



# Sustainable Food Governance: The Growing Role of Local Governments in Türkiye From A Public Policy Perspective

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**Abstract.** Sustainable food governance is not merely a framework regulating production–consumption relations but also a multi-actor governance process encompassing the formulation, implementation, and evaluation stages of public policy. The accelerating climate crisis, food insecurity, and agricultural vulnerabilities on a global scale reveal the limits of the state’s traditional policy-making capacity. Accordingly, sustainable food policies increasingly rely on a multi-level governance model that goes beyond hierarchical administration and incorporates the active participation of local governments, civil society, the private sector, and citizens. This transformation brings a profound restructuring in both the content and the actor composition of public policy processes. Within this restructuring, the strategic position of local governments in sustainable food governance in Türkiye has become increasingly prominent. At the local level, municipalities are emerging not only as implementers but also as policy-makers and coordinators in areas such as food security, waste prevention, rural development, and climate-friendly production. This shift indicates a transition from a centralized model of policy-making toward a multi-level, participatory, and resilience-oriented public policy framework. The aim of this study is to explore the role of local governments in shaping sustainable food policies in Türkiye from the perspective of public policy and governance.

**Keywords:** Public Policy, Governance, Sustainable Food, Local Governments, Food Security.

## 1 Introduction

At the global level, the growing population, urbanization, climate change, and the unsustainable use of natural resources have intensified concerns regarding the security and sustainability of food systems. The environmental, economic, and social challenges that emerge at every stage of the food chain from production to consumption are no longer solely addressed through agricultural production policies, but have increasingly become the focus of a holistic public policy and governance approach. In this context,

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the capacity of central governments to formulate and implement adequate policies remains insufficient; thus, a multi-actor governance model that includes local governments, civil society, and the private sector has gained prominence (Lang and Barling, 2012, pp. 313–326).

The concept of food governance refers to an approach that emphasizes participation, transparency, accountability, and multi-level cooperation in decision-making processes throughout the stages from production to consumption (Sonnino, Faus, and Maggio, 2016, pp. 173–188). Unlike traditional agricultural policies, this approach takes into account not only production and supply, but also environmental sustainability, social justice, and local resilience. In this regard, food governance is considered a strategic domain in achieving sustainable development goals (UNDP, 2023).

In the context of Türkiye, the increasing role of local governments in designing and implementing sustainable food policies has become particularly notable in recent years. Many local governments—especially metropolitan municipalities—have emerged as active stakeholders in food governance through rural development projects, collaborations with producer cooperatives, local markets, and social food support programs (Atik and Atik, 2019, pp. 453–465). This trend has laid the groundwork for the reshaping of public policies at the local level and the institutionalization of a multi-actor governance approach.

This study, which examines sustainable food governance from a public policy perspective and analyzes the growing role of local governments in Türkiye, investigates the impact of the governance approach on the transformation of food policies and identifies the functional roles that local governments assume within this transformation. In doing so, the study evaluates Türkiye’s administrative capacity in the field of sustainable food policies at both theoretical and practical levels.

### **1.1 Conceptual Framework: The Relationship Between Sustainable Food Governance and Public Policy**

Sustainability is a multidimensional concept that lies at the center of contemporary public policy discussions, aiming to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity. The theoretical foundations of this concept are rooted in the 1987 Brundtland Report, which defines sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN, 1987). This definition highlights that sustainability is not merely an ecological concern but also a field of administrative and social responsibility. Accordingly, sustainability extends beyond environmental protection policies and necessitates a governance-oriented transformation across various public policy domains such as urban management, energy, transportation, food, and social welfare (Kates, Parris, and Leiserowitz, 2005, pp. 8–21).

At this point, the concept of governance provides a fundamental framework for realizing sustainability goals. Governance moves beyond the classical understanding of public administration and refers to a multi-actor and horizontally structured form of management in which non-state actors also participate in decision-making processes.

This approach represents a shift from a centralized and hierarchical decision-making structure of the state toward policy processes grounded in collective reasoning, deliberation, and inclusiveness. Thus, governance has evolved from being merely a technical instrument of public administration to a normative framework that strengthens democratic participation and stakeholder-based decision-making mechanisms. The success of sustainability policies depends largely on the institutionalization of such participatory governance processes (Rhodes, 1996, pp. 652–667).

One of the areas in which the governance approach is most clearly observed is food governance. Food governance emphasizes the participation of all stakeholders involved in the processes of production, distribution, consumption, and waste management in decision-making mechanisms (Pereira and Drimie, 2016, pp. 18–31). While traditional food security policies generally focus on production and supply, the concept of food governance goes further by incorporating ecological sustainability, fair access, local resilience, and food sovereignty as key social dimensions. Thus, food governance has become not only an agricultural issue but also a multi-layered governance field directly related to local development, social policy, and environmental management (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019, pp. 778–794).

The multi-actor nature of food governance is closely tied to the essence of public policy. Public policy refers to the set of goals, instruments, and implementation processes devised by the state to address societal issues (Dye, 2017). However, today, food policies are not solely shaped by the planning role of the state; rather, they emerge through the joint actions of various stakeholders such as local governments, civil society organizations, producer cooperatives, and the private sector (Lang, 2021). This situation weakens the absolute determining authority of the central government in the implementation of public policy and gives rise to a new policy-making process referred to as multi-level governance (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003).

Therefore, sustainable food governance develops in a reciprocal relationship with public policy. On the one hand, public policies establish the legal and institutional framework for the regulation of food systems; on the other hand, governance approaches strengthen the principles of transparency, participation, and accountability in the implementation of these policies. This reciprocal interaction points to a new governance architecture in which local social stakeholders share responsibility beyond the regulatory capacity of the state alone. This architecture enables the redesign of urban food policies, the strengthening of local production and supply chains, and the development of solidarity-based food strategies (Hayaloğlu, 2022, pp. 93–97).

In conclusion, sustainable food governance is a transformative domain that necessitates a reconsideration of public policy at both theoretical and practical levels. This transformation replaces top-down, state-centered models with a horizontal and participatory governance approach in which local governments, producer and consumer organizations, academic institutions, and civil society collectively engage in policy-making. Hence, the permanent realization of sustainability goals depends on the integration of public policies with this new governance paradigm.

## 1.2 The Role of Local Governments in Türkiye

Local governments play a critical role in the provision of public services at the local level alongside central government in modern public administration systems. In Türkiye, the duties and authorities of local governments are primarily regulated by the 1982 Constitution, the Municipal Law (Law No. 5393), and the Metropolitan Municipality Law (Law No. 5216). The Constitution grants local governments autonomy and decision-making authority, aiming to ensure that local services are delivered effectively, efficiently, and with public participation (Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye, 1982). This legal framework enables local governments to take an active role not only in service provision but also in local policy-making.

The mandate of municipalities is not limited to traditional public service areas such as zoning, infrastructure, environmental management, and health and social services. In recent years, the rise of sustainability-focused and environmentally oriented policies has directed municipalities toward new policy fields such as the management of local food systems, support for short supply chains, programs for supporting local producers, and the reduction of food waste. In this context, local governments function simultaneously as implementers, coordinators, and policy-making actors (Kanaat, 2022, pp. 189–208; Toprak, 2025, pp. 219–236).

The role of local governments in the context of food governance is closely linked to the multi-actor governance approach. Municipalities collaborate with local producer associations, cooperatives, civil society organizations, and consumer groups to plan both production and distribution processes while enhancing social participation. For instance, several metropolitan municipalities support short supply chains through local marketplaces and producer cooperatives, thereby establishing a direct relationship between producers and consumers. These practices not only facilitate the local implementation of national food policies but also contribute to reshaping policy processes in a flexible, participatory, and locally responsive manner (Pereira and Drimie, 2016, pp. 18–31; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019, pp. 778–794).

This increasing role of local governments is of critical importance for the effectiveness of sustainable food policies in Türkiye. Municipalities develop strategic plans and projects to ensure local food security and support environmental sustainability. For example, the Nilüfer Municipality of Bursa collaborates with rural producers and cooperatives to strengthen local food networks and optimize production and distribution processes. Such initiatives stimulate the local economy while contributing to food security and social solidarity goals (Eurocities, 2025).

However, many municipalities in Türkiye face challenges such as budget constraints, limited institutional capacity, and legal authority restrictions. These limitations reduce the effectiveness of local governments in the area of food governance, particularly weakening the capacity of small and medium-sized municipalities to develop sustainable food systems. Therefore, strengthening the capacities of local governments is essential

for developing sustainable food strategies that align with central government policies while also responding to local needs (Toprak, 2025, pp. 219–236).

Ultimately, local governments in Türkiye emerge as significant stakeholders in sustainable food policies due to both their legal authority and governance responsibilities. Through collaboration with central government and by implementing multi-actor and participatory policy processes, municipalities generate concrete local examples of sustainable food governance.

### 1.3 The Growing Role of Local Governments in Food Governance in Türkiye

In recent years, local governments in Türkiye have increasingly assumed a more active role in the implementation of sustainable food policies. Metropolitan municipalities have engaged in a wide range of activities, from supporting rural producers and establishing local markets to implementing social food assistance programs, waste management initiatives, and food waste reduction efforts. In this context, local governments serve as intermediary actors that both translate central government policies into local practice and develop solutions tailored to local needs (Kanaat, 2022, pp. 189–208).

Notably, metropolitan municipalities have developed projects aimed at supporting short supply chains and establishing direct linkages between producers and consumers. One of the most prominent examples is the “Agriculture İzmir” project of the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, which seeks to support local producers while providing consumers in the city with safe and locally sourced food products (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2025). Similarly, Bursa Nilüfer Municipality has contributed to the strengthening of local food networks by offering technical and logistical support to producers through rural development-oriented initiatives (Eurocities, 2025). These projects demonstrate that local governments have evolved beyond service-providing institutions to become policy-making actors in the field of food security and sustainability.

The increasing role of local governments extends beyond production and distribution processes. Municipalities are also developing participatory mechanisms that encourage the involvement of consumers and producers in decision-making processes. The “Local Food Network” initiative by Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, carried out in collaboration with civil society organizations and producer associations, represents a participatory model of food planning (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, 2022). This approach concretely operationalizes the multi-actor and participatory policy production model emphasized in governance literature (Rhodes, 1996, pp. 652–667; Kooiman, 2003). Additionally, local governments play an active role in critical areas such as environmental sustainability and the reduction of food waste. The “Zero Waste Food” project of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality aims to redistribute surplus food and utilize organic waste in energy production (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2023). Such initiatives illustrate the tangible local impacts of sustainable food governance and generate social and environmental benefits in alignment with national policy objectives.

However, the expanding role of local governments in Türkiye faces certain limitations. Budget constraints, shortages of personnel and technical capacity, legal authority restrictions, and coordination challenges with central government may hinder the widespread implementation of sustainable food governance practices. Therefore, strengthening the capacities of local governments and enhancing central-local coordination mechanisms are essential for the successful establishment of sustainable food systems (Demirağ and Yılmaz, 2009).

In conclusion, local governments in Türkiye are increasingly emerging as active policy-making and implementing actors in the field of food governance. Their growing role contributes to the reshaping of policy processes in line with the principles of sustainability, participation, transparency, and accountability. Thus, local governments are transforming from mere service providers into key actors in sustainable food governance.

## 2 Conclusion

This study has examined the concept of sustainable food governance from a public policy perspective and analyzed the increasing role of local governments in Türkiye. By highlighting the integration of sustainability and governance principles within food systems, the study demonstrates how public policies and local administrative practices are shaped within this framework. In this regard, sustainable food governance is not solely an environmental or economic approach, but a multidimensional policy field that also incorporates governance principles such as social participation, transparency, and accountability.

In the case of Türkiye, local governments have moved beyond merely implementing central government policies and have assumed direct policy-making and coordinating roles in the processes of food production, distribution, consumption, and waste management. Practices implemented by metropolitan municipalities and certain district administrations illustrate how sustainable food systems are operationalized at the local level through collaboration with producer cooperatives, local markets, and social food support programs. This demonstrates that local governments are capable of producing policies that are both aligned with the general framework established by the central government and responsive to local needs, while ensuring participatory engagement.

However, the role of local governments in sustainable food governance in Türkiye is constrained by budgetary and technical capacity limitations, legal authority restrictions, and challenges in coordination with central administration. These constraints hinder the wider adoption and institutionalization of sustainable food policies. Yet, for sustainable food governance to be effective, strengthening the capacities of local governments, increasing financial resources, and institutionalizing systematic central-local cooperation mechanisms are essential.

In conclusion, local governments in Türkiye have emerged as central actors in sustainable food governance. This expanding role not only strengthens the implementation

of public policies at the local level but also reshapes policy-making processes themselves. The participatory, transparent, and accountable policy approach adopted by local governments ensures that sustainable food systems generate effective outcomes in both environmental and social dimensions. Looking forward, enhancing the institutional capacities of local authorities, strengthening multi-actor cooperation mechanisms, and expanding policy learning processes will make significant contributions to the stable and effective implementation of sustainable food governance in Türkiye.

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