Building a roundtable for a sustainable hazelnut supply chain

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\section*{A B S T R A C T}

Considering the increasing awareness of the sustainability issues in the hazelnut sector in Turkey as well as its leading role in the international market, this paper provides a thorough qualitative analysis of the potential of creating a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts, and the key success factors to consider. This is done by combining insights from the most relevant stakeholders in the hazelnut sector and the existing literature on partnerships for sustainability. The research findings show that there is potential to create a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts. The issues in the sector are highly complex, there exist multiple interdependences among stakeholders, and potential solutions can be achieved through joint interventions. This research equips practitioners with relevant information that allows them to better understand the potential and the formation phase of a multi-stakeholder partnership for the sector, facilitating the process and increasing its chance for success in case there is a desire to create such an organization. Meanwhile, a more practical and sector-specific perspective is provided to the existing literature, particularly to that on the formation process of partnerships. In addition, the methodology followed in this paper indicates a clear and systematic approach to analyze the potential of other partnerships’ formation which can be applicable to different settings.

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\section*{1. Introduction}

In 1992, during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), one of the first official calls was made to put sustainable development on the international agenda (van Huijstee et al., 2007). Since then, multiple initiatives have emerged in order to improve sustainability in the different economic sectors, among which the agricultural sector has a prominent position (Dentoni and Peterson, 2011). These initiatives have generally aimed to achieve sustainable production through the Triple Bottom Line (henceforth, TBL) approach\textsuperscript{1} via the implementation of good agricultural practices, the improvement of farm management skills and social and living conditions, and the care for the environment (Potts et al., 2014).

There are significant differences in the way these initiatives to increase agriculture sustainability are structured, as well as on their intrinsic motivations, and the capabilities and mechanisms available to achieve their goal. This diversity, especially concerning capabilities, combined with the recognition of the complexity to tackle sustainability issues has increased the awareness among organizations of their interdependences and their need to collaborate. As a result, more and more partnerships have emerged, which have been increasingly embraced by academics and practitioners (i.e. Stoteler et al., 2012; van Huijstee et al., 2007). Examples of partnerships for sustainable agriculture are the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil RSPO, the Sustainable Agriculture Network SAN, the World Cocoa Foundation WCF, and the Sustainable Rice Platform SRP.

This paper provides a thorough qualitative analysis of the potential of creating a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts in Turkey. Alongside this qualitative analysis, this paper describes how the roundtable should be set up in order to increase the chance of success. Therefore, the emphasis lies on the formation phase which sets the basis for a successful partnership (Stoteler et al., 2012). The focus on the Turkish hazelnut sector aligns with its national and international importance. The food and agriculture industry in Turkey is large, contributing to approximately 9% of the overall Gross Value Added (GVA) and 25% of the employment levels in the country (ISPAT, 2014). Among the different crops in Turkey, the production of hazelnuts stands out. According to the Food and

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1 See (Etkington, 1998). The TBL approach provides a comprehensive definition of sustainability, based on three dimensions: economic (profit), social (people), and ecological (planet), known as the PPPs.
Agriculture Organization of the United Nations FAO (2016), Turkey is the world’s leading hazelnut producer and exporter, accounting for about 70% of the total world supply, and 76% of the world’s hazelnut trade. Moreover, the hazelnut production has a strong influence on the social and economic structure of a significant portion of Turkey as thousands of people, especially in the Black Sea Region, are directly or indirectly related to this economic activity (Koksal, 2000). Unfortunately, the Turkish hazelnut sector faces many challenges in terms of sustainability, such as low productivity due to old orchards, low environmental standards, unsafe working conditions for migrant workers, low wages, and child labor (UTZ, 2016).

The acknowledgment of these problems in the hazelnut sector in Turkey has recently led to various local and international organizations, including private firms, NGOs and governmental institutions, moving efforts and resources into programs that help boosting sustainability. However, most of these initiatives are being developed in isolation, potentially leading to overlapping or even conflicting efforts. Favorably, these initiatives are still in their startup phases, which makes it the right moment to identify interdependences, and decide whether it is convenient to join forces in order to achieve the desirable sector impact. The analysis drawn in this paper is to support practitioners in the hazelnut sector by providing them with a set of practical recommendations on whether the transition towards a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts is viable, and if so, what the essential requirements are during the formation phase to guarantee the best results.

The literature on partnerships for sustainability in the agricultural sector is relatively scarce. Moreover a large majority of the literature focuses on either providing a general theoretical model of how such partnerships should operate, or on applying those theoretical models to perform an ex-post assessment of existing initiatives. This paper contributes to this literature by providing a practical approach in which both, theory and experts’ knowledge, are applied to an ex-ante assessment of a potential partnership in a specific sector, namely the hazelnut sector. For this purpose, a formation phase partnership model from the literature is used to design the qualitative approach and present the findings of this paper. In-depth interviews with relevant actors in the hazelnut sector and a questionnaire filled out by hazelnut farmers are used to gather information on the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the formation of a roundtable for sustainability in the Turkish hazelnut sector. This approach can be subsequently used in different settings to investigate the potential of a roundtable for other crops. The main objective of this paper is therefore to investigate the potential of a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts from both a theoretical perspective and the perception of stakeholders. To achieve this main objective, this paper addresses five secondary related objectives, namely: i. the main sustainability issues in the hazelnut sector in Turkey and the existing initiatives addressing these issues; ii. the benefits of creating a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts; iii. the costs and risks of a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts; iv. the challenges in the formation of a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts; v. the main conditions and recommendations for success for a roundtable for sustainable hazelnuts.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the existing literature by first defining roundtables for sustainability, and their advantages and disadvantages; and then exploring the formation process of roundtables. Section 3 focuses in Turkey by presenting a situational description of the hazelnut sector and the existing sustainability initiatives. Section 4 discusses the research methodology and the data; and provides an overview of the interview participants. Section 5 presents the results and discussion. Finally, section 6 concludes.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sustainability and multi-sectoral partnerships

The concept of sustainability can take different definitions, depending in particular, on the field of research in which it is used (see e.g. Vos, 2007 for an ecological perspective of sustainability, and Toman, 1992 for a social science and anthropological perspective). Despite the differences in definitions, all of them preserve the character given by the United Nations of intergenerational fairness and respect. This paper follows Elkington (1998) and Willard (2002) on the definition of sustainable agriculture and sustainable food supply chain.² By that, this paper considers that achieving a sustainable hazelnut supply chain encompasses that all stakeholders involved in the production, transportation and distribution, processing and manufacturing, and retailing, are aware of the necessity of adopting sustainable practices that care for the environment, the people, and the profit; and that they act upon this necessity. Achieving a sustainable hazelnut supply chain also implies that the market demands better practices and rewards them, that consumers are well informed on the performance of the sector, and that organizations outside the chain such as governments, NGOs and research institutions are also involved in the process (see Bostrom et al., 2015; Govindan et al., 2016; Luthra et al., 2017; Rajeev et al., 2017; and Silvestre, 2015 for recent work on sustainable supply chain).

Contrary to the concept of sustainability, the notion of multi-sectoral partnership does not vary significantly among studies. The core idea of the concept is to denote joined voluntary activities in which at least three different sectors of society are involved (business, government, NGOs, and civil society), and which is beneficial for all participants (Gray and Stites, 2013; Reit et al., 2005; van Huijstee et al., 2007). Nevertheless, a vast majority of the literature uses collaborative arrangements, cross-sectoral partnerships, intersectoral partnerships, and multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) interchangeably (Gray and Stites, 2013).

Regardless of the name given to the cooperation, according to the Partnerships Resource Centre (2015) there are certain requirements that need to be met in order to classify such cooperation as a partnership. These requirements stress that there needs to be a high degree of partners’ involvement, which is based on the intention of cooperating and on the obligations, that come along with the process. Such obligations involve clear inputs in terms of resources and competences, risk sharing, commitment to institutionalize the partnership beyond its own boundaries, among others. Furthermore, highlighting obligations leads to the necessity of having a monitoring system in place that allows to evaluate a member’s compliance and the partnership’s performance. The Partnerships Resource Centre (2015) also states that it is central to clarify all these aspects in the initial phases of the partnership, and to include them in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

2.2. Roundtables for sustainability

In addition, there are also different types of multi-sectoral partnerships. Among those, roundtables have become more common to tackle sustainability issues (Ponte, 2014). Examples of these are the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB), the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB), and the Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS). Ponte (2014) defines ‘roundtablIng’ as: “the current process
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