU – or run the risk of making policies less effective and efficient than might otherwise have been the case.
- For *regional actors*, public as well as private, who have to take up the challenge of designing and implementing regional development initiatives in a situation where resources are likely to be limited and possibly disputed – or run the risk of making little difference in practice.

In facing up to these challenges, many lessons and much inspiration may be derived from European experiences with regional development in recent decades – but at the end of the day it will be the extent to which these findings are digested and translated into the specific socio-economic and institutional context through intensive and interactive learning processes that will determine whether the RDA concept will end up making a significant impact on the development of regions across Turkey.

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NOTES

1. See e.g. Dulupcu 2005.
2. Halkier 2001, 2006a; Halkier & Danson 1998, Halkier & Damborg 2000, Halkier & Flockhart 2002.
3. Halkier 2006b, cf <http://www.eurodite.bham.ac.uk/>.
4. Halkier & Danson 1998, cf Velasco 1991, Benneworth 2001.
5. For an overview, See Halkier 2006a Section 2.1.
6. Yuill (ed.) 1982, Halkier & Danson 1998. The results of the the ongoing *Eurodite* survey will be published in 2007/2008 (cf Halkier 2006b).
7. The survey covered 30 members of the *Eurada* interest organisation
8. Halkier 2006a section 3.4, cf Halkier & Danson 1998.
9. In order to allow for the greater number of policy areas with an indigenous strategic focus (cf Figure 2), an organisation with predominantly new activities will be regarded as specialised if it engages in no more than one traditional activity, and an organisation with predominantly traditional activities will be regarded as specialised if it engages in no more than two new policy areas.
10. See e.g. Halkier 2006a for a case-study approach to this.
11. Halkier & Danson 1998.
12. Halkier 2006b, cf Halkier 1999.
13. For an extended argument, see Halkier 2006a Section 2.1.
14. Denmark is the exception in that all central government regional subsidies were terminated in 1991 (Halkier 2001).
15. Calculated on the basis of Wren's grant-equivalent figures (1996 p. 328).
16. For case studies of individual agencies and countries, see e.g. Alden & Boland (eds.) 1996, Halkier, Danson & Damborg (eds.) 1998, Danson, Halkier & Cameron (eds.) 2000, Sagan & Halkier (eds.) 2005.
17. For overviews, see Wishlade 1996, Staeck 1996, Bachtler 1997.
18. See e.g. Ferry & McMaster 2005, Östholl & Svensson (eds.) 2002, Downes 2000, Balme 1998.
19. See e.g. Cameron *et al.* 2000, Sagan & Halkier 2005.