GLOBAL DYNAMICS IN GASTRONOMY AND TOURISM:

NEW PERSPECTIVES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

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PREFACE

It is with great pleasure and a sense of accomplished continuity that we present the third volume of **"Global Dynamics in Gastronomy and Tourism: New Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Approaches."** Since our inaugural edition in 2023, this series has strived to capture the rapidly evolving pulse of the hospitality and tourism sectors. The overwhelming interest and demand we received for this year's edition is a testament not only to the vibrancy of our field but also to the urgent need for scholarly work that bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, science and culture.

The landscape of global gastronomy is shifting. We are witnessing a dual phenomenon: a rapid, technology-driven transformation of management and service on one side, and a fierce protection of intangible cultural heritage on the other. This volume was curated specifically to address this dichotomy, structured into three distinct parts that guide the reader from strategic foundations to digital frontiers, and finally, to the deep roots of cultural history.

Part I

Addresses the strategic and educational foundations of the sector. We begin with **"Rethinking English Language Pedagogy for Tourism and Gastronomy,"** which highlights the critical need for specialized vocational communication skills. This is followed by **"The Role of Outsourcing in Tourism Business Management,"** offering strategic insights into operational efficiency. Complementing these managerial perspectives is **"Beyond the Plate: Strategic Communication and Relationship Management in Catering Services,"** which provides a vital framework for building trust and managing the client lifecycle.

Part II

Explores the digital transformation reshaping the industry. We map the trajectory of smart tourism research in **"Bibliometric Analysis on Destination Branding in Digital Tourism in Turkey."** Alongside this macro-view, **"The Digital Palate: e-WOM, Parasocial Interaction, and the Reconstruction of Gastronomic Desire"** delves into the psychology of modern consumption, examining how digital interactions reshape our culinary cravings.

Part III

Moves from the screen to the table, examining the experiential and historical nature of food. **"Gastronomic Recreation: The Experiential Dimension of Local Flavors"** analyzes food as a core leisure activity, while **"A Cultural Gastronomic Journey Through Octopus and Other Seafood"** synthesizes marine biology with culinary culture. We then delve into the ancient roots of dietary practices with **"Historical and Cultural Reflections of Shamanism in Turkish Food Culture,"** tracing the continuity of rituals from the steppes to modern tables. This regional focus continues with **"Historical Origins and Cultural Symbolism of Konya Wedding Foods From Past to Present,"** a comparative analysis of food as a rite of passage. Finally, we close the volume with **"A Cultural Heritage of Anatolia: Keşkek,"** analyzing the profound social solidarity embedded in this UNESCO-recognized ceremonial dish.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our contributing authors. Their willingness to explore niche, complex, and interdisciplinary topics has resulted in a volume that is not just a collection of articles, but a cohesive dialogue about who we are, what we eat, and how we connect with the world.

We hope this edition serves as both a reference for scholars and an inspiration for practitioners.

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RETHINKING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PEDOGOGY FOR TOURISM AND GASTRONOMY

Cem Cihanşahı[*]

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world is defined by unprecedented levels of global mobility, within which gastronomy and tourism have emerged as two of the most influential and rapidly expanding international sectors. Whether in a Michelin-starred restaurant in Tokyo serving a cosmopolitan clientele or an eco-resort in Costa Rica operated by a multinational team, professional success in these industries is inseparable from effective cross-cultural communication. This chapter, therefore, begins from a central premise: English functions as the primary lingua franca of global hospitality, commerce, and cultural exchange, acting as the connective medium that links producers, professionals, and patrons across borders.

Despite this global reliance on English, a persistent skills gap remains evident. Many graduates of gastronomy and tourism programs possess a foundation in General English yet lack the specialized, context-sensitive command required for professional engagement. Tasks such as negotiating supplier contracts, drafting menus with precise allergen specifications, or managing complex customer complaints with diplomatic accuracy demand a level of linguistic sophistication that general language instruction rarely provides. Consequently, an exclusive focus on General English proves insufficient for cultivating the global professional competencies required for leadership within these industries.

This chapter contends that addressing this gap necessitates a dedicated pedagogical shift: the creative and purposeful teaching of English to students of gastronomy and tourism. By embedding professional content directly into language instruction—through approaches such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)—the classroom can be reconfigured as a realistic simulation of the global workplace According to Tomlinson (2013), the use of authentic materials is crucial as it provides learners with a rich and varied experience of language in use, exposing them to the real-world discourse they will encounter in their professional careers.Such integration fosters not only linguistic competence but also critical cultural awareness, technical vocabulary mastery, and essential professional soft skills. Collectively, these elements enable students to develop insight into the genuinely global dimensions of their chosen fields. This represents a decisive step in preparing graduates not merely for employment, but for shaping professional practice within the international tourism and culinary landscape (Hutchinson and Waters 1987).

Creative ELT Methodologies for Professional Skill Development

To prepare students effectively for the demands of the global gastronomy and tourism industries, English Language Teaching (ELT) must move beyond traditional, form-focused instruction and adopt task-based, content-driven, and experiential learning models. The methodologies outlined in this section are designed to immerse learners in authentic professional scenarios, thereby developing communicative competence alongside specialized industry expertise (Scrivener (2011).

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Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): Learning by Doing

Task-Based Language Teaching emphasizes the use of language as a tool for accomplishing meaningful objectives rather than as an isolated system of grammatical rules. For students of gastronomy and tourism, this approach is particularly valuable, as it mirrors the communicative demands of the global professional environment.

Global Gastronomy Research and Communication

International Professional Link-Up: Students use English to research global culinary trends—such as fermentation techniques or plant-based dining—through international trade journals, specialized websites, or direct communication with English-speaking chefs or food critics abroad via email or video conferencing. This task requires the drafting of professional correspondence and the synthesis of complex technical information. Professional skills developed: global research competence, professional networking, technical vocabulary synthesis, and formal written communication (UNWTO).

Tourism

The Destination Pitch: Students research a sustainable tourism destination—for example, an ecotourism lodge in Norway or a cultural heritage site in Peru—and deliver a five-minute sales pitch to a simulated international travel agency panel. The task requires persuasive language, responsive handling of questions, and discussion of pricing and sustainability models. Professional skills developed: public speaking, persuasion and negotiation, market research, and critical analysis of sustainability concepts.

General Service

Customer Complaint Resolution: Students role-play advanced service scenarios, such as food poisoning incidents, lost luggage, or overbooked flights. These simulations require the use of formal, diplomatic English to manage expectations, issue effective apologies, and propose viable solutions. Students also produce a concise written report summarizing the incident for management. Professional skills developed: conflict resolution, cross-cultural sensitivity, professional register management, and report writing.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): Using Authentic Industry Texts

CLIL positions industry-specific content as the primary vehicle for language acquisition. Through engagement with authentic professional materials, students naturally internalize specialized terminology and conceptual frameworks. As argued by Tomlinson (2013), effective language materials should achieve impact and help learners to feel at ease, which is realized here by using high-interest, real-wIorld texts such as Michelin Guide reviews and UNWTO reports."

Analyzing Professional Documents:

Analyzing Professional Documents: Students work with real-world texts, including:

· Gastronomy: International food safety standards (HACCP), Michelin Guide reviews (with attention to evaluative culinary language), and technical ingredient specifications.

·Tourism: UNWTO reports on market trends, international hotel management contracts, and bilingual travel insurance documentation.

Media Analysis:

Students engage with multimedia sources, such as international cooking programs and travel documentaries, focusing on accent comprehension, professional vocabulary, and summarization of

key techniques or cultural concepts. Additionally, they critically analyze promotional language used by global hotel chains, examining emotional and aspirational messaging strategies.

Immersive Simulation and Role-Play: The Professional Persona

Simulation-based learning enables students to adopt professional roles, activating their linguistic resources under time pressure and replicating real-world service conditions.

The Fine Dining Simulation:

Students rotate through roles including Head Chef, Sommelier, and   Service Staff, using highly formal English to explain menu items, wine pairings, preparation methods, and customer options with precision.

The Concierge Challenge:

Students provide complex, personalized recommendations to international guests, requiring proficiency in explaining cultural practices, historical context, directions, and reservation procedures in authentic professional English.

Through these methodologies, the ELT classroom evolves from a space of linguistic practice into a professional development environment, where students simultaneously refine their English proficiency and deepen their understanding of global industry standards.

Figure 1. The Concierge Challenges in Tourism and Gastronomy Sectors

Understanding Global Culinary and Technical Terminology

In the globalized domains of gastronomy and tourism, professional communication is defined by accuracy and terminological precision. English serves as the central repository for standardized technical vocabulary that enables professionals from diverse linguistic backgrounds to collaborate effectively.

Linguistic Precision in Gastronomy:

Students must acquire command of English terminology associated with culinary techniques, equipment, and ingredients that operate beyond local linguistic systems. Distinctions between methods such as sautéing, pan-frying, and searing are not stylistic preferences, but technical specifications that directly influence culinary outcomes. Likewise, terminology related to food science, hygiene, and health regulation—such as cross-contamination, pasteurization, and HACCP—is standardized internationally through English and must be understood with exactness.

> **Real-life Example:** In a professional kitchen operating at an international level, chefs are frequently required to interpret recipes written by colleagues from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The instruction to temper chocolate, for instance, carries precise procedural and thermal requirements that must be followed accurately to achieve the desired result (approximately 32–34°C for dark chocolate). This example illustrates the inseparable relationship between English-language instruction, scientific understanding, and culinary execution, where linguistic precision directly determines product quality.

The Register of Tourism Documentation:

Within the tourism industry, English is the default language of global booking platforms, insurance policies, airline regulations, and international legal documentation, including those issued by bodies such as IATA and the UNWTO. Students must therefore develop familiarity with the formal and technical registers required to draft, interpret, and explain such documents accurately, ensuring both professional reliability and legal clarity.

> **Real-life Example:** A hotel revenue manager working with an English-language yield management contract must interpret terms such as minimum stay requirement, dynamic pricing, or non-refundable rate with complete accuracy. Misunderstanding or misapplying these terms due to inadequate English proficiency can result in operational inefficiencies and significant financial loss, underscoring the practical stakes of technical language competence.

Cultivating Cultural Competence and Soft skills

English functions as the primary communicative bridge between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, making intercultural competence a central objective of English language education in gastronomy and tourism. This competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy to encompass an understanding of how meaning, politeness, and professional intent are shaped by cultural context.

Navigating Service Etiquette:

The English classroom provides a structured environment in which students can examine and practice culturally specific service norms using a shared linguistic medium. Through guided discussion and role-play, learners explore how different cultures interpret directness, levels of formality, silence, and non-verbal communication, and how these interpretations affect professional interactions in hospitality and tourism settings.

> **Real-life Example (Tourism):** Tipping practices offer a clear illustration of cultural variation. In the United States, tipping is an established convention reinforced through explicit verbal expressions of appreciation. In contrast, in Japan, tipping may be considered inappropriate and requires a polite verbal refusal, often delivered in English, to avoid causing offense. Mastery of the appropriate linguistic forms in these contexts signals cultural awareness and professional sensitivity.

Empathy and Complaint Resolution:

Advanced English proficiency also enables professionals to express empathy with clarity and appropriateness. In situations involving dissatisfied customers, the ability to use measured, respectful English—such as acknowledging inconvenience or frustration before proposing a resolution—is a critical soft skill. This communicative competence is routinely developed through simulation-based training and is widely regarded as essential for de-escalating conflict in international service environments.

Case studies and Practical Examples: Transforming Theory into Professional Practice

To illustrate more concretely the pedagogical value of creative English Language Teaching (ELT) in cultivating globally competent professionals in gastronomy and tourism, this section presents a series of detailed and practice-oriented case studies. These examples demonstrate how the methodologies introduced in Section 2—namely Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and immersive simulation—are operationalized in realistic educational settings. At the same time, they directly reinforce the Global Concepts and Professional Insight discussed in Section 3. Each case is deliberately designed to replicate authentic professional tasks in which English functions not merely as a communicative tool, but as the primary medium through which professional standards, ethical considerations, and decision-making processes are enacted.

Case Study 1: The Michelin Star Review CLIL Analysis Project

Methodology applied: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Global concept developed: Understanding and applying international quality benchmarks, high-end descriptive culinary language, and critical evaluative discourse.

The task: Students are provided with several authentic and contemporary restaurant reviews written in English and published by internationally recognized sources such as the Michelin Guide, Eater, or The New York Times. These texts are linguistically demanding, featuring advanced syntax, metaphorical culinary descriptions, and nuanced evaluative language characteristic of professional food criticism.

Step 1: Receptive skill focus (Reading and analysis): Working collaboratively in small groups, students first identify and define key vocabulary related to flavor profiles, textures, preparation techniques, and presentation (for example, umami, velvety, reduction, ephemeral, mise en place). They then analyze the evaluative criteria employed by the reviewer, identifying the factors that influence ratings, such as service consistency, innovation, atmosphere, coherence of the menu, and perceived value.

Step 2: Language and content synthesis: Each group constructs a semantic map or structured comparative table that contrasts multiple reviews. Particular attention is paid to register, allowing students to distinguish between the formal, analytical tone of professional criticism and the more subjective or informal language commonly found in consumer-generated reviews.

Step 3: Productive skill focus (Writing and creation): as a final output, each group produces an English-language internal improvement report addressed to a hypothetical restaurant manager. This document translates the reviewer's critical observations into concrete, actionable recommendations for both kitchen and front-of-house operations.

Professional impact: This project compels students to engage in higher-order cognitive processes, notably evaluation and synthesis, rather than surface-level summarization. Through close analysis of professional English-language reviews, students become aware that seemingly subtle lexical choices carry significant professional consequences. Terms such as disappointing, underwhelming, or lacking coherence are revealed not as casual opinions, but as signals with direct economic and reputational implications. Writing the internal improvement report further requires students to convert abstract critique into operational strategy, reinforcing the role of English as a managerial and consultancy tool. In this context, English becomes the mechanism through which quality standards are interpreted, institutionalized, and continuously improved, preparing students for leadership roles within globally competitive culinary environments.

Case Study 2: The Sustainable Tourism Marketing Campaign (TBLT)

Methodology applied: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) combined with Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Global concept developed: Ethical tourism, responsible consumption, sustainability discourse, and compliance with international environmental frameworks.

The task: Students work in project teams and are assigned a real-world, small-scale tourism initiative experiencing limited international visibility, such as a rural guesthouse, an agritourism enterprise, or a locally managed crafts trail. Their objective is to design a comprehensive sustainable tourism marketing campaign aimed at English-speaking international audiences.

Figure 2. Project Based Learning (English for Tourism – 5 star Hotel Staff)

Step 1: Research and sustainability auditing: Research and Sustainability Auditing: Students conduct a sustainability audit of the initiative using English-language terminology and criteria. This includes evaluating waste management practices, local employment ratios, energy use, and environmental impact. To support this process, students consult documentation and guidelines from international bodies such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

Step 2: Product development (Writing and presentation): Teams produce a three-part professional marketing package in English:

- A formal press release announcing the initiative's sustainability commitment

- Platform-specific social media captions demonstrating awareness of tone, audience, and ethical transparency

- A two-minute video presentation script for the destination's website articulating adherence to ecotourism principles

Step 3: Peer Assessment: Peer Assessment: Final campaigns are presented in English to classmates acting as an international investor and stakeholder panel. Evaluation focuses on clarity of communication, persuasive effectiveness, and ethical consistency in language use.

Professional Impact: This case study moves learners into the domain of strategic communication and ethical branding, requiring them to articulate sustainability not as a marketing slogan but as a substantiated professional commitment. By engaging with international sustainability frameworks in English, students internalize the standardized discourse of accountability that governs global tourism. The writing tasks reinforce the necessity of linguistic precision and ethical credibility when addressing environmentally conscious international travelers. Ultimately, the project demonstrates that advanced English proficiency is indispensable for positioning local tourism initiatives within global value systems, equipping students with the communicative authority needed to operate as future leaders in responsible tourism development.

Recommendations: Future Directions for Curriculum Development

To consolidate these outcomes and ensure sustained global competitiveness, a fundamental shift in curriculum design and educational policy is required.

Recommendation 1: Full Curricular Entegration (CLIL and ESP Mandate):

English must no longer be treated as a separate or auxiliary subject. Instead, it should be systematically embedded within core disciplinary courses through a formal CLIL and ESP framework (Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Subjects such as Hotel Revenue Management, Culinary History, and Sustainable Tourism Planning should be delivered using English-language academic and industry materials. This shift requires targeted professional development for both subject-matter specialists and language instructors to ensure effective interdisciplinary collaboration.

Recommendation 2: Mandated International Digital Literacy and Research Skills:

As professional knowledge production and networking increasingly occur in English-mediated digital spaces, curricula must prioritize advanced digital literacy. Students should be trained to critically evaluate English-language industry publications, synthesize research from international databases, and engage professionally on global platforms such as LinkedIn. Mastery of written digital communication and international branding discourse is essential for independent professional growth.

Recommendation 3: Enhanced Immersive Simulation and Virtual Exchange Programs:

Institutions should invest in high-fidelity simulation environments that replicate international hospitality and tourism settings. Additionally, structured virtual exchange programs with partner institutions in English-speaking contexts should become a core curricular component. These initiatives provide students with sustained exposure to real-time intercultural collaboration, reinforcing linguistic competence and cultural intelligence.

Conclusion: The Future of ELT in Gastronomy and Tourism

The Future of ELT in Gastronomy and Tourism The analysis presented throughout this chapter has clearly demonstrated that the strategic integration of creative English Language Teaching (ELT) methodologies is not a peripheral enhancement but a foundational requirement for educating professionals in the globalized fields of gastronomy and tourism. As these industries continue to expand across linguistic and cultural boundaries, their success increasingly depends on professionals who possess both advanced technical expertise and sophisticated communicative competence in English as the international lingua franca.

Summary of impact: Transforming Local Practitioners into Global Professionals

The implementation of creative ELT approaches—specifically Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and immersive professional simulation—functions as a critical bridge between academic instruction and international industry standards. The impact of these approaches on student development is comprehensive and multidimensional, extending well beyond surface-level language proficiency (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

Linguistic and Communicative Mastery:

Students progress from functional or survival-level English to full professional communicative competence. This includes mastery of specialized registers required for tasks such as contract negotiation, formal reporting, critical evaluation, and conflict resolution. Through repeated exposure to high-stakes communicative scenarios, learners acquire the confidence and precision necessary to engage with international peers, clients, and institutions using English that is both accurate and contextually appropriate.

Access to Global Concepts and Standards:

Equally significant is the role of English as a gateway to global professional knowledge. By working directly with English-language sources such as UNWTO reports, international hotel management documentation, and global food safety standards, students gain unmediated access to contemporary best practices. This exposure enables them to internalize international ethical norms, sustainability principles, and quality benchmarks, ensuring that their professional knowledge is current, globally validated, and not limited by translation or local adaptation.

Cultivating Strategic Leadership:

The English classroom thus evolves into a professional development environment where strategic thinking, decision-making, and leadership skills are actively cultivated. Tasks such as pitching sustainable tourism initiatives or drafting internal evaluation reports require students to perform complex cognitive operations under linguistic pressure. This sustained practice prepares graduates to assume leadership roles, initiate innovation, and navigate the ambiguities of multicultural professional contexts. English proficiency, in this sense, becomes a strategic asset that facilitates career mobility and global influence.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter demonstrates that in the globalized sectors of gastronomy and tourism, English is the essential lingua franca that connects professionals, producers, and patrons. Traditional "General English" instruction is no longer sufficient; success now demands a pedagogical shift toward ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). By integrating industry-specific content into language training, we do more than teach a language—yoruz; we equip students with the technical precision, cultural empathy, and strategic leadership skills necessary to navigate and shape the international professional landscape.

To bridge the existing skills gap and foster global competitiveness, the following actions are recommended:

Integrated Curriculum: Replace isolated language lessons with a CLIL mandate, where core subjects (e.g., Hotel Management, Food Safety) are taught directly in English using authentic industry texts.

Immersive Simulation: Invest in high-fidelity simulations and virtual exchange programs that replicate the time pressure and cultural complexity of the global workplace.

Digital & Research Literacy: Prioritize training in international digital communication, enabling students to research global trends and network professionally on platforms like LinkedIn.

Intercultural Competence: Shift focus beyond grammar to "Soft Skills," specifically training students in diplomatic conflict resolution and culturally sensitive service etiquette.

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THE ROLE OF OUTSOURCING IN TOURISM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment, companies develop various strategies in order to cope with changing internal and external conditions. Increasing competition makes it more difficult for businesses to deliver their goods and services to consumers. Many firms engage in intense rivalry with other competitors in the sector to differentiate and promote the products and services they offer. To succeed in such a competitive atmosphere, businesses continuously develop new managerial approaches and practices (Atan, 2013).

Technological advancements, greater diversity in production, improvements in transportation, and rising income levels have eliminated economic boundaries between countries, resulting in the formation of a global market structure (Özdoğan, 2006). Globalization, market maturity, technological change, increasing customer expectations, and intensifying competition have made the business world unpredictable. This situation requires organizations to develop innovative methods for managing their operations. The need to respond quickly to market changes and the difficulty of forecasting such changes make it necessary for companies to focus on their core competencies (Çakır & Can, 2019). Globalization, growing competition, and the necessity to reduce costs have led firms to adopt outsourcing practices more effectively. In management, outsourcing refers to "contracting out" or "external resource utilization," which involves transferring certain internal activities to external suppliers. Firms delegate not only non-core tasks but also some activities that may be considered part of their primary operations to outsourcing companies (Kanzuk, 2017). Today, outsourcing has become one of the most important and widely used managerial tools in organizational transformation processes. Parallel to its increasing popularity in developed countries, outsourcing practices have rapidly expanded in Türkiye and begun to receive greater attention (Ekici Yıldız, 2007).

This study aims to examine the significance of outsourcing in tourism enterprises and to evaluate the benefits it provides to businesses. In the tourism industry, outsourcing is an essential strategy used to enhance service quality, reduce costs, and improve efficiency. The study will analyze outsourcing practices in tourism enterprises in both Türkiye and other countries, and will discuss their effects on business operations.

Definition and Historical Development of Outsourcing

Outsourcing refers to the practice whereby businesses focus on their core competencies while procuring supportive functions from other organizations, with the aim of gaining competitive advantage and creating greater value for customers (Karaca, 2006). Outsourcing enables firms to acquire external expertise in order to enhance competitiveness and build capacity. With the effects of globalization, companies have increasingly faced international competition and have thus been driven to reduce costs and differentiate their products and services to achieve competitive advantage (Karaman, 2014).

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Outsourcing is the transfer of non-core business functions to third-party providers in both the public and private sectors. This strategy allows organizations to concentrate on their main activities without utilizing internal resources, by benefiting from suppliers that deliver services based on specific performance standards. The literature highlights that outsourcing is preferred for purposes such as obtaining competitive advantage and improving quality. Additionally, it is considered a strategic collaboration that should be managed by top management through cost–benefit analyses (Kuşak & Dülek, 2023). Outsourcing is commonly defined as assigning specific tasks to external vendors or obtaining predefined services from external organizations instead of using internal resources. Scholars have also conceptualized outsourcing based on the degree of technological and human resource internalization (Çeliksoy, 2023). Companies adopt outsourcing to reduce operational costs and accelerate business processes. This approach not only enables organizations to maintain competitive advantage by focusing on their core expertise but also increases efficiency by benefiting from the knowledge and experience of third-party providers. Businesses striving to protect their competitive advantage achieve cost benefits by transferring non-core activities to specialized firms (Özbakıcı, 2018).

Although the literature does not provide a precise starting date for outsourcing practices in business, it is well known that such practices have existed for a long time (Karakaş, 2012). Historical examinations reveal that the earliest examples of outsourcing date back to the Roman Empire. During this period, outsourcing emerged through the delegation of tax collection duties to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, the use of logistics services for storage in Venetian trade during the 14th century is considered among the early examples of outsourcing (Karaca et al., 2022).

Advantages of Outsourcing

Outsourcing is a significant strategy that enables businesses to increase their efficiency and reduce operational costs. Through this strategy, firms can receive professional support in areas that require specialized expertise, thereby enhancing their operational performance. Outsourcing also offers organizations flexibility and cost savings, allowing them to adapt more rapidly to dynamic business environments and to gain competitive advantage (Akkuzu & Arslanoğlu, 2024).

Cost savings and Efficiency

Businesses can focus more effectively on their core activities by outsourcing functions that fall outside their primary areas of operation, such as finance, human resources, accounting, legal, and administrative processes. This strategy not only allows firms to save substantial time and resources but also provides cost–reduction opportunities (Ecerkale & Kovancı, 2005). Outsourcing plays a crucial role in offering businesses a cost advantage. By concentrating their limited resources on core competencies and procuring non-specialized activities through external suppliers, companies avoid resource waste and additional expenditures. This approach enables firms to gain significant cost benefits through external providers and helps them achieve competitive superiority (Gül, 2005).

Expertise and Access to Technology

One of the most significant advantages of outsourcing for businesses is the ability to benefit from advanced expertise, access extensive knowledge networks, increase flexibility and efficiency, and focus on core competencies (İrak & Arslantürk, 2021). Today, rapid and continuous change has become a crucial topic in the management literature. While changes once required centuries to materialize, they now occur within significantly shorter time periods. This acceleration poses major challenges for organizations. Contemporary businesses face the constant evolution of technologies, managerial approaches, products, and customer preferences. In order to sustain their operations,

achieve growth, and maintain competitiveness, organizations must monitor technological and environmental changes and adapt in a timely manner (Bayındır, 2007).

Flexibility and Global Competition

Following the 1980s, the imbalance in supply–demand dynamics in favor of supply in global markets compelled businesses to utilize modern competitive tools. During this period, the need to offer innovative and customized products emerged, and innovation began to serve as a source of long-term competitive advantage (Akgemci et al., 2005). In global competition, firms increasingly turn to outsourcing to reduce costs, improve quality, and enhance flexibility. Flexibility has become a more critical factor than cost reduction, as it allows organizations to respond rapidly to changing customer demands within dynamic markets (Kadakal, 2007).

Confidentiality and Security Risks

Outsourcing may entail various risks regarding confidentiality and security. External providers may disclose commercial secrets or proprietary technologies of the business. Such risks may result in suppliers using strategic information for their own benefit. Contractual agreements often fail to provide fully effective measures to prevent these risks. Additionally, some firms may choose to retain control over equipment to restrict suppliers' influence over production processes. The risk of confidential information being disclosed stands out as one of the key factors limiting outsourcing decisions (Akyürek, 2022).

Dependency and Loss of Control

Among the disadvantages of outsourcing, dependency and loss of control hold significant importance. Excessive reliance on external providers can cause businesses to lose control over their supply chain processes. This situation may lead to problems such as supplier dependency, trust issues, the inability to create shared value, loss of knowledge and internal capabilities, unexpected expenses, leakage of confidential information, and employee-related consequences such as anxiety, low morale, and distrust. Moreover, the most critical drawback of outsourcing is the loss of control over organizational processes (Kâhya, 2022).

Long-Term Cost Increases

The impact of outsourcing on long-term cost escalation represents a critical factor in strategic decision-making. Although outsourcing is initially adopted to reduce costs, it may result in unexpected cost increases in the long run. Changes in supplier pricing policies, fluctuations in service quality, and supply chain risks may negatively affect a firm's cost structure (Cox, 2005; Lacity & Willcocks, 2001). Additionally, the long-term effects of outsourcing should be carefully evaluated in alignment with the strategic objectives and operational needs of businesses (Gable et al., 2008).

Areas of Outsourcing

Outsourcing emerged as a modern management approach utilized by businesses to achieve downsizing goals following the global economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s. In the 2000s, it became a critical component in promoting innovation and gaining competitive advantage. Today, organizations procure a wide range of services externally, from cleaning and catering to information technology management and research and development activities, which hold strategic importance (Arpacı, 2019).

Outsourcing is most commonly preferred in areas such as information technologies, administrative services, human resources, distribution, finance, manufacturing, real estate services,

call centers, transportation, and sales/marketing (Keskin, 2005). Overall, four primary domains stand out within the context of outsourcing:

Information services: Information services represent one of the most examined areas of outsourcing. Cost control, the need for flexibility, and technological advancements have encouraged outsourcing in this field. Innovations in data storage technologies have enhanced service quality while reducing costs, transforming information services into a "commodity." Consequently, businesses have increasingly relied on external suppliers for information services to gain competitive advantage (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2005).

Human resources management: Outsourcing is employed as a strategic tool to enhance firm performance in human resources. This method helps companies reduce costs and increase efficiency while making human resource management more flexible and strategic. By utilizing outsourcing, firms can acquire competencies externally, optimize per-employee costs, and increase operational efficiency. Ultimately, outsourcing helps create a more effective human resources structure, thereby strengthening corporate competitiveness (Lilly & Gray, 2005).

Logistics and transportation: Logistics and transportation are of critical importance for businesses and continue to grow rapidly (Sarder, 2016). The Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (2013) defines logistics management as: "the part of supply chain management that plans, implements, and controls the forward and reverse flow and storage of goods, services, and related information from the point of origin to the point of consumption in order to meet customer requirements" (Antoniolli et al., 2015). Logistics outsourcing refers to the management of logistical operations by a specialized external provider. This model enables companies to focus on core activities, reduce costs, and increase operational efficiency. The growing prevalence of logistics outsourcing is driven by the globalization of supply chains, increasing consumer expectations, requirements such as rapid replenishment and delivery, and the rising complexity of logistics processes. This system enables companies to manage logistics more effectively and gain competitive advantage (Parashkevova, 2007).

Accounting and finance: Outsourcing in accounting and finance involves delegating financial processes such as payroll, taxation, procurement, and general accounting to external providers, enabling firms to reduce costs and benefit from specialized expertise. Cloud-based accounting systems facilitate outsourcing by offering flexibility and transparency. These practices contribute to reduced costs, streamlined operations, and increased efficiency (Kocev, 2021).

Outsourcing in Business Organizations

Businesses adapting to rapidly changing market conditions increasingly recognize that delegating specific functions through outsourcing enables them to gain considerable competitive advantages by utilizing external expertise and technology (Potryvaieva, 2023). However, successful outsourcing requires careful evaluation of several factors, including aligning outsourcing strategies with overall business objectives and effectively managing relationships with service providers (Lok et al., 2021).

One of the most critical aspects of outsourcing is its effect on organizational performance. Research indicates that outsourcing can lead to substantial performance improvements by allowing firms to concentrate on their core activities while delegating non-core functions to specialized service providers. For instance, McIvor et al. (2009) emphasize that organizations are increasingly inclined to look beyond traditional boundaries to enhance performance, particularly in business services. Similarly, Nyameboame & Haddud (2017) reveal that outsourcing non-integrated activities positively influences organizational performance, particularly in the oil and gas industry.

These findings align with Pereira et al. (2019), who suggest that outsourcing knowledge-intensive activities utilizes local expertise to strengthen competitive advantage.

The strategic implications of outsourcing are also noteworthy. Lacity et al. (2016), through a comprehensive review of empirical literature on business service outsourcing, identified the determinants influencing outsourcing decisions and outcomes. Their findings suggest that firms must carefully balance cost savings with potential risks such as loss of control and reduced quality. Additionally, Eggert et al. (2017) emphasize that firm value is closely linked to the quality of services delivered to customers, highlighting the necessity of effective management of outsourcing relationships. This is particularly important in industries such as IT and logistics, where customer satisfaction and loyalty significantly shape competitive success.

Extensive literature on outsourcing provides a detailed discussion of its applications across different sectors, its effects, and pathways to success. Kulembayeva et al. (2021) argue that outsourcing strategies aligned with business models are crucial for economic efficiency, whereas Grefen et al. (2003) emphasize the importance of contractual management in e-service delivery. Gottschalk & Solli-Sæther (2006) reveal a transition from economic benefits to alliance management as IT outsourcing relations mature. Bilan et al. (2017) suggest that outsourcing enhances international competitive advantage, while Yadav & Gupta (2008) demonstrate the use of diverse methodologies in outsourcing research. Dibbern et al. (2004) propose a conceptual framework for IS outsourcing, and Beaumont (2004) indicates that cost savings and access to expertise shape outsourcing practices in Australia. Koong et al. (2007) identify the key determinants of outsourcing decisions, while Mahmoodzadeh et al. (2009) highlight that business process management and knowledge management reduce outsourcing risks. Asatiani et al. (2019) reveal that cost reduction and access to expertise are primary motivators in outsourcing, whereas Ukor & Carpenter (2011) underscore that success depends on process-based service selection. Sanders et al. (2007) show that various strategies support different business objectives, and Karamyshev (2019) discusses the importance of quantitative models in decision-making. Lee (2006) argues that strategic alignment between outsourcing and business strategy enhances firm performance, whereas Ahearne & Kothandaraman (2009) indicate that outsourcing in B2B markets requires comprehensive approaches. Yadav & Metri (2010) emphasize the importance of effective contract management, while Babin et al. (2017) show that trust strengthens outsourcing relationships. Weigelt (2009) examines the effect of outsourcing on technology integration, whereas Ndiiri & Kilika (2021) demonstrate that business process outsourcing fosters competitive capabilities. Korucuk (2022) analyzes outsourcing risks in logistics, and Shaharudin et al. (2014) argue that logistics outsourcing enhances efficiency and customer value. Sreedevi (2018) highlights the strategic value of outsourcing in gaining competitive advantage, while Raassens et al. (2012) emphasize its impact on market value in new product development processes. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that outsourcing is a critical strategy shaping economic efficiency, strategic alignment, quality, trust, and competitive advantage across multiple dimensions.

Outsourcing in Tourism Enterprises

Outsourcing is defined as the transfer of specific activities that fall outside a company's core competencies to specialized firms through contractual agreements, and it has become significantly widespread over the last two decades. Although applied across various industries today, outsourcing is predominantly utilized for complementary activities by businesses operating in the tourism sector (Atan, 2013).

The tourism industry increasingly focuses on fulfilling individuals' vacation needs within limited time frames through technological innovations and improved transportation networks emerging from globalization. As global competition intensifies, countries aim to attract tourists and

ensure customer satisfaction by integrating these efforts into sustainable tourism strategies. Due to the broad scope of activities within tourism enterprises, managerial approaches have a profound impact on the sector (Güçlütürk & Öter, 2014). Core activities in tourism—such as reception, restaurant, and bar services—constitute primary operational areas that organizations must focus on. Accommodation businesses, however, tend to outsource non-core activities to specialized suppliers, thereby benefiting from outsourcing practices (Birdir & Dalgıç, 2018). Additionally, some tourism enterprises outsource business analysis processes to external professionals, delegating responsibility to business analysts. This approach assumes that outsourcing, when necessary, may provide advantages for both employees and the organization in the context of business analysis processes (Pelit & Gökçe, 2019).

In the tourism sector, particularly in accommodation businesses, outsourcing and strategic partnerships are widely adopted due to increasing competitive pressures. This strategy aims to reduce costs, improve quality, and ensure efficient utilization of resources. Outsourced services in tourism typically include cleaning, security, and transportation, which exemplify these collaborative practices (Aslan & Aslan, 2014).

The implementation of outsourcing in the hotel industry first emerged in France in the mid-1980s, when certain hotel departments were transferred to specialized companies. In Türkiye, the first recorded outsourcing practice in hospitality was observed in 1997 at the Atlantis Holiday Village located in Seferihisar, İzmir (Öncü & Işkın, 2009). Outsourcing in the tourism and hospitality industry contributes to cost advantages and enhanced performance. Numerous studies demonstrate that hotels prefer outsourcing to reduce expenses, increase quality, and improve efficiency, particularly in areas such as cleaning, security, and laundry services (Aydoğdu & Varoğlu, 2017).

Over the last decade, outsourcing practices in the tourism industry have become increasingly prevalent. A substantial body of literature examines outsourcing in tourism enterprises, and selected studies from the last ten years are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Studies on Outsourcing in Tourism Enterprises Conducted in the Last Decade

Author(s)	Year	Article Title	Description
Tayfun & Tekbalkan	2014	Dış Kaynaklardan Yararlanan Otel İşletmelerinde Örgütsel Bağlılık ve İş Doyumu: Ankara'da Bir Araştırma	This study examined the organizational commitment and job satisfaction levels of employees in hotels utilizing outsourcing. According to survey results from 4- and 5-star hotels in Ankara, outsourced subcontractor employees showed lower emotional and continuance commitment, while having similar normative commitment compared to in-house hotel employees. It was found that outsourcing caused differences in job satisfaction levels. As a result, it was emphasized that strategies to increase the commitment of outsourced employees would contribute to business efficiency and service quality.
Karakaş & Çiçek	2015	Alanya'daki Otel İşletmelerinin Dış Kaynak Kullanımına Yönelik Tutumlarının İncelenmesi	This study explored hotels' attitudes toward outsourcing in Alanya. Using a descriptive survey model, data were collected through questionnaires, and it was found that hotels prefer outsourcing for non-core services such as animation, security, and laundry. The effect of outsourcing on financial performance varies according to the type of

			service. The study concludes that outsourcing is a strategic decision that should be planned carefully and initially applied in a pilot department for evaluation.
Zöngür et al.	2016	Konaklama İşletmelerinde Dış Kaynak Kullanımı: Ankara İlindeki Dört ve Beş Yıldızlı Otel İşletmelerinde Bir Uygulama	The research comprehensively examined the outsourcing practices of 4- and 5-star hotels in Ankara. Findings revealed that 16 out of 20 hotels outsourced services such as laundry, security, information systems, and technical services, while avoiding outsourcing in confidentiality-sensitive areas such as front office and accounting–finance. Cost advantage and avoiding difficult tasks were main reasons for outsourcing, whereas fear of customer and reputation loss was the main concern among non-outsourcers. It was concluded that outsourcing is still in the development phase in hotels, but increasing numbers of suppliers and new sectors may accelerate the process.
Leitão et al.	2017	Dış Kaynak Kullanımı, Doğrudan Yabancı Yatırım ve Turizm Talebi.	In this study, the impact of outsourcing and foreign direct investment on tourism demand was analyzed using econometric models. Findings show that outsourcing and FDI positively affect tourism demand. It was emphasized that these factors play a significant role in the growth of the tourism sector and support economic development.
González et al.	2018	Stratejik Yönelim Boyutları ile Otel Dış Kaynak Kullanımı Arasındaki İlişki ve Organizasyonel Performansa Etkisi: Bir Turizm Destinasyonunda Uygulama	This study analyzed the relationship between strategic orientation and outsourcing in hotels, examining managers' perceptions of outsourcing. Advocacy, proactiveness, and risk-taking dimensions increased outsourcing, while competitive analysis and aggressiveness negatively influenced it. Future orientation showed no impact. Outsourcing enhanced financial performance but had no effect on non-financial performance such as employee and customer satisfaction.
Kurnaz	2019	Konaklama İşletmeleri Mutfak Departmanlarında Dış Kaynak Kullanımı: Marmaris Örneği	This study aimed to examine how outsourcing is practiced in the kitchen departments of 5-star hotels in Marmaris and the advantages it provides. Fieldwork-based data collected from business representatives were analyzed. Findings indicate that outsourcing is applied on a product basis and provides advantages such as efficiency, production with fewer staff, and cost reduction. Additionally, the supply process, brand preference, and contract management are of importance. The study concluded that outsourcing provides flexibility and efficiency to businesses and that broader implementation may offer additional benefits.
Arslan & Yumurtacı Aydoğmuş	2020	Otel İşletmelerinde Dış Kaynak Kullanımı: TOPSIS Yöntemi ile Bir Uygulama	The study examined the selection process of a consultancy firm providing quality management system services within outsourcing practices in a five-star hotel in

			Alanya. Using AHP to determine criteria weights followed by TOPSIS to evaluate alternatives, five criteria—economic factors, internal structure of the company, reference, support, and communication—were analyzed. Support services provided by the consulting firm emerged as the most important criterion. Findings revealed that price is no longer the dominant factor in outsourcing decisions, while support services and communication have become more significant.
Şen et al.	2021	Sapanca'da Faaliyet Gösteren 4 ve 5 Yıldızlı Otel İşletmelerinin Dış Kaynak Kullanımına Yönelik Bir Araştırma	The article examined outsourcing preferences of 4- and 5-star hotels in Sapanca. Hotels mostly outsourced extra staff, cleaning, and technical equipment services due to reasons such as cost reduction and personnel provision during peak seasons. Food and beverage and technical service departments received the highest outsourcing budget, and coordination between permanent and temporary staff was achieved. It was concluded that outsourcing reduces managers' workload and helps find qualified personnel, but firms need to be effectively supervised.
Özdemir	2022	Otel İşletmelerinde Dış Kaynak Kullanımı Kuşadası Bölgesinde Faaliyette Bulunan Otel İşletmelerinde Bir Araştırma	This study analyzed the outsourcing levels and reasons for outsourcing among 3-, 4-, and 5-star hotels in Kuşadası. Conducted with 21 hotels, the research found that outsourcing increases service quality and efficiency. The pandemic affected outsourcing practices, and most businesses reported increased costs. It was emphasized that outsourcing should be managed strategically, considering confidentiality and security factors.
Sudiarawan et al.	2023	Endonezya'da Turizm İş Sektöründe İşçi Haklarının Dış Kaynak Kullanımı	The article examines the rights of outsourced workers in the tourism sector in Indonesia. Existing legal regulations, including the Job Creation Law, were analyzed. Findings indicate that legal protections for outsourced workers are insufficient. It was concluded that legal regulations must be improved and workers' rights must be more effectively protected.
Poulaki et al.	2024	Turizm KOBİ'lerinde Muhasebe Dış Kaynak Kullanımı ve Finansal Riskin Azaltılması	This study found that tourism SMEs outsource accounting services to reduce costs and manage financial risks. Factors such as legal structure and geographical location affected outsourcing practices, whereas business size had no direct impact. Outsourcing was associated with tax process complexity and ESG reporting requirements, additionally providing efficiency and capital savings. However, outsourcing may lead to coordination and quality control issues.

The studies presented in Table 1 examine different aspects of outsourcing in the tourism industry and reveal the sector's trends and areas of application. The findings indicate that outsourcing provides several advantages to tourism enterprises, such as reducing costs, increasing efficiency, and improving service quality. However, some research emphasizes that outsourcing requires effective monitoring and that factors such as confidentiality and security must be taken into consideration. Furthermore, outsourcing is evaluated as a strategic decision that should be carefully planned according to the specific needs of each enterprise. Overall, these studies demonstrate that outsourcing not only offers significant benefits when integrated into the managerial processes of tourism businesses but also presents various challenges that must be addressed.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Outsourcing practices in tourism enterprises involve delegating non-core activities to specialized external providers, offering advantages such as cost reduction, operational efficiency, and improvements in service quality. This approach enables businesses to allocate their resources more effectively and concentrate on their core operational functions, contributing to sustainable management of budget, time, and workforce. Moreover, outsourcing enhances flexibility in a highly competitive tourism market, supporting faster adaptation to changing environmental and customer demands. However, the success of outsourcing largely depends on selecting the appropriate service provider, maintaining quality standards, and managing the business–provider relationship in a professional manner. Therefore, outsourcing should not be considered merely as a cost-saving technique but as a strategic management policy that contributes to long-term competitiveness.

To implement outsourcing effectively, tourism enterprises are advised to consider several important aspects. First, the selection of outsourced services should be based on criteria such as expertise, reliability, and service quality. Contracts should explicitly address confidentiality, data protection, performance criteria, and inspection mechanisms. Additionally, outsourcing decisions should be aligned with long-term strategic goals rather than focusing solely on short-term financial benefits. It is recommended that tourism enterprises retain core services that include direct customer interaction in-house, while outsourcing complementary services to external providers when appropriate. Furthermore, employee training and awareness programs should be implemented to support organizational adaptation to outsourced processes. When properly managed, outsourcing can offer significant benefits to tourism enterprises and serve as a strategic tool that strengthens competitive advantage within the industry.

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BEYOND THE PLATE:
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN CATERING SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

Catering services possess increasing importance in the contemporary service sector and constitute a multidimensional service domain encompassing the processes of planning, presenting, and managing events. This sector requires managing not only the presentation of food and beverages but also all stages of the customer experience (Ladhari, 2009). The intangible nature of the service, coupled with the fact that it occurs simultaneously with consumption, renders the communication and interaction between the customer and the business a critical element. Therefore, effective communication strategies for catering businesses hold strategic significance in terms of customer satisfaction, loyalty, and business success.

Communication established with the customer directly affects the perception of service quality, risk assessment, and the likelihood of repurchase (Grönroos, 2007). Particularly in catering services, the accurate understanding of customer expectations, pre-event information provision, coordination during the event, and the effective management of post-event feedback mechanisms determine the holistic experience of the service. In this context, customer communication is evaluated not merely as information transfer, but as a process of building trust, developing empathy, and establishing long-term relationships.

Customer Profile and Needs Analysis

The foundation of effective customer communication strategies in catering services lies in the accurate definition of the target customer profile and the systematic analysis of needs. The diversity of customer expectations in the service sector necessitates that businesses adopt a dynamic and customer-oriented approach rather than a standard communication model. In this context, the correct determination of the customer profile requires a comprehensive evaluation of demographic characteristics, consumption habits, purchasing behaviors, and requirements dependent on the event type (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In the catering sector, customers can generally be classified under two main categories: corporate clients and individual clients. While corporate clients typically demand regular, high-volume services that exhibit continuity, individual clients generally prefer personalized, one-off services oriented towards special events. While the purchasing criteria of corporate clients are more rational and budget-focused, experience, emotional satisfaction, and aesthetic elements are more

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determinant for individual clients (Grönroos, 2007). Therefore, it is important to differentiate customer communication strategies according to the expectations of both groups.

Needs analysis is one of the most critical stages of customer-oriented service design. In this analysis process, businesses must examine variables such as event type, number of participants, menu preferences, special dietary requests, service duration, venue conditions, and logistical requirements in detail. Considering that service quality is directly related to the value perceived by the customer, conducting a correct needs analysis significantly increases customer satisfaction and repurchase behavior (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988).

Furthermore, the accurate understanding of customer expectations is not limited to initial consultations. Communication that continues throughout the process allows for the timely detection of changing demands and the adaptation of the service accordingly. This approach is compatible with the concept of relationship marketing, one of the fundamental principles of modern service marketing. Relationship marketing aims to establish long-term, trust-based relationships with customers and to position the customer not merely as a transaction element but as a strategic partner for the sustainability of the business (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

First Contact and Correct Communication Channels

The success of customer communication processes in catering services mostly depends on the quality of the first contact and the effective use of communication channels. First contact is a critical stage where the customer's perception of the business is shaped and is evaluated as the starting point of 'perceived quality' for service businesses. According to service marketing literature, positive initial perceptions contribute to customers developing a higher level of tolerance towards the business in subsequent evaluations (Zeithaml, 1988). Therefore, it is imperative for catering businesses to manage the first moment of communication in a professional, rapid, and information-oriented manner.

Today, the channels customers prefer to contact a business vary; telephone calls, email correspondence, social media platforms, website forms, and face-to-face meetings are among the most common options. The correct management of a multi-channel communication structure requires rapid adaptation to the communication method preferred by the customer. Research reveals that customers evaluate multi-channel communication as an important element in terms of service accessibility and reliability, particularly in the service sector (Verhoef, Kannan & Inman, 2015).

Traditional channels such as telephone and email are mostly preferred by corporate clients. Since these channel types provide formality and documentation capability in information transfer, they serve an important function, particularly in clarifying price quotes, menu contents, and logistical details. Conversely, social media and online messaging applications are channels frequently used by individual customers to obtain quick information and make preliminary evaluations about the business. Since social media platforms enable the customer to access visual content regarding the business, they can be decisive in terms of perceived professionalism and service quality (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Effective Proposal and Information Process

The proposal preparation and information process in catering services, as one of the initial stages of the customer experience, has a determining effect on the perception of the service. Especially

within the context of service marketing, the clarity, scope, and professionalism of the proposal submitted to the customer play an important role in shaping expectations regarding service quality. According to Lovelock and Wirtz (2016), since proposal processes bear the quality of 'pre-service evidence' in the customer's evaluation of the service, communication errors made at this stage can lead to customer loss.

CUSTOMER

Expected Service
(What the customer thinks they will get)

⬇

THE GAP
(Risk of Dissatisfaction)

⬇

Perceived Service
(What the customer actually experiences)

⬆

Impact of **Proposals** & Communication
(Clear proposals reduce the gap; Vague ones widen it)
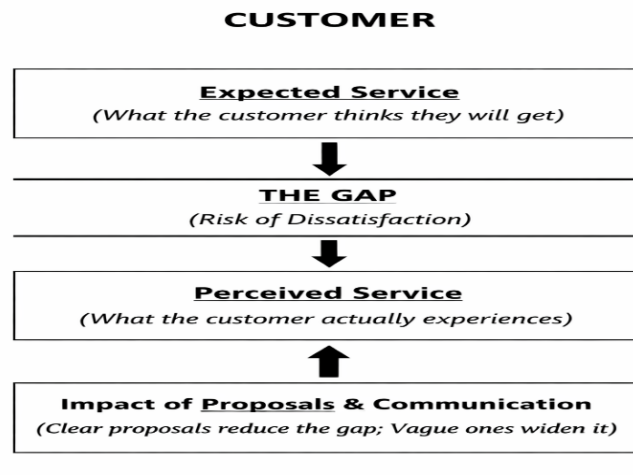
Figure 1. Gap Model of Service Quality
(Adapted from Parasuraman et al, 1985)

The proposal preparation process does not consist merely of presenting price information; it also includes detailing menu options, explaining alternative service packages comparatively, and specifying the extent to which the customer's special requests can be accommodated. Presenting this scope in a clear and systematic manner facilitates the customer's decision-making process. According to Bitner, Ostrom, and Morgan (2008), reducing uncertainties regarding service delivery directly increases customer satisfaction and decreases perceived risk. For catering businesses, this necessitates a detailed explanation of menu contents, portion quantities, presentation styles, the number of service staff, and logistical requirements.

The effectiveness of the information process also depends on the transparency level of the business. Transparent information flow is a fundamental element that increases the trust customers feel toward the service provider. The trust model of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) emphasizes that transparent information provision is a determining factor in the formation of the trust relationship. Therefore, catering businesses must clearly explain the pricing structure, eliminate uncertainties regarding additional fees, and avoid creating a perception of surprise costs for the customer.

The use of visual materials in the proposal and information process is also among the elements that increase communication effectiveness. In particular, menu photos, sample presentations, and visuals taken from previous events help the customer tangibilize the service. Research shows that visual content significantly affects decision-making behavior, especially in the food and event sectors (Cyr, Head & Larios, 2010). Therefore, professional visuals are important tools supporting the proposal process. Finally, rapid feedback and regular information updates provided during the proposal stage positively affect the customer's perception of the business. It is widely accepted in

the literature that the response process in service businesses is highly correlated with customer satisfaction (De Matos, Henrique & Rossi, 2007). Therefore, catering businesses must optimize their proposal and information processes in terms of time management as well.

Trust-Oriented Communication Technologies

Trust in the service sector is a fundamental element for the sustainability of customer-business relationships and plays a critical role, especially in catering services where uncertainty is high. Trust is a strategic factor that directly affects not only the expectation regarding service quality but also the customer's purchasing decision process, loyalty tendency, and general satisfaction with the service provider (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Therefore, catering businesses need to structure their communication strategies with the aim of building trust.

One of the first steps of trust-oriented communication is the consistency and accuracy of the information given to the customer. According to Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), information transparency is one of the strongest determinants of customer trust; because when customers perceive that the service provider is acting openly and honestly towards them, they evaluate the level of risk and uncertainty as lower. In this context, it is of great importance for catering businesses to clearly present information regarding menu contents, pricing policies, procurement processes, and service scope.

The second important element in establishing trust is the perception of the service provider's competence. From the customer's perspective, professional competence is associated with experience, expertise, team quality, and the reliability of operational processes. The perception of competence can be strengthened, especially before purchasing, through references, review comments, and documentation of previous work (Gefen, 2000). In catering businesses, sample menus, portfolio presentations, and the sharing of feedback obtained from previous events are distinct forms of evidence that positively affect the customer's perception of the service provider.

Another dimension of trust-oriented communication is developing emotional trust. Emotional trust involves the customer's relationship with the business being based not only on rational foundations but also on emotional elements such as empathy, interest, and understanding. The 'personal trust' elements defined by McKnight and Chervany (2001) reveal that a warm and supportive communication style from the service representative strengthens the trust relationship. Therefore, the adoption of an empathetic approach in customer relations by catering businesses should encompass not only information transfer but also establishing an emotional bond.

Furthermore, the sustainability of building trust depends on the fulfillment of promises. Brown, Lusch, and Nicholson (1995) emphasize that the service provider demonstrating consistency makes the trust relationship long-term. Compliance with delivery times, full fulfillment of contract conditions, and rapid resolution of problems arising during the event are critical communication behaviors that ensure the consolidation of trust.

Effective Feedback management

In catering services, feedback management has a central importance in terms of the sustainability of customer satisfaction and the continuous improvement of service quality. Since feedback serves as a direct indicator of the perception created by the service delivery in the customer, it constitutes both a strategic and operational information source for businesses. As stated by Johnston and Clark

(2005), the effective design of feedback mechanisms in the service sector facilitates the measurement of customer experience and directs service improvements.
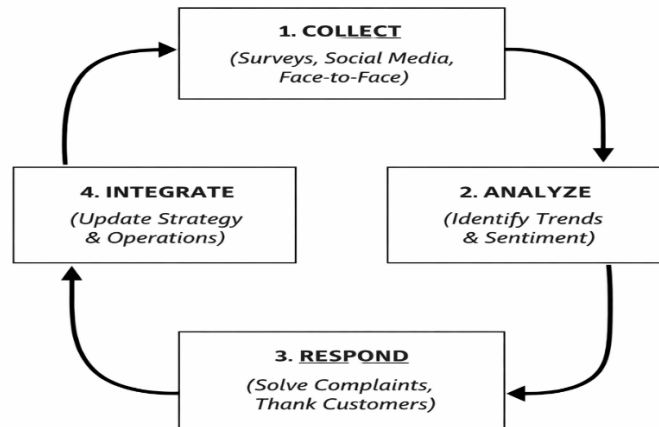
Figure 2. Continuous Feedback Loop.

The first stage of feedback management is the systematic establishment of feedback collection methods. These methods include online surveys, telephone interviews, face-to-face evaluations, and social media comments. Feedback provided through digital channels, in particular, offers significant advantages for businesses due to high accessibility and data diversity. According to Homburg and Fürst (2005), the rapidly analyzable nature of digital feedback helps businesses adapt more quickly to customer expectations.

The second stage in feedback management is the analysis of the collected data. Effective analysis processes involve not only addressing customer complaints but also integrating positive feedback into service quality strategies. Tax and Brown (1998) state that the systematic examination of feedback data by service businesses contributes to the strengthening of long-term customer relationships. In this context, catering businesses need to make process improvements by identifying recurring problems and evaluate positive feedback as elements supporting brand image.

One of the most critical elements of feedback management is the response given to customer complaints. Handling complaints in a timely, empathetic, and solution-oriented manner is of great importance in re-establishing customer satisfaction. Davidow (2003) states that effective complaint management strengthens the customer's trust in the business and that negative experiences can be turned into positive ones. In this context, catering businesses should provide explanatory feedback regarding complaints and present clear plans regarding the resolution of problems.

The final stage is the integration of feedback results into organizational learning processes. According to Argyris and Schön's (1996) 'organizational learning' model, businesses should use data obtained from feedback not only for short-term corrective actions but also for long-term strategic improvements. This approach enables catering businesses to gain flexibility in service delivery processes and adapt more quickly to changing customer expectations.

Pre-Event, During-Event, and Post-Event Communication

Communication processes in catering services are not limited to the moment the service is provided; they possess a holistic structure covering the pre-event preparation period, coordination during the event, and post-event evaluation stages. Service marketing literature emphasizes that the customer's overall experience is determined by the holistic quality of these three stages (Edvardsson, 1998). Therefore, effective communication at every stage is important for the sustainability of customer satisfaction and service quality.

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┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐
│    PRE-EVENT    │ ──▶ │  DURING-EVENT   │ ──▶ │   POST-EVENT    │
├─────────────────┤     ├─────────────────┤     ├─────────────────┤
│ • Needs Analysis│     │ • Coordination  │     │ • Feedback      │
│ • Proposal/     │     │ • Instant       │     │   Surveys       │
│   Contract      │     │   Problem       │     │ • Thank You     │
│ • Menu Selection│     │   Solving       │     │   Notes         │
│ • Logistics Plan│     │ • Guest         │     │ • Reporting     │
│                 │     │   Interaction   │     │ • Loyalty       │
│                 │     │                 │     │   Building      │
└─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘
    (Planning)              (Operation)             (Evaluation)
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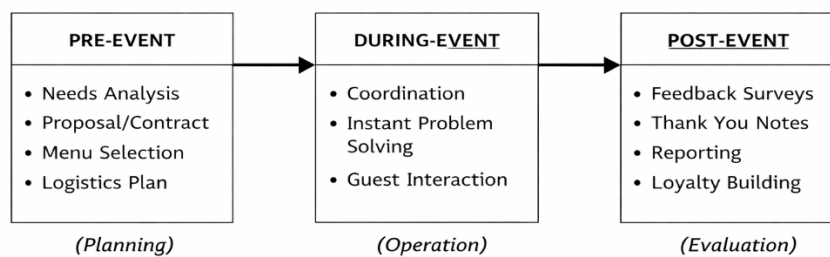
Figure 3. Communication Lifecycle in Catering Service.

Pre-Event Communication

The pre-event period is a critical process where customer expectations are clarified, the scope of service is finalized, and all logistical elements are planned. At this stage, the business must provide regular and clear information to the customer. As stated by Bowen and Clarke (2002), effective service planning requires continuous information exchange with the customer, and this communication process plays a determining role in preventing operational disruptions. For catering businesses, this process involves conveying menu selection, number of service staff, venue layout, equipment requirements, and timeline to the customer in detail.

The use of tools such as meetings, tasting rehearsals, and digital planning tools in pre-event communication strengthens the alignment between the customer and the service provider. Digital coordination applications, in particular, facilitate information sharing and reduce errors. Buhalis and Amaranggna (2015) emphasize that digital communication tools increase efficiency and accuracy in service planning processes.

During-Event Communication

Communication during the event is the primary determinant of operational effectiveness for both the customer and the business. At this stage, intra-team coordination and instantaneous information mechanisms are critically important for the continuity of service quality. According to Van der Wagen and Carlos (2005), communication interruptions in event management can lead to service

errors, loss of time, and customer dissatisfaction. Therefore, catering teams must be in continuous communication via radios, mobile applications, or coordination leaders throughout the event.

Communication established with the customer during the event should be solution-oriented, rapid, and proactive. Paraskevas (2006) states that businesses with communication structures capable of reacting quickly to crises or unexpected situations in service processes are more successful in maintaining customer satisfaction. In catering services, this can be realized through managing unexpected change requests in the menu, regulating service flow, or rapidly resolving instantaneous problems.

Post-Event Communication

Post-event communication is an important stage in terms of establishing long-term relationships with the customer and evaluating the service. In this process, customer feedback must be collected, satisfaction levels measured, and areas for improvement determined for future events. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) state that post-event interaction is a critical factor in the formation of customer loyalty.

Catering businesses sending post-event thank-you messages, sharing short evaluation surveys, and measuring the customer's satisfaction level contribute to the continuity of the relationship process. Furthermore, presenting visual and operational reports regarding the executed event to the customer strengthens the perception of professional service. Bowen and Chen's (2001) research shows that conducting high-quality post-event communication increases the likelihood of the customer preferring the business again.

The Role of Digital Tools and Technology

Digitalization has radically transformed communication processes in catering businesses, as in the service sector, and created new strategic possibilities in the management of customer relationships. The use of technological tools accelerates information flow, standardizes processes, and makes the customer experience more predictable. As stated by Buhalis and Law (2008), digital technologies have become one of the fundamental components increasing the competitiveness of service businesses. In this context, the correct integration of digital communication tools in the catering sector affects customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

The Role of CRM Systems in Customer Communication

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems are used as one of the central tools of digital communication in catering businesses. CRM systems make it possible to collect customer information on a single platform, analyze interaction history, and develop personalized communication strategies. According to Payne and Frow (2005), effective CRM applications allow businesses to understand their customers' needs more accurately and manage communication processes more precisely. This provides significant advantages in catering services, especially in terms of proposal preparation, logistical planning, and post-event feedback management.

Online Reservation and Proposal Systems

Digital reservation and automated proposal systems are important tools facilitating the customer's first contact with the business. These systems reduce uncertainty regarding the service by offering the customer rapid pricing, access to menu options, and instant communication opportunities.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra's (2005) e-service quality model revealed that usability and reliability in digital transactions are fundamental factors determining customer satisfaction. For catering businesses, a user-friendly reservation system ensures both more effective management of the business's service capacity and facilitation of the customer's decision-making process.

The Impact of Social Media and Digital Marketing

Social media has become a powerful tool for catering businesses in both promotion and communication. Instagram and other visual-focused platforms, in particular, play an important role in sharing menu presentations and event examples with potential customers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) state that social media democratizes the process of interacting with customers and offers businesses direct communication opportunities. Social media also affects the business's credibility perception by making customer reviews visible.

Operational Technologies and Digital Coordination Tools

Digital coordination tools are widely used for the management of operational processes in catering services. Cloud-based planning software, inventory tracking systems, and instant communication applications strengthen intra-team coordination, ensuring a reduction in service errors. As stated by Gretzel, Sigala, and Xiang (2015), digital operations management tools are critical technologies that optimize not only communication processes but also decision-making mechanisms. These tools allow for the rapid resolution of disruptions that may occur during the event.

AI-Supported Communication Applications

In recent years, AI-based chatbots, automated response systems, and personalized recommendation algorithms have made customer communication more efficient in the catering sector. Davenport and Ronanki (2018) emphasize that AI applications reduce the operational burden on businesses and gain speed in customer communication processes. Catering businesses can automatically present menu suggestions, price ranges, and service options requested by their customers using such tools.

Staff Training and Development of Communication Skills

The communication skills possessed by staff in catering services are one of the fundamental elements directly affecting customer experience. Due to the intangible nature of the service, the staff's attitude, body language, problem-solving capacity, and the quality of the relationship established with the customer significantly shape the customer's perception of service quality. As stated by Bowen and Schneider (2014), the relationship between staff behavior, customer satisfaction, and business performance in the service sector is extremely strong. Therefore, staff training needs to be approached as a strategic investment in catering businesses.

Importance of In-Service Training Programs

In the service sector, training programs not only increase the professional competence of the staff but also improve their communication competencies. Baum (2007) emphasizes that continuous training is critical for service standardization, especially in the tourism and food and beverage sectors. Training programs in catering businesses should cover topics such as customer relationship management, etiquette rules, stress management, complaint resolution, and intra-team

communication. Such training improves both the technical and social skills of the staff, thereby ensuring the stability of service quality.

Body Language and Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is an important element determining the emotional tone of the relationship established with the customer. According to Mehrabian's (1972) classic study, a large part of communication consists of non-verbal elements, and factors such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice directly affect the customer's perception. Considering that mutual interaction is intense in catering services, raising staff awareness about body language is an important strategy that increases customer satisfaction.

Empathetic Communication and Emotional Intelligence

Empathy and emotional intelligence play a determining role in service employees correctly understanding customer needs and giving appropriate responses. Goleman (1998) revealed that emotional intelligence is a competency that increases performance, especially in sectors where customer contact is intense. Catering staff receiving emotional intelligence training enables them to read the customer's emotional state correctly and helps them display a more constructive approach in problem-solving processes.

Intra-Team Communication and Operational Efficiency

The communication staff establish not only with the customer but also with each other is critical for operational performance. Cannon-Bowers and Salas (2001) emphasize the effect of intra-team communication on the coordination of service operations, stating that effective communication skills increase team performance. Since multi-stage operations in catering services require continuous information sharing between kitchen and service teams, intra-team communication competencies are the primary determinant of operational success.

Motivation and Employee Engagement

Training processes not only improve staff competencies but also strengthen work motivation and commitment to the business. Meyer and Allen's (1991) commitment model states that if employees feel supported in the workplace, both their emotional and normative commitment levels increase. This situation is important in terms of reducing staff turnover rates and ensuring service continuity in the catering sector.

Customer Loyalty and Communication Strategies

Customer loyalty in catering services is a critical indicator directly affecting the long-term success and sustainable revenue model of the business. Loyalty is not limited only to the customers repurchase behavior; it also includes positive recommendations, references, and brand advocacy towards the business (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). In this context, effective communication strategies stand out as fundamental tools in the creation and maintenance of customer loyalty.

Personalized Communication and Loyalty

Personalized communication involves understanding the individual needs and expectations of the customer and implementing the service accordingly. Peppers and Rogers (2011) emphasize that personalized communication is an effective strategy in increasing customer commitment. In the catering sector, this approach requires taking into account elements such as the customer's previous event preferences, special dietary requirements, and aesthetic preferences. Thus, the customer feels that the service is designed specifically for them, and brand commitment is strengthened.

Communication Continuity and Loyalty Formation

Customer loyalty cannot be achieved solely through communication established at the moment of sale; an effective loyalty strategy requires continuous communication covering pre-, during-, and post-service phases. Verhoef (2003) states that regular and proactive communication increases the customer's trust and commitment to the business. In catering services, this can be supported by pre-event briefings, careful coordination during the event, and post-event thanks and feedback processes.

The Effect of Trust on Loyalty

Trust is a fundamental factor in the formation of customer loyalty. Morgan and Hunt (1994) state that trust and the sense of commitment are the primary determinants of long-term customer relationships. For catering businesses, trust is ensured by providing the service as promised and at high quality, transparent pricing, and professional communication. When an environment of trust is created, the likelihood of the customer choosing to receive service again is higher.

Digital Communication and Loyalty Programs

Digital tools play an important role in communication strategies supporting customer loyalty. Loyalty programs offered via email marketing, social media interactions, and mobile applications are tools that reinforce the customer's commitment to the business (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Catering businesses can increase loyalty by ensuring continuous contact on digital channels through customer-specific offers, post-event thank-you messages, and innovative service announcements.

Feedback and Loyalty Management

Customer feedback is one of the fundamental components of loyalty strategy. The business improving its service processes by taking customer feedback into account creates a perception in the customer that they are valued and strengthens loyalty (Oliver, 1999). In catering services, post-event surveys, satisfaction evaluations, and solution-oriented communication support the establishment of long-term loyalty relationships.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

In catering services, customer communication plays a central role in the perception of service quality and the formation of customer satisfaction and loyalty. The different communication strategies discussed in this article are of critical importance in increasing the operational and strategic successes of catering businesses. Effective communication is evaluated not merely as

information transfer, but as a holistic approach covering processes of building trust, developing empathy, collecting feedback, and establishing long-term customer relationships.

Customer communication is a process that starts from pre-event preparation stages and continues through coordination during the event to post-event feedback mechanisms. Additionally, the use of digital tools, CRM systems, online reservation platforms, social media, and AI-supported applications offers the customer a faster, personalized, and measurable communication experience.

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A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF DESTINATION BRANDING IN DIGITAL TOURISM IN TÜRKİYE

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INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is considered a strategic area in terms of economic growth, job creation and cultural interaction processes. However, the rapid transformation in information and communication technologies since the first quarter of the twenty-first century has profoundly affected not only the application areas of tourism but also the forms of academic knowledge production. Along with this transformation, tourism literature is rapidly expanding along the axis of digitalisation; topics such as destination management, marketing, experience design and branding are being addressed within new conceptual frameworks. Nevertheless, it is observed that studies comprehensively and systematically evaluating this literary expansion are limited.

Within the context of Türkiye, there has been a significant increase in academic output in the field of digital tourism and destination branding, particularly over the last fifteen years. Theses, national and international articles, and papers examine the effects of digitalisation on tourism from various perspectives. However, the majority of these studies are limited to a specific destination, application area or method; synthesising analyses that reveal the general structure of the literature, its thematic concentrations and research trends have not been sufficiently developed. This situation makes it difficult to clearly see the conceptual maturity level of the field, the themes around which it is concentrated and the research gaps that exist.

In the current literature, digital tourism is mostly addressed through application-based research; its relationship with destination branding, however, appears fragmented and disjointed. Yet the digitalisation process transforms destination branding into a multidimensional and dynamic structure that is not limited to promotional activities. Questions such as how this multidimensional structure is represented in academic production, which concepts come to the fore, and which themes gain prominence over time are critical for understanding the direction of development in the field. At this point, a systematic analysis of the literature is necessary not only to map the existing body of knowledge but also to determine future research directions.

Despite the numerical increase in studies related to digital tourism and destination branding literature in Türkiye, there is a notable lack of comprehensive bibliometric studies that evaluate academic output in this field from a holistic perspective. Studies in the literature generally focus on specific case studies; the distribution of publications by year, thematic concentrations, conceptual orientations, and academic impact levels are not considered together. This deficiency limits the clear presentation of the scientific development trajectory and research dynamics of the field.

This research aims to examine the academic literature on digital tourism and destination branding in Türkiye within the framework of bibliometric indicators, based on the aforementioned gap. The study aims to reveal the current state of the field by systematically analysing the temporal distribution of relevant publications, prominent themes, and research trends. Thus, the direction of development of the digital tourism literature in the Turkish context is made visible, and a conceptual and thematic roadmap is presented for future studies.

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CONCEPTUAL and THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The digitalisation process is fundamentally transforming the economic, social and cultural dynamics of the twenty-first century, reshaping all aspects of the tourism sector. In particular, destination promotion, marketing and brand management activities are now conducted in virtual environments with the widespread use of digital technologies. The forms of tourism production and consumption are being redefined with digital tools, and travel decisions, experience sharing and destination image are largely formed in online environments (Yavuz and Mesci, 2021). In this context, digital tourism is considered not only a technological transformation process but also an information-based economic structure and cultural interaction area (Sever, 2025). Digitalisation is leading to the reshaping of both business models and consumer behaviour in tourism.

The Concept and Development of Digital Tourism

The concept of digital tourism refers to the process of presenting, promoting and managing the tourism sector in a digital environment through the use of information and communication technologies (Tan and Armutcu, 2020). In this process, smartphones, social media platforms, online booking systems, virtual reality applications, artificial intelligence-supported guidance services and big data analytics are increasingly being used. Thus, the tourist's relationship with the destination becomes a holistic digital experience that begins before the trip and continues after the trip (Yalçın Kayıkçı and Kutluk Bozkurt, 2018). The development of digital tourism has gained momentum, especially since 2010, alongside digital transformation policies. The development of digital culture and e-government applications at the public administration level in Türkiye facilitates the integration of the tourism sector into the digital ecosystem (Uysal ve Malkoç Yılmaz, 2025).

Digitalisation in tourism is also leading to a fundamental shift in marketing approaches. Traditional promotional tools are being replaced by social media, web-based platforms and user-generated content (Mürteza, 2019). Digital communication strategies increase the visibility of destinations and enable direct interaction with target audiences. At this point, digital tourism is not only a promotional tool but also a tool for managing sustainable tourism practices. Monitoring visitor flows through digital systems enables data-driven decisions to be made in terms of environmental sustainability (Zhou, Buhalis and Lian, 2024). In this context, digital tourism is considered a strategic tool in destination management in terms of both economic efficiency and ecological balance.

Digital tourism applications in Türkiye have been integrated into the fields of health, gastronomy, culture, nature, and rural tourism in recent years. Digital health tourism applications, in particular, provide significant conveniences in managing international patient flows (Yılmaz and Yılmaz, 2022). Similarly, the phenomenon of digital nomadism has emerged as a new type of tourism with the spread of remote working culture (Kocaman, 2022). This situation has led to the creation of new digital living spaces in different regions, from Türkiye's coastal cities to Cappadocia. Digital tourism thus creates an experience-based form of tourism that transcends the physical boundaries of space. In this process, AI-powered recommendation systems, augmented reality (AR) applications, and three-dimensional virtual tours increase the accessibility of destinations and enrich the visitor experience (Kırık, 2024).

The development of digital tourism is shaped not only by technological innovations on a global scale but also by applications implemented at the local level. In Türkiye, the digital transformation of cultural heritage sites in particular offers new opportunities in terms of both promotion and preservation. For example, as in the case of Göbeklitepe, digital storytelling techniques reflect the historical and cultural identity of the destination in a more impressive way (Karabacak, 2023). Similarly, transmedia storytelling strategies are increasing Konya's brand value and rebuilding the

visitor experience across multiple platforms (Yetiş, 2025). These developments demonstrate that the destination can be evaluated not only as a physical space but also as a narrative, identity, and digital experience area.

The concept of digital tourism also has an interactive structure that includes social participation and user-generated content. Images, videos and comments shared on social media platforms play an important role in shaping the destination image (Cerić, Więckowski and Timothy, 2024). Visitors' online interactions organically spread the promotion of the destination and influence the decision-making processes of potential visitors. In this context, digital tourism is considered not only as a supply-side activity but also as a multi-layered communication space that includes demand-side participation. In particular, the more active role of younger generations in digital media is transforming the dynamics of tourism marketing. The intensive use of technology by Generation Z and Generation Alpha necessitates destinations to develop innovative strategies in digital environments (Yalçın Kayıkçı ve Kutluk Bozkurt, 2018).

The digitalisation process also requires a comprehensive governance model carried out with the joint contribution of local governments, civil society organisations and the private sector. Strengthening the digital infrastructure of public institutions enables the implementation of data-driven strategies in terms of destination branding (Uysal and Malkoç Yılmaz, 2025). Digital cultural policies are also giving rise to new collaborations in the field of cultural heritage preservation and promotion. In particular, the promotion of UNESCO World Heritage sites on virtual platforms creates significant awareness in terms of sustainable tourism (Göker, 2018; Göker and Ünlüönen, 2019). In this regard, digital tourism is considered not only an economic activity but also a tool that serves the transmission of cultural heritage.

The development of digital tourism in Türkiye is shaped by a combination of local dynamics and international trends. Emphasising digital identity in city branding strategies enhances the tourist appeal of cities (Aydın, 2020). In particular, the integration of graffiti, urban art and digital media elements strengthens the city image. However, the fact that digitalisation is not embraced to the same extent in every region also raises the issue of digital inequality. Therefore, the sustainability of digital tourism depends on improving infrastructure, access and digital literacy levels (Aydın, 2012). Digital tourism applications create new economic opportunities in rural areas and contribute to the local population receiving a greater share of tourism revenues. In particular, the promotion of rural tourism on digital platforms ensures that local production and gastronomic experiences gain visibility on a global scale (Akgün Şahin, 2021; Çataklı, 2021).

With the development of digital tourism, destinations' virtual identities have become as important as their physical characteristics. The destination identity created in the virtual environment determines the brand's digital perception. The consistency of digital identity, visual aesthetics, user experience, and level of online interaction directly impact the destination's brand value (Inkinen, Heikkonen, and Rautiainen, 2024). Therefore, digital tourism offers a framework that integrates the concrete and abstract identity elements of the destination.

The Relationship Between Destination Branding and Digitalisation

The concept of destination branding refers to strategic activities carried out with the aim of increasing the tourist appeal of a region or city, raising its profile and creating a sustainable image (Doğanlı, 2006). Unlike traditional branding, destination branding is a multidimensional process that encompasses natural resources, cultural heritage, social identity, and management strategies. Digitalisation is both a tool and an accelerator of this process. Promotional campaigns conducted through digital platforms strengthen the destination's image on a global scale and establish direct relationships with potential visitors through interactive communication channels (Demir, 2021).

The impact of digitalisation on destination branding has become evident, particularly in Türkiye, through academic studies conducted over the past twenty years. Early studies on destination branding in tourism have revealed the fundamental components of the branding process in the examples of Antalya and Beypazarı (Doğanlı, 2006; Öztürk, 2012). These studies show that the destination's natural, historical and cultural elements can be brought together to create a holistic brand identity. However, with the digital transformation process, the way these components are managed has changed. Now, the destination brand is shaped by visual content created in digital environments, user experiences and online feedback (Mürteza, 2019).

Destination branding is increasingly becoming a data-driven strategy in the digital age. Big data analytics and digital tracking tools enable destination managers to monitor tourist behaviour in real time. This contributes to the design of more targeted destination marketing strategies (Zhou, Buhalis and Lian, 2024). Digital networks support not only the promotion of the destination but also its management. In this context, the concept of the 'smart destination' represents a new management approach in which digital technologies are integrated with sustainable tourism goals (Sever, 2025). Technologies such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and cloud computing are used in smart destinations, thereby enhancing destination performance.

Digitalisation also strengthens the emotional dimension of destination branding. Social media posts, digital storytelling, and user experiences enable the establishment of an emotional connection with the destination. In this context, digital narrative strategies, as seen in the examples of Göbeklitepe and Konya, reflect the historical and cultural depth of the brand (Karabacak, 2023; Yetiş, 2025). Digital storytelling enhances the symbolic value of the destination and evokes a sense of belonging in visitors. This demonstrates that destination branding is not only a rational but also an emotional process.

Gastronomy-based destination branding in Türkiye is also strongly influenced by digitalisation. As seen in the examples of Moda, Adana and Izmir, gastronomy festivals are promoted globally through digital media and contribute significantly to the branding process (Akgün Şahin, 2021; Karaca, 2025; Karslı, 2021). Digital platforms play an important role in promoting local cuisines, supporting branding by visualising gastronomic identity elements. Thus, local products gain an international identity in the digital environment, emphasising the uniqueness of the destination. Similarly, nature-based recreational activities and gastronomic tourism are also marketed through digital networks, thereby strengthening sustainable destination strategies (Göker ve Ünlüönen, 2019; Çataklı, 2021).

Digitalisation also increases the resilience of destinations during times of crisis. Digital platforms are used as an effective tool for revitalising tourism, particularly in post-disaster processes. In Türkiye, digital donation and promotion campaigns following the 2023 earthquake contributed to the restoration of cultural heritage sites (Anser et al., 2025). In this process, digital tourism applications form the basis of a new tourism approach that brings together the themes of solidarity, sustainability and reconstruction. Therefore, digitalisation has become a process that encompasses not only the economic but also the social responsibility dimension of destination branding.

Destination branding also encompasses the reproduction of cultural identity in the digital environment. In particular, the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage are being conveyed to wider audiences through digital technologies (Aslan, 2020). Studies conducted in historic cities such as Cumalıkızık, Bergama, Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır show that digital platforms increase awareness of cultural heritage (İbiş, 2017; Kıngır, Küçük and Sancar, 2011; Serçek and Hassan, 2016). In this regard, digitalisation acts as a bridge that connects the historical identity of the destination with current technology. At the same time, digital image management strategies are

also gaining importance in the context of nation branding (Karabulut, 2018). The image of a country created in the digital environment in international relations affects foreign policy perceptions as much as tourism revenues.

In the destination branding process, visual and artistic elements play an important role alongside digital media. Particularly in the context of city branding, graphic design, logos and digital aesthetic elements strengthen the consistency of the brand (Aydın, 2020). The quality level of images used in the digital environment determines the perceived value of the destination and influences tourists' decision-making processes (Cerić, Więckowski and Timothy, 2024). Therefore, in destination branding, digital design is considered not only an aesthetic but also a strategic element.

Cultural events and festivals are also reaching wider audiences through digital platforms, adding dynamism to the branding process. The festivals organised in Çanakkale, Adana and Konya, for example, both increase local participation and promote the destination nationally (Altınışık, 2017; Karaca, 2025; Yetiş, 2025). Digital platforms enable these events to be broadcast live, interaction to be established via social media, and the destination's recognition to be increased. Thus, digitalisation has become one of the fundamental components of the experience economy in destination branding.

The impact of digitalisation on destination branding is also evident at the spatial planning and governance levels. Research conducted in provinces such as Alanya, Gaziantep, Niğde and Şanlıurfa reveals that the destination's administrative capacity can be strengthened with digital tools (Kavacık, Zafer and İnal, 2015; Giritlioğlu and Öksüz, 2016; Eroğlu, 2018; Kuvvetli, 2014). Digital systems facilitate coordination between stakeholders and accelerate decision-making processes. This enhances the destination's competitive strength and supports sustainable brand management.

Digitalisation is also a strategic tool that increases the visibility of destinations at an international level. Studies conducted on cross-border destinations in Europe show that visual representation forms play a decisive role in the branding process (Cerić, Więckowski and Timothy, 2024). In this context, Türkiye's digital branding strategies are becoming increasingly professional when compared to international examples. Digital promotion strategies, particularly in nature-based destinations such as Cappadocia and Mount Ilgaz, are being implemented in line with sustainable tourism objectives (Göker, 2018; Göker ve Ünlüönen, 2019; Gülecen, 2024).

METHOD and DATA ANALYSIS

This research was designed to reveal the development direction, trends, thematic clusters, and scientific collaboration networks of the scientific literature on destination branding in digital tourism in Türkiye. The research was conducted using a quantitative bibliometric analysis method. Bibliometric analysis enables the measurement of academic production in a specific field, the determination of the structural characteristics of publications, the identification of research trends, and the visualisation of scientific networks. In this context, the study is a data-driven analysis that systematically examines academic publications produced in the fields of digital tourism and destination branding in Türkiye. The research methodology consists of literature mapping, trend analysis, author, institution and journal-based network analyses, and keyword co-occurrence analyses.

The Purpose, Scope and Data Sources of the Research

The primary objective of this research is to reveal the current state and direction of development of academic studies produced in Türkiye on digital tourism and destination branding. To this end, the study systematically examines the development of the literature over the years, author productivity, institutional and country distributions, the most cited studies, thematic clusters, and

research gaps. The study is based on a data set that is broad enough to represent Türkiye-centred academic production in the field of digital tourism. Therefore, the scope includes studies published in articles, theses, and scientific journals at both the national and international levels.

The data sources used in the research were obtained from reliable academic databases commonly preferred in bibliometric analyses. The Web of Science, Scopus, TR Index, and Higher Education Council Thesis Centre databases constitute the primary data sources for this study. During the data collection process, all relevant studies published between 2006 and 2025 were screened. This time frame was chosen because it covers the period from the early days when the concept of digital tourism began to appear in the literature in Türkiye to the present day. The keywords used were 'digital tourism', 'digitalisation in tourism', 'destination branding', 'city branding', 'digital marketing in tourism', 'smart destination', 'cultural heritage and digital promotion' and 'digital storytelling'. Equivalent terms in Turkish and English were evaluated together, and only studies relevant to the subject were included.

All publications obtained have been subjected to deduplication, content control and suitability filtering. Duplicate records, off-topic publications, and documents that were outside the scope in terms of language or type were excluded from the analysis set. The final data set consisted of more than 90 scientific studies, theses, articles, and journals. These studies showed a more limited distribution in the 2006–2015 period and a rapidly increasing distribution after 2016. The bibliographic information of the documents included in the dataset includes elements such as author, title, abstract, year of publication, institution, country, keywords, and number of citations. This information was converted to a standard format and the necessary adjustments were made before being transferred to bibliometric analysis software.

The scope of the research includes only studies directly related to digital tourism and destination branding. Publications conducted in other sub-fields of tourism but lacking a digitalisation or branding dimension have been excluded. Thus, the analysis was conducted using a sample that accurately reflects the thematic boundaries of the field. Furthermore, while the scope of the research focuses on Türkiye-based studies, international studies examining Turkish destinations have also been included. This approach is important for assessing Türkiye's international visibility in the digital tourism literature.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations. Firstly, although the dataset examined in the study covers a period of approximately twenty years, the number of publications included in the analysis is limited to approximately 90 studies. In bibliometric analysis literature, larger sample sizes (generally N>300) are preferred, particularly for network-based analyses and statistical clustering techniques. In this context, the current sample size is limiting in terms of reaching large-scale generalisations and robust clustering results.

Within these limitations, the bibliometric analysis conducted in this study aims to reveal the general trends, thematic concentrations and research orientations of the field from an exploratory perspective, rather than producing comprehensive and definitive results. The analysis results present pioneering and guiding findings regarding the development trajectory of the digital tourism and destination branding literature in the Turkish context; however, it does not claim that these findings are generalisable to the entire field. Furthermore, due to the limited sample size, keyword co-occurrence and thematic evolution assessments are addressed primarily at a descriptive level; the aim is not to establish statistically robust network structures. This should be regarded not as a methodological weakness of the study but as a conscious research choice. Indeed, this research aims

to map the current state of the field and establish a starting point for future, larger-scale bibliometric studies.

Bibliometric Analysis Method and Indicators Used

Bibliometric analysis is a method based on the quantitative and systematic examination of the bibliographic characteristics of academic publications with the aim of revealing the structure, development trends and research dynamics of a specific scientific field. This method makes it possible to assess which topics are prominent in a field of research, which studies and researchers are influential in the field, and the trajectory of scientific production over time. Bibliometric analysis is not limited to determining the number of publications; it also reveals patterns of scientific interaction, thematic concentrations, and research orientations.

Bibliometric analysis is generally approached within two main frameworks. The first approach involves descriptive and productivity-based analyses. Within this scope, the distribution of publications by year, productivity levels based on author, institution and journal, and citation frequencies are examined. The second approach involves relational and thematic analyses. These analyses evaluate the conceptual and content-based relationships established between publications; the frequency of co-occurrence of specific concepts and thematic areas of concentration are determined.

In this study, bibliometric analysis was conducted using a content-based approach without the use of any software or automated analysis applications. During the analysis process, bibliographic data were examined directly by the researcher; publication titles, abstracts and keywords were systematically evaluated. This approach allows for a more in-depth examination of conceptual integrity, particularly when the number of publications analysed is limited and amenable to qualitative evaluation.

Within the scope of the research, publications were first classified by year and the temporal distribution of scientific output in the relevant field was determined. Subsequently, the authors, institutional information, and journals in which the publications appeared were examined to reveal their productivity levels. Citation data were considered to assess the academic impact of the publications; the most frequently referenced works in the field were identified. At this stage, citation data were manually compiled directly from publication bibliographies and reference lists.

In terms of relational analysis, a content-based co-occurrence assessment was conducted based on keywords and fundamental concepts. Recurring concepts in the publications were identified, and terms with similar meanings were combined to achieve conceptual standardisation. This enabled the identification of thematic areas concentrated in the literature and clusters of concepts related to each other. Furthermore, within the scope of thematic evolution analysis, topics that gained prominence over time were compared with themes that lost their relative importance.

The bibliometric indicators used in the study are addressed under five main headings. The first indicator is productivity indicators, which include the number of publications by year and the contribution levels by author and institution. The second indicator is citation analysis, which aims to reveal the academic impact of publications. The third indicator is collaboration indicators, which are evaluated through co-authorship and institutional contributions. The fourth indicator is thematic concentration analysis based on keyword co-occurrence. The fifth indicator is thematic evolution analysis, which examines the change in themes in the literature over time.

Presentation of Findings

The findings have been organised within the framework of indicators determined by bibliometric analysis. First, publication trends by year were examined. The findings reveal that academic studies

on digital tourism and destination branding in Türkiye began in limited numbers from 2006 onwards and increased after 2015. Following 2020, with the acceleration of digital transformation policies, a significant rise in the number of publications has been observed. This increase has occurred in parallel with the proliferation of both postgraduate theses and articles published in national journals.

In the author-based analysis, it was determined that the vast majority of academics contributing to the studies specialised in the fields of tourism, communication, business administration and urban planning. When viewed on an institutional basis, universities in Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Nevşehir and Konya stood out in terms of productivity. Higher education institutions focused on tourism, in particular, are at the centre of publications in the fields of digital tourism and branding. This situation demonstrates that academic institutions are in direct interaction with regional tourism policies.

According to citation analysis, the most frequently cited studies in the digital tourism literature in Türkiye generally focus on digital communication, gastronomic tourism, the digital representation of cultural heritage, and smart destination management. This indicates that researchers consider digitalisation to be both an economic and a cultural factor. Keyword co-occurrence analysis identified the most frequently used concepts as digitalisation, destination branding, cultural heritage, digital marketing, sustainability, and storytelling. Clusters formed by these concepts constitute the fundamental thematic structures of the field.

In the thematic evolution analysis, it was determined that branding and city image themes were prominent in tourism during the 2006–2015 period, gastronomy and cultural heritage emphasis came to the fore in the 2016–2020 period, and digital transformation, smart destinations, sustainability, and data-driven management issues gained prominence after 2020. This evolutionary process demonstrates that digital tourism has become an increasingly mature field of research in the Turkish literature.

When examining author collaboration networks, it has been observed that academics in Türkiye generally collaborate within the same institution or regional centres, while international collaboration has begun to increase in recent years. This situation demonstrates that digital tourism has become a global field of research and that Türkiye is becoming increasingly integrated into scientific communication networks in this field.

All findings reveal that digital tourism in Türkiye is an emerging field of research in the context of destination branding, possesses an interdisciplinary structure, and holds significant potential for future scientific production. The results obtained through bibliometric analysis methods are indicative for both academic research and policymakers. The data obtained on digital tourism and destination branding lays the groundwork for more comprehensive field research, international comparisons, and thematic deepening in the future.

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

Development Trends in Digital Tourism Literature in Türkiye

Academic output in the field of digital tourism in Türkiye has shown a marked increase, particularly since the 2010s. This increase is directly related to digitalisation becoming one of the fundamental components of tourism at both the level of public policies and private sector applications. The digital transformation process is considered not only a new research theme in tourism literature but also an interdisciplinary intersection (Sever, 2025). The bibliometric analysis of the study revealed that the literature on digital tourism and destination branding in Türkiye exhibits a conceptual diversity that has developed over time. This diversity is particularly concentrated in sub-themes such as cultural heritage, gastronomy, smart destination management,

digital marketing, and storytelling (Akgün Şahin, 2021; Çataklı, 2021; Karabacak, 2023; Yetiş, 2025).

Table 1. Distribution of Literature on Digital Tourism and Destination Branding in Türkiye by Year

Year Range	Number of Publications	Publication Type (Article/Thesis)	Main Themes	Trend Analysis
2006–2010	3	2 theses, 1 article	Destination branding, tourism image	Conceptual inception phase
2011–2015	8	5 theses, 3 articles	Cultural heritage, city image, rural tourism	Orientation towards regional applications
2016–2020	22	10 theses, 12 articles	Gastronomy, cultural tourism, digital communication	Thematic expansion period
2021–2025	34	15 theses, 19 articles	Digital storytelling, smart destination, sustainability	The dominant era of digitalisation

As shown in Table 1, the first phase of digital tourism literature in Türkiye began between 2006 and 2010. Studies conducted during this period generally discussed the fundamental elements of destination branding and established the conceptual framework of destination image using examples such as Antalya (Doğanlı, 2006) and Istanbul (İpar, 2011). The increase in the number of publications observed between 2011 and 2015 can be explained by the beginning of the association of digitalisation with tourism planning and cultural heritage. Studies focused on rural tourism and regional development came to the fore during this period (Aydın, 2012; İbiş, 2017).

The period between 2016 and 2020 represents a period of thematic expansion in the literature. During these years, the themes of gastronomy, cultural heritage and event tourism gained prominence (Çataklı, 2021; Karslı, 2021; Altınışık, 2017). In the post-2021 period, the concept of digital tourism has merged with new themes such as sustainability, smart destinations, digital storytelling, and digital nomadism, significantly broadening the scope of the literature (Kocaman, 2022; Karabacak, 2023; Yetiş, 2025). This development trajectory indicates that digital tourism in Türkiye is reaching conceptual maturity.

As of 2021, the prominent emergence of the theme of 'Smart Destinations' is directly related to the tourism sector's restructuring process following the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic period has made elements such as digital monitoring systems, contactless services, data-driven visitor management and crisis resilience mandatory in destination management. In this process, the smart destination approach has positioned itself not only as a technological innovation but also as a strategic policy tool that integrates health safety, sustainability and crisis management (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Gretzel, 2020). Therefore, the increase observed in the literature after 2021 is considered an academic and administrative response to the structural disruption caused by the pandemic. Furthermore, 2021 represents a period in which tourism policies at the international level were reshaped around the axes of 'recovery' and 'resilience.' Many countries and destinations have prioritised strategies based on smart destinations, digital infrastructure and data governance in order to increase their competitiveness after the pandemic. This trend has also been reflected in academic literature; the relationship between digitalisation, smart cities and smart destinations has begun to be addressed more intensively (UNWTO, 2021; Sigala, 2020). A similar trend is observed in the Turkish context, where digital tourism policies and smart destination applications have become one of the fundamental components of destination branding in the post-pandemic period. This situation is considered one of the key factors explaining the increased visibility of this theme in the literature after 2021.

The development of digital tourism literature represents a process characterised by both quantitative growth and qualitative diversity. In the early 2000s, digital elements were virtually absent from destination branding efforts. However, since 2010, digital marketing, online communication and digital culture elements have become an integral part of destination management (Mürteza, 2019; Tan and Armutcu, 2020). The development of digital tourism in Türkiye has followed a parallel course with both global technological advances and national digitalisation policies. In particular, the development of digital culture at the public administration level has led to the adoption of data-driven approaches in destination promotion (Uysal ve Malkoç Yılmaz, 2025).

Table 1: Thematic Distribution in Digital Tourism Literature in Türkiye

Thematic Area	Number of Publications	Featured Studies	Share in the Literature (%)
Cultural heritage and conservation	14	(Aslan, 2020; İbiş, 2017; Serçek ve Hassan, 2016)	17
Gastronomy and local identity	11	(Akgün Şahin, 2021; Karaca, 2025; Karslı, 2021)	13
Digital marketing and promotion	10	(Mürteza, 2019; Demir, 2021; Tan ve Armutcu, 2020)	12
Smart destination and technology	9	(Sever, 2025; Zhou, Buhalis ve Lian, 2024)	10
Digital storytelling and media	8	(Karabacak, 2023; Yetiş, 2025)	9
City branding and image	7	(Aydın, 2020; Karabulut, 2018; Altınışık, 2017)	8
Nature and rural tourism	6	(Göker, 2018; Göker ve Ünlüönen, 2019; Aydın, 2012)	7
Health and medical tourism	5	(Yılmaz ve Yılmaz, 2022)	6
Sustainability in tourism	5	(Kocaman, 2022; Sever, 2025)	6
Other sub-themes	7	Various	12

Table 2 shows the thematic areas that stand out in the digital tourism literature in Türkiye. The theme of cultural heritage and conservation is the strongest area, accounting for 17 per cent of the total literature. This theme focuses particularly on the promotion and preservation of historical destinations such as Cumalıkızık, Bergama, Göbeklitepe, and Diyarbakır on digital platforms (Aslan, 2020; İbiş, 2017; Serçek and Hassan, 2016). The theme of gastronomic tourism and local identity ranks second and examines the impact of digital media on the cultural branding of destinations (Akgün Şahin, 2021; Karaca, 2025; Karslı, 2021).

Smart destination and technology-focused studies are showing a growing trend in the literature (Sever, 2025; Zhou, Buhalis and Lian, 2024). These studies reveal how digital transformation is evaluated in terms of managerial efficiency and sustainability in tourism. Publications in the field of digital storytelling and media, meanwhile, focus on the processes of establishing emotional connections and conveying experiences in branding (Karabacak, 2023; Yetiş, 2025).

Most Effective Authors, Institutions, Journals and Thematic Areas

Author and institution-based analyses indicate that academic production in the field of digital tourism is concentrated in specific centres. Among the authors with the highest number of publications are academics specialising in gastronomy, communication and tourism management. In terms of university distribution, Istanbul University, Izmir Katip Çelebi University, Ege

University, Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Gazi University and Sakarya University of Applied Sciences stand out. These institutions form the scientific basis of the field through both their master's and doctoral theses and their article production.

Table 2: The Most Productive Institutions in the Field of Digital Tourism in Türkiye

Organisation Name	Number of Publications	Featured Studies	Main Themes
University of Istanbul	8	(Akgün Şahin, 2021; Gökkaya, 2019)	Gastronomy, city branding
Ege University	6	(Karslı, 2021; İbiş, 2017)	Gastronomy and cultural heritage
Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University	6	(Eroğlu, 2018; Gülecen, 2024)	Cappadocia, nature-based tourism
Izmir Katip Çelebi University	5	(Aktürk, 2022)	Local festivals, gastronomy
Gazi University	5	(Göker, 2018; Göker ve Ünlüönen, 2019)	Recreational activities, nature tourism
Sakarya University of Applied Sciences	4	(Çataklı, 2021)	Gastronomy and destination branding
Other institutions	17	Çeşitli	Sustainability, digital marketing

As shown in Table 3, Istanbul University stands out as the most productive institution in the field of destination branding in digital tourism. It is followed by Ege University and Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University. This situation reflects the regional diversity of academic production in Türkiye and shows that tourism is addressed in relation to different geographical characteristics.

When examining the journals in which the publications appear, publications such as the Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, Travel and Hotel Management Journal, Electronic Social Sciences Journal, Tourism Academic Journal, and TRT Academy stand out (Cerić, Więckowski, and Timothy, 2024; Sever, 2025; Kırık, 2024). These journals expand the academic impact of Turkish literature by providing visibility at both national and international levels.

Table 3: Most Frequently Used Keywords

Keyword	Frequency of Use	Thematic Relationship
Digital tourism	45	The general trend, digital transformation
Destination branding	38	Brand identity, tourism management
Cultural heritage	32	Protection, cultural transmission
Gastronomic tourism	25	Local identity, gastronomic experience
Digital marketing	22	Promotion, communication strategies
Smart destination	19	Technology, sustainability
Digital storytelling	15	Experience transfer, media strategy

Keyword	Frequency of Use	Thematic Relationship
City branding	13	Image, city identity
Digital nomad	10	New forms of tourism
Sustainable tourism	9	Environment, development policy

Keyword analysis demonstrates the conceptual density of the digital tourism literature. The concepts of 'digital tourism' and 'destination branding' form the core axis, with 'cultural heritage' and 'digital marketing' serving as supporting sub-themes. The rapid rise of the concepts of 'smart destination' and 'digital storytelling' over the past five years demonstrates the field's openness to innovative approaches (Zhou, Buhalis ve Lian, 2024; Yetiş, 2025).

Trends, Gaps and Future Research Recommendations

The findings reveal that digital tourism literature in Türkiye is undergoing a multidimensional development process. However, despite this rapid development, certain thematic gaps persist. In particular, there are limited empirical studies addressing the relationship between digitalisation and organisational management processes. The economic impacts of digital tourism are not sufficiently linked to regional development indicators. This situation necessitates an increase in future studies based on tourism economics and digital data analytics

Table 5: Research Gaps Identified in the Digital Tourism Literature in Türkiye

Empty Space	Explanation	Future Research Possibility
Digital governance and policy	The public administration dimension of digitalisation has not been sufficiently examined.	High
Sustainable digital applications	Data on environmental impacts is limited.	Middle
User experience analysis	Social media engagement data is low.	High
The impact of the digital economy	The relationship between tourism revenues and the level of digitalisation is not examined.	High
International comparisons	Türkiye is rarely compared with other countries.	Extremely high
Rural digital tourism	Research into digital infrastructure in rural areas is limited..	Middle

This table determines the direction of future research. In particular, studies focused on digital governance, sustainability and user experience have the potential to fill gaps in the literature. Furthermore, the lack of comparative analyses comparing digital tourism in Türkiye with international examples increases the importance of such research in the future (Cerić, Więckowski ve Timothy, 2024).

Table 6: The Thematic Evolution of Digital Tourism Literature in Türkiye

Term	Predominant Themes	Emerging Themes	Declining Themes
2006–2010	Tourism image, brand identity	-	-
2011–2015	Cultural heritage, city image	Gastronomy	Traditional promotion
2016–2020	Gastronomy, event tourism, digital promotion	Smart destination	One-way communication
2021–2025	Digital storytelling, sustainability, digital nomadism	Data-driven management	Single brand approach

The thematic evolution shown in Table 6 indicates the direction of conceptual transformation in the field of digital tourism. While early studies approached branding as a visual and image-based process, digital governance, data analytics and user experience have come to the fore in recent years. This situation demonstrates that digital tourism has transformed into a holistic strategic management field rather than merely promotional activities (Sever, 2025).
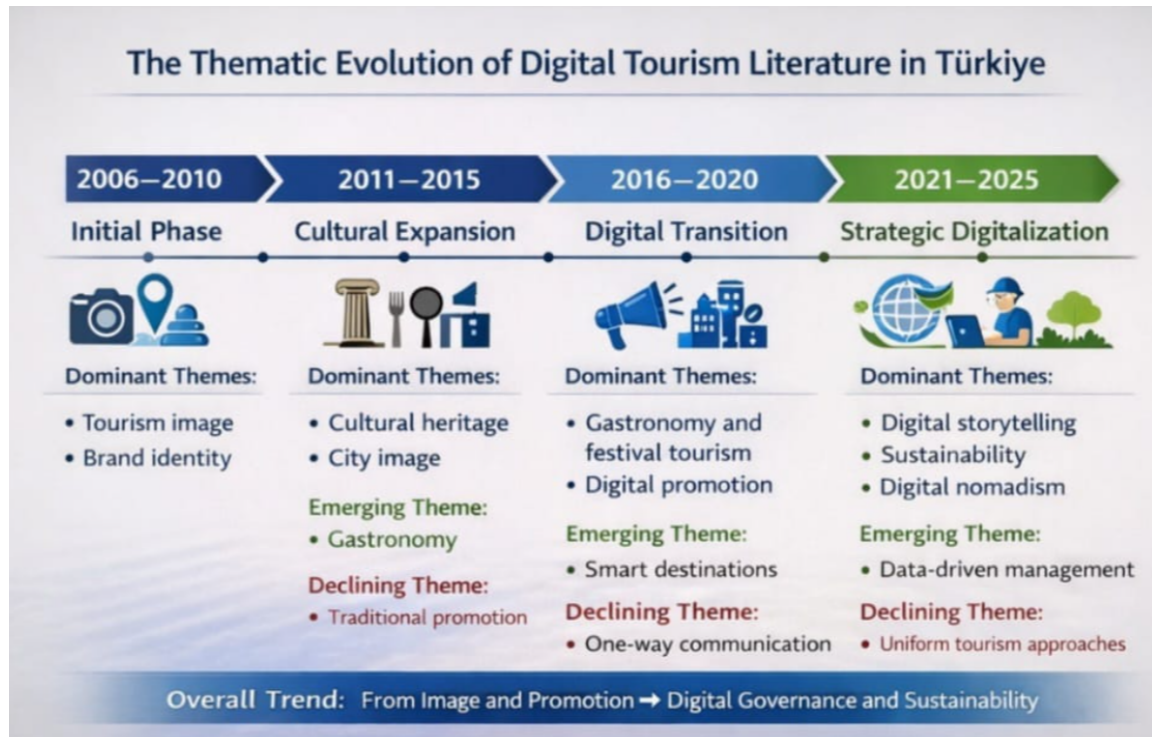
Figure 1: The Thematic Evolution of Digital Tourism Literature in Türkiye

This timeline demonstrates that thematic transformation in digital tourism literature has followed a gradual and contextual process rather than a linear one. Early studies focused more on image and promotion, while in subsequent years cultural content, digital interaction and, ultimately, data-driven governance came to the fore. The thematic intensification observed particularly after 2021 reveals that digital tourism has evolved from being merely a marketing tool into a strategic, sustainable and user-centred management field.

Overall, the findings reveal that there are three phases in the academic development of digital tourism in Türkiye. The first phase, spanning 2006–2015, is the conceptual framework development period. The second phase, 2016–2020, is the period of intensive applied studies and regional examples. The third phase, 2021–2025, is the maturity phase, where digital transformation has taken root and sustainability and technology themes come to the fore. This evolution indicates that digital tourism in Türkiye is approaching academic maturity.

The overall assessment of the findings indicates that the digital tourism literature in Türkiye has acquired an interdisciplinary character. There is a strong intersection between the fields of tourism, communication, cultural studies, business, and public administration. Digitalisation is not only a technological variable but has also become a determinant of cultural identity and social participation. Türkiye's digital tourism literature is achieving a globally competitive scientific depth and contributing to the international literature.

CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively examines the general trends, thematic orientations, and scientific collaboration networks within the field of destination branding in digital tourism in Türkiye. The bibliometric analysis revealed that there has been significant academic growth in the field of digital tourism in Türkiye over the past twenty years, with a notable increase in the number of publications and subject diversity, particularly since 2015. The digitalisation process brings about a multidimensional restructuring in the field of tourism, encompassing not only technological transformation but also management, promotion, preservation of cultural heritage, and local development dimensions.

According to the findings, digital tourism literature in Türkiye has developed through three main phases. During the first phase, between 2006 and 2015, most studies focused on the fundamental components of destination branding and the concept of tourism image. During this period, the concept of digitalisation was still addressed in a limited manner, with research progressing mainly in the areas of promotion and brand identity. Between 2016 and 2020, topics such as gastronomic tourism, cultural heritage and event-based branding came to the fore; concepts such as digital communication, online marketing and new media began to be integrated into the field of tourism. In the 2021–2025 period, the scope of digital transformation expanded, with concepts such as sustainability, smart destinations, digital storytelling, digital nomadism, and data-driven management becoming dominant themes in the literature. This indicates that digital tourism research in Türkiye is maturing in line with global trends.

Research findings reveal that digital tourism in Türkiye is primarily shaped around the themes of cultural heritage, gastronomy, and digital marketing. Cultural heritage and conservation-focused initiatives aim to ensure the sustainable representation of destination identity on digital platforms. The gastronomy theme integrates elements of local identity and uniqueness with branding processes, ensuring that regional promotion is enhanced through digital tools. The themes of digital marketing and storytelling increase the visibility of destinations and enable the establishment of an emotional connection with tourists. The smart destination and digital governance approach enables the integration of data-driven decision-making processes into tourism management.

The data obtained in the study shows that academic production is concentrated in certain universities and regional centres across Türkiye. Universities based in Istanbul, Izmir, Nevşehir, Konya and Ankara produce the majority of theses and articles in the field of digital tourism. This situation reflects the impact of both academic specialisation and regional destination policies on the literature. It has been determined that collaboration networks between authors have expanded in recent years, while international partnerships have begun to increase. Türkiye's visibility in this field is strengthened by contributions in international publications.

One of the most striking findings observed in digital tourism research is the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Contributions from different disciplines such as tourism, communication, urban planning, cultural studies, business and public administration enrich the multidimensional structure of digital tourism. The digitalisation process transforms tourism from being merely an economic activity into an area of cultural, social and technological transformation. This transformation ensures that destinations are perceived not only as physical spaces but also as dynamic entities represented by virtual identities.

Research findings also indicate that the economic and managerial potential of digital tourism in Türkiye has not yet been fully realised. Empirical studies revealing the effects of digitalisation on regional development are limited. Furthermore, there is a need for more data-driven research on the environmental sustainability and social participation dimensions of digital tourism. The integration

of digital governance, big data usage and artificial intelligence-supported analyses into tourism policies is important in terms of future research directions.

One of the most notable trends in the development of digital tourism in Türkiye is the use of digital storytelling and media representations. This strategy strengthens the emotional appeal of the destination and ensures that cultural heritage is conveyed more effectively. Digital storytelling establishes an identity bond between visitors and the destination and makes branding sustainable. This approach has been observed to have a positive impact on the destination image, particularly in examples such as Göbeklitepe, Cappadocia, Konya and Adana.

The research reveals that there is significant potential in areas such as cultural heritage, gastronomy, health tourism, smart cities and digital nomad lifestyles for the future of digital tourism in Türkiye. Supporting policies and projects developed in these areas with digital infrastructure will contribute to both the diversification of tourism and the acceleration of regional development. Collaborations between universities, local authorities and the private sector will enable digital tourism to achieve a more institutional framework.

In this context, destination branding in digital tourism in Türkiye has rapidly become a dynamic and multifaceted field of research. Digital technologies are transforming not only the promotion of tourism, but also its management, experience, sustainability and identity-building processes. Considering Türkiye's cultural diversity, geographical richness and technological development potential, it is possible to plan digital tourism strategies in a way that will increase international competitiveness. In this context, it is necessary to continue academic studies, develop data-driven policies and integrate digital tourism into local development processes. Digital tourism is considered a decisive factor in Türkiye's economic and cultural development in the future.

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THE DIGITAL PALATE: E-WOM, PARASOCIAL INTERACTION, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF GASTRONOMIC DESIRE

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of digital technologies and social media platforms, individuals have gained the opportunity to access people and communities in different parts of the world instantly, transcending spatial and temporal boundaries. In line with these developments, as traditional advertising tools have lost their impact compared to previous periods, consumers are increasingly turning to Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) when choosing a restaurant or food and beverage establishment. This includes reviewing online applications where other users share their experiences, as well as content such as photos and videos shared on social media platforms (Ergün & Akgün, 2016).

In the gastronomy sector, where consumer experience varies depending on personal expectations, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) has ceased to be merely an element of promotional activities for businesses; it has assumed a determining role in shaping corporate image, perception of trust, and preferability. Considering that user comments shared on online platforms yield positive or negative economic results, it has become a strategic necessity for businesses to ensure visibility in digital environments, reach large audiences, and influence these masses in order to gain a competitive advantage (Yaşar & Tekeler, 2023). Numerous studies have been conducted in the literature regarding this subject, examining it from various perspectives. Bansal and Voyer (2000) stated in their research that Word-of-Mouth communication is more effective than mass media when customers make purchasing decisions; the evolution of this situation over time formed the foundations of electronic Word-of-Mouth communication. As Rabjohn et al. (2008:2) noted, e-WOM is one of the traditional communication methods integrated into developing technological conditions. At the same time, the development of e-WOM has provided economic benefits by making businesses more visible on social networks and opening space in other digital areas. According to Pekerşen and Kaplan (2020, p. 2365), it is observed that food photos or videos shared on social media platforms affect individuals' purchasing or preference status.

Communication

The concept of communication is etymologically based on the word communication in English and French, and in its early periods, it was used in the sense of "correspondence." However, in later years, the concept of communication began to be referred to as "communication" by gaining a broader framework of meaning that includes correspondence. The root of the word communication lies in the Latin concept communis, which is used in the meanings of "common," "shared," or "belonging to more than one person and object." In this context, it is observed that communication

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is not merely the transmission of messages but also a process involving social interaction (Zıllıoğlu, 2007: 22).

Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Word-of-Mouth communication is defined as a form of communication based on trust with high persuasive power, where experiences, opinions, and evaluations are shared among individuals within a natural flow. The basis of this type of communication lies in individuals' tendency to find information based on personal experiences obtained from their social circles more reliable. Indeed, such information based on direct experience is perceived as less biased and more sincere compared to institutionally sourced messages. Accordingly, Word-of-Mouth communication is evaluated not only as a process of information transfer but also as an important form of social interaction where social trust is reproduced, social relationships are strengthened, and individuals' decision-making processes are shaped (Akar, 2015).

When considered historically, Word-of-Mouth communication is one of the oldest types of communication ensuring the circulation of information within human communities, long before the emergence of written and visual media tools. In traditional societies, the transmission of legends, cultural norms, and practical information from generation to generation occurred largely through oral communication. However, in the modern era, this form of communication has undergone a significant transformation with the effect of digital technologies, paving the way for the emergence of the concept of "Electronic Word-of-Mouth" (e-WOM) (Avcılar, 2010).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)

The internet assumes the role of the main starting point and an indispensable source of information for e-WOM for modern consumers. Thanks to developing internet technologies and applications, a significant increase has been recorded in the number of users researching a product or business in the virtual environment worldwide. With this transformation, traditional WOM communication has evolved into a new form called e-WOM, becoming a central phenomenon for consumers. Indeed, e-WOM has emerged as an even more effective communication tool than WOM over time (Sarıışık & Özbay, 2012).

In other words, e-WOM offers a platform where opinions and comments are shared from consumer to consumer as an updated version of traditional Word-of-Mouth communication in the virtual world. Such posts manage to attract the attention of potential customers on the verge of a consumption decision, as well as the management levels of the criticized businesses (Sen & Lerman, 2007). e-WOM offers users the opportunity to establish unlimited dialogue with other internet participants. Thanks to the global access feature of the internet, a tight communication environment is provided among consumers who are physically impossible to come together. Therefore, e-WOM is also referred to as consumer communication on the internet in the literature (Yazıcı, 2018).

The content of e-WOM encompasses evaluations regarding product performance, service quality, general impressions, and reliability transferred to others by current or previous customers. e-WOM is a non-commercial and informal source of information based on positive and negative experiences of users. The majority of those exchanging information in the virtual environment are usually customers who have personally experienced the relevant product or service; the remaining part consists of potential buyers wishing to obtain more information (Sarıışık & Özbay, 2012). Today, the internet provides the opportunity for ideas and experiences about a product to be shared quickly

and effortlessly among consumers through e-WOM activities (Park & Kim, 2008: 400). These shares are carried out through various platforms such as blogs, virtual communities, newsgroups, chat rooms, review sites, and social networks.

Eating Motivation

Eating is a process that must be completed to eliminate the physical hunger felt by the person and to satisfy physiological needs. In recent years, eating has begun to be seen as a tool for creating an experience, supported by motivations such as curiosity and pleasure, rather than just eliminating hunger (Yüksel, 2022). Social media is one of the most important dynamics of developing technology. The increase in the frequency of use of social media platforms expands the functional scope of these platforms and leads to the diversification of content types generated by users. Especially in recent years, it is observed that nutrition, gastronomy photography, social media accounts created by businesses for promotional purposes, and food photos or videos shared by individuals on their personal accounts have become significantly popular. Findings indicating that such content creates meaningful effects on individuals' eating motivations are increasing (Gedik, 2023). Food has become more visible through food videos, blogs, and photos popularized on social media, playing a key role in breaking individuals' prejudices and entrenched eating habits (Çaycı, 2019). Food has been viewed as a status tool in all ages from the past to the present. While consumption differences between the palace and the local people constituted an example in the past, social media posts bridge this gap today. In this context, while individuals view social media platforms as a tool to jump social status or demonstrate their status, they achieve internal satisfaction by eating at a popular venue and showing this to other users. This situation has turned food into a tool of pleasure and status, not just a means of eliminating hunger (Can & Avcı, 2023). Social media and mass media tools make foods that the person did not want to experience before, or that were out of the ordinary for them, preferable by using the element of curiosity. It is observed that individuals have turned social media platforms into a tool to meet people who have tried and experienced before and to exchange ideas by following photos, videos, or recipe blogs they see on these platforms (Güzel, 2020).

Parasocial Interaction and the Effect of Influencers

The first known studies in the field of parasocial interaction began in the 1940s. Unlike the known concept of communication, parasocial interaction, established as one-way, is the imaginary bond the viewer or user establishes towards the media character. Although it was shaped by actions such as feeling sad or happy about what the character on television experienced in the early days, the change in the type of communication today contributes to the development of parasocial interaction (Aytulun, 2015).

Parasocial interaction is characterized by being one-way, formed towards famous individuals, and constituting an imaginary relationship. Parasocial interaction is an interaction form that emerges when individuals follow people they feel closer to on their social media accounts and tend to develop a perception of similarity towards these people; it is among the important factors affecting individuals' daily lives. Media characters producing content in the field of gastronomy or sharing food photos can reach large audiences thanks to this parasocial bond and can be effective on individuals' food and beverage preferences and eating motivations (Akdeniz & Uyar, 2021). The term "Influencer" is a name given to people who produce content on social media platforms and appeal to a certain audience. Influencers, who regularly offer content to viewers and have the chance to appeal to large masses, can significantly affect people's preferences. They play an important role

in determining the purchasing status of a product or service and guiding people's food preferences and eating habits (Bayındır & Bayındır, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication is a phenomenon that has existed since the existence of humanity. It has developed over time and taken its current form. Significant changes in mass media tools have created today's social media culture and have begun to become a part of individuals' daily lives.

Gastronomy content shared on social platforms has become one of the fundamental elements shaping individuals' eating motivations. Food photos, short videos, and shares based on user experiences not only transfer information and experience but also significantly affect eating behaviors by arousing appetite, curiosity, and the desire to try in viewers. Social media increases its impact through Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM), which is the digital reflection of Word-of-Mouth communication. Users sharing their experiences and making positive or negative evaluations about restaurants or foods are perceived as a reliable source of information for potential consumers. In the literature examined within the scope of the study, it is emphasized that e-WOM is found more reliable compared to traditional marketing communication and strongly affects decision-making processes, especially in experience-based consumption areas such as gastronomy and destination preferences. Gastronomy content produced by influencers stands out as an important element guiding the eating motivations of social media users. The parasocial interaction established with followers makes the suggestions of these people sincerer and reliable; this situation is effective in shaping food choices. In this context, social media creates a multidimensional motivational space where individuals decide not only what they will eat but also where and with what experience expectation they will eat. When the study is evaluated, it demonstrates that social media and e-WOM have an important position in influencing individuals' eating behaviors by forming a structure that loads emotional, social, and symbolic meanings onto eating motivation rather than merely information seeking.

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GASTRONOMIC RECREATION: THE EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION OF LOCAL FLAVORS

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, gastronomy has not merely been a means of satisfying a biological need; it has also functioned as a reflection of cultural identity, social relations, and aesthetic values (Scarpato, 2002). While food culture constitutes an important indicator of individuals' connection with society, in the modern era gastronomy is no longer confined to "nutrition" alone but has become a field that produces experience and meaning (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). In this respect, gastronomy intersects with the notion of recreation and has secured a prominent position among leisure activities.

Recreation can be broadly defined as the set of activities undertaken in one's free time with the aim of physical, social, cultural, or psychological renewal (Bayrak et al., 2023; Bayram et al., 2020; Bayram & Kavlak, 2021; Demirel et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Karaküçük, 2014; Kavlak et al., 2020, 2021; Kavlak & Aksu, 2023). Within the spectrum of cultural forms of recreation, gastronomy has attracted increasing academic interest, particularly in recent years. Events such as local food festivals, grape harvest celebrations, village breakfasts, cooking workshops, and market tours do not merely satisfy nutritional needs; they also provide individuals with socio-cultural experiences, keep collective memory alive and generate personal pleasure (Quan & Wang, 2004). Accordingly, gastronomic recreation is regarded as a distinctive form of recreation that offers contributions at both individual and societal levels.

One of the most relevant theoretical frameworks for understanding gastronomic recreation is Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Experience Economy Theory. This approach posits that contemporary consumers do not simply purchase products or services; rather, they seek holistic and memorable experiences. Local gastronomic experiences (such as tasting an authentic kebab from Gaziantep cuisine, participating in an etliekmek workshop in Konya, or taking part in the grape harvest in the Aegean) offer individuals multidimensional experiences with aesthetic, cultural, and social components. The four core dimensions of the experience economy (entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism) are clearly observable in gastronomic recreation activities (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Gastronomic activities provide not only sensory pleasure but also cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). For instance, an individual who attends a grape harvest festival not only learns about the wine-making process but also acquires a sense of social status and cultural belonging. Similarly, the experiential consumption of local cuisines enhances individuals' life satisfaction while contributing to local economies (Okumus et al., 2007). In countries with a rich culinary heritage such as Türkiye, gastronomic recreation holds strategic importance for the preservation of cultural heritage, the strengthening of local identity, and the sustainability of tourism (Şahin & Ünver, 2015).

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In this section, the concept of gastronomic recreation, its theoretical foundations within the framework of the experience economy, and illustrative practices in the Turkish context will be addressed. In addition, the experiential dimensions of local flavors will be evaluated in relation to their effects on individuals' life satisfaction, cultural identity, and local development, and the individual, societal, and economic contributions of gastronomic recreation will be discussed. The section will also examine how gastronomic recreation has been transformed through processes of digitalization, the tendencies of younger generations, sustainability concerns, and the norms emerging in the post-pandemic period, as well as in the context of cultural diplomacy.

The Concept and Types of Recreation

Recreation is a multidimensional concept that encompasses activities individuals engage in during their free time for physical, mental, and social renewal (Karaküçük, 2014). Derived from the Latin term recreatio, the concept denotes "being recreated" or "renewal" and refers to individuals' efforts to distance themselves from the stress of everyday life and attain satisfaction at both individual and societal levels (Torkildsen, 2005). In modern societies, recreation is not merely the filling of free time; it is conceived as a process that enhances quality of life, strengthens social relationships, and contributes to identity formation (Kelly, 2012).

Recreational activities are generally examined under different categories such as physical, social, cultural, artistic, and psychological. While physical recreation includes activities such as sports, hiking, swimming, and cycling, social recreation covers gatherings with friends, community events, and participation in festivals. Cultural recreation focuses on the experience of cultural values through activities such as museum visits, theatre, music, handicrafts, and gastronomic practices (Edginton et al., 2004). Artistic recreation refers to creative pursuits such as painting, music, and dance, whereas psychological recreation contributes to mental renewal through activities like meditation, yoga, and silence-based practices.

In the context of Türkiye, the cultural dimension of recreation is particularly strong. Traditional games (e.g., mendil kapmaca, aşık oyunu), folk dances, coffeehouse culture, and local festivals are among the principal forms of recreation that help sustain collective memory (Wheatley & Bickerton, 2022). In recent years, gastronomy-based events (such as the Baklava Festival in Gaziantep, Etliekmek Days in Konya, or grape harvest festivals in the Aegean) have attracted attention as examples that foreground the gastronomic dimension of cultural recreation (Şahin & Ünver, 2015).

Recreation also serves as a vehicle through which individuals increase their social capital, acquire cultural capital, and enhance their life satisfaction (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, specific subtypes such as gastronomic recreation are significant not only in terms of individual gratification but also with regard to social belonging, the preservation of cultural heritage, and economic contributions.

In sum, accurately defining the concept of recreation and delineating its types is critical for situating gastronomic recreation within an interdisciplinary framework. Especially when considered under the category of cultural recreation and through the lens of the experience economy, gastronomic recreation emerges as a robust subfield within contemporary tourism and leisure studies.

Experience Economy Theory

In today's consumer society, individuals' expectations have gone beyond the mere purchase of products or services and have shifted towards holistic, memorable, and multidimensional experiences. One of the most influential approaches explaining this transformation is Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Experience Economy Theory. According to this theory, the historical

development of economies has evolved from commodities to goods, from goods to services, and ultimately to experiences. Thus, experience is regarded as one of the highest tiers of the modern consumption economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013).

The experience economy posits that consumers derive emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic gratification from the experiences they live through. Pine and Gilmore (1999) classify experiences into four core dimensions: entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism. These four dimensions offer a powerful explanatory framework in the context of gastronomic recreation:

- Entertainment: Gastronomic activities provide individuals with opportunities to have an enjoyable time and to engage in social interaction. For instance, the inclusion of concerts and performances in food festivals reinforces the entertainment dimension (Oh et al., 2007).

- Education: Local culinary workshops enable participants to learn recipes, experiment with cooking techniques, and acquire new knowledge. In this regard, gastronomic recreation also functions as an educational experience (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

- Aesthetics: The presentation of local flavors, the decoration of the venue, the ambience, and the broader cultural atmosphere nurture individuals' aesthetic pleasure. The design of gastronomic spaces reinforces this aesthetic experience (Oh et al., 2007).

- Escapism: Gastronomic experiences offer individuals an opportunity to escape from the routines of everyday life. For example, grape harvest festivals or dining experiences organized in natural settings allow participants to feel as if they have "escaped" into a different world (Neuhofer et al., 2014).

Since the 2000s, the experience economy approach has been widely employed in tourism and recreation studies. The work of Oh et al. (2007) demonstrates that the experience economy provides a robust model for the marketing of tourism and gastronomic destinations, while Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) show that this approach constitutes an effective theoretical foundation for understanding participant motivations in cultural events and festival research.

In the context of Türkiye, when gastronomic recreation is examined from the perspective of the experience economy, it becomes evident that local cuisines are not merely foods to be consumed but multidimensional experiences. Gaziantep's designation as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, grape harvest events in Cappadocia, and etliekmek workshops in Konya concretely reflect the entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism dimensions of the experience economy (Şahin & Ünver, 2015).

In conclusion, the Experience Economy Theory is one of the most suitable theoretical approaches for explaining why gastronomic recreation exerts such a strong appeal for individuals and society. This is because gastronomic recreation represents not only a biological act but also an emotional, cognitive, and cultural experience.

The Experiential Dimension of Gastronomic Recreation

Gastronomic recreation is not limited to meeting individuals' nutritional needs; it enables them to have multidimensional experiences in sensory, emotional, cognitive, and cultural terms (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). From the perspective of the experience economy, gastronomic activities offer a holistic experience that encompasses the dimensions of entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). These experiences can be examined through several interrelated facets.

From a sensory standpoint, gastronomic recreation is enriched through the activation of taste, smell, visual, auditory, and tactile senses. For example, the crisp sound of freshly prepared baklava

in Gaziantep or the distinctive aroma of olive oil used in Aegean cuisine leaves a lasting imprint on individuals' memories. In line with Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) experiential consumption theory, such multi-sensory interaction generates not only physiological satisfaction but also aesthetic and emotional gratification.

On a social level, the processes of preparing and consuming food serve as a medium for interpersonal interaction and the strengthening of community belonging. Participants who harvest grapes during a grape festival or knead dough together in a cooking workshop are not merely taking part in a gastronomic activity; they are simultaneously reinforcing their social ties. Quan and Wang (2004) argue that food experiences function as "supporting experiences" within tourism activities, enhancing social interaction and the sense of satisfaction.

Culturally, local gastronomic experiences are significant for the preservation of cultural heritage and the transmission of collective memory. Everett (2016) emphasizes that foods are not only objects of consumption but also powerful symbols employed in processes of identity construction. In this respect, gastronomic recreation helps participants connect with local culture, satisfy their quest for authenticity, and accumulate cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

From the perspective of experiential consumption, Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) framework is critical for understanding the essence of gastronomic recreation. When individuals participate in gastronomic activities, they do not merely consume a meal; they also acquire prestige, belonging, and meaning (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016). In Türkiye, grape harvest festivals in Cappadocia or etliekmek workshops in Konya present participants with all of these experiential facets simultaneously, thereby creating a multilayered experience (Şahin & Ünver, 2015).

In sum, gastronomic recreation occupies an important position in contemporary understandings of leisure through its sensory richness, social bonding potential, cultural authenticity, and experiential consumption characteristics. The fact that these experiences enhance individuals' life satisfaction, contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, and support local economies renders gastronomic recreation a strategic field of practice and research.

Gastronomic Recreation Tendencies Among Younger Generations

Today, two of the most dynamic participant groups in gastronomic recreation are members of Generation Z and Generation Y. These younger cohorts perceive food experiences not merely as acts of tasting but also as processes of social sharing, learning, and exploration. As Gössling et al. (2018) emphasize, young tourists are particularly inclined to make more conscious choices regarding sustainability and authenticity. Street foods, gastronomy festivals, and workshop-based activities rank among the events that attract strong interest from younger generations. In Türkiye as well, the active participation of young people in such organizations directly shapes the future of gastronomic recreation.

At the same time, a notable tension characterizes young generations' gastronomic experiences: the pull towards global flavors versus the quest for authentic experiences. Richards (2015) notes that young consumers simultaneously wish to remain connected to local cultures while also being part of global trends. For members of Generation Z, for instance, both traditional tastes from Anatolian cuisine and globally branded "street food" offerings can be equally appealing. This suggests that hybridized gastronomic experiences are likely to increase in the future. Consequently, event designs targeting younger generations will need to strike a careful balance between authenticity and modernity.

The gastronomic recreation tendencies of younger generations also herald a significant transformation in the years ahead. As Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) point out, digitalization and social

media use have turned young participants' gastronomy experiences into processes of online identity construction. In this context, festivals and workshops are no longer merely physical events; they are also transformed into shareable online content. These consumption patterns among younger cohorts enhance the strategic importance of social media campaigns, collaborations with influencers, and digital experiences in destination marketing. In sum, the gastronomic preferences of Generations Z and Y are critical factors that shape not only current patterns of participation but also the future development trajectory of gastronomic recreation.

Applications and Examples from Türkiye

Türkiye is one of the countries where gastronomic recreation can be observed most vividly. Its long history as a host to diverse civilizations, the climatic diversity offered by its geographical regions, and the distinctiveness of its local cuisines position the country as a unique setting for gastronomic experiences. Accordingly, gastronomic recreation is not only a domain in which individuals spend their leisure time, but also a powerful tool for the preservation of cultural heritage, the maintenance of collective memory, and the branding of destinations at both national and international levels.

Located in the southeastern part of Türkiye, Gaziantep is one of the most striking examples in this field. The city was included in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (Gastronomy) in 2015. Official sources emphasize that Gaziantep cuisine comprises more than 500 distinct dishes and that this heritage is made visible through events, workshops, and tasting programs organized within the framework of the GastroAntep International Gastronomy Festival. Everyday culinary practices such as lahmacun, katmer, and numerous types of kebab, which are deeply embedded in the city's daily life, simultaneously nourish the entertainment, educational, and escapism dimensions of gastronomic recreation and transport participants into a rich cultural universe (UNESCO, 2015; GoTürkiye, n.d.; Hürriyet Daily News, 2018).

Similarly, Hatay in southern Türkiye stands out as another key destination. The city joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (Gastronomy) in 2017. In its UNESCO profile, Hatay is highlighted for its Silk Road heritage, multicultural identity, tradition of spice trade, and a variety of gastronomy-themed festivals, including those centered on künefe. Events such as the Antakya Taste Festival organized by Antakya Municipality and the Street Flavors Festival organized by Hatay Metropolitan Municipality offer an educational dimension through on-site learning and workshop activities, while spaces such as the city's gastronomy market/spice bazaar create a powerful sensory atmosphere that reinforces the aesthetic and social dimensions of the experience (UNESCO, 2017; UNESCO, n.d.; Antakya Municipality, 2022; Hürriyet Daily News, 2024; Hatay Metropolitan Municipality [Hatay BB], 2022).

Moving to the country's interior, Konya draws attention in terms of gastronomic recreation with both its historical and cultural characteristics. Closely intertwined with Mevlevi culture, Konya cuisine reflects the city's identity through emblematic dishes such as etliekmek, okra soup, and oven-baked kebab. In particular, etliekmek workshops provide participants not only with the opportunity to taste the dish, but also with the chance to be directly involved in the process, from dough preparation to baking in a stone oven. This experience concretely embodies both educational and aesthetic dimensions, while local taste days organized in the city help to strengthen community participation (Şahin & Ünver, 2015).

Examples from the Aegean, Thrace, and the Black Sea; Gastronomic Recreation in İstanbul

In western Türkiye, the Aegean and Thrace regions are prominent centers of gastronomic recreation due to their viticulture and olive oil culture. The Bozcaada Culture, Arts and Vintage Festival (Kültür Sanat ve Bağbozumu Festivali), held annually on the island of Bozcaada, offers

participants a nature-integrated experience through grape harvesting, workshops, and concerts (Bozcaada Municipality, 2025). Similarly, the Ayvalık International Olive Harvest and Tourism Festival (Ayvalık Uluslararası Zeytin Hasat ve Turizm Festivali) makes olive and olive oil culture visible in an experience-oriented manner through harvest walks, tastings, and culinary workshops (Ayvalık Municipality, 2024; Ayvalık Chamber of Commerce, 2022). In Thrace, the Yayla Abundance, Prosperity, Harvest, and Vintage Festivities in Kırklareli (Yayla Bolluk, Bereket, Hasat ve Bağbozumu Şenlikleri) reinforce the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of the experience through parades, symbolic vintage ceremonies, and local product stands (Kırklareli Municipality, n.d.).

In northern Türkiye, the Black Sea Region offers some of the most dynamic examples of gastronomic recreation, particularly through anchovy festivals. For instance, the Rize Anchovy Festival (Rize Hamsi Festivali) simultaneously generates entertainment, aesthetic pleasure, and social interaction through anchovy offerings, horon folk dances, and concerts (Rize Municipality, 2023a, 2023b). Held along the coastline, these events provide participants with an opportunity to detach from everyday routines and adopt a different way of life, even if temporarily.

Türkiye's largest metropolis, İstanbul, showcases both traditional and modern dimensions of gastronomic recreation. The Grand Bazaar (Kapalıçarşı) makes the city's multilayered culinary culture visible as a historical site of commerce and socialization (Kapalıçarşı Shopkeepers Association, n.d.), while the urban conservation status of the Kadıköy Historic Market area supports the spatial continuity of market culture and street foods (İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality [İBB] Department of Urban Planning, 2022). In international travel guides, the Kadıköy Market is described as a "foodie" attraction center in terms of local production and street flavors, and guided gastronomy tours organized along the Spice Bazaar–Kadıköy route allow visitors to experience the educational and entertainment dimensions of the experience economy simultaneously (Lonely Planet, n.d.; Context Travel, n.d.).

Various cities across Anatolia further illustrate the diversity of gastronomic recreation. In Şanlıurfa, the isot (chili pepper) festival and traditional sıra geceleri combine gastronomy with music and entertainment to create a multidimensional experience. In Mardin, Syriac wine production and stone-oven dishes offer participants a richly multicultural culinary experience. In Kayseri, the mantı (Turkish dumpling) festival transforms the preparation and consumption of a symbolic local dish into a recreation event. In Kars, cheese routes focusing on gravyer and kaşar cheese production integrate gastronomy with agricultural experiences. This diversity demonstrates that gastronomic recreation is not confined to a few cities, but rather has a wide field of application extending across all of Türkiye.

In conclusion, practices of gastronomic recreation in Türkiye contribute not only to individual leisure satisfaction, but also to the preservation of cultural heritage, the strengthening of social belonging, and the sustainable development of local economies. The richness extending from Gaziantep to Hatay, from Konya to the Aegean and Thrace, from the Black Sea to İstanbul, and to various cities across Anatolia strongly reflects the entertainment, education, aesthetic, and escapism dimensions of the experience economy. In doing so, the diverse examples of gastronomic recreation emerging in different regions of Türkiye enhance the country's tourist appeal, increase individuals' life satisfaction, and transform gastronomy into a domain of cultural experience.

Gastronomic Recreation and Cultural Diplomacy

Gastronomic recreation is not only a domain that generates individual pleasure and social belonging; it also emerges as an effective instrument in international relations. In this context, the concept of gastrodiplomacy refers to the ways in which nations use their culinary cultures to gain recognition on a global scale. Everett (2016) emphasizes that gastronomic tourism plays a critical

role in the international promotion of cultural identities and in enhancing the brand value of destinations. Cities included in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the field of gastronomy are therefore not only centers of touristic attraction, but also important vehicles for cultural diplomacy. In this way, gastronomic recreation extends beyond food experiences and becomes one of the means through which countries express themselves in the international arena.

In the context of Türkiye, gastronomic recreation offers significant opportunities for cultural diplomacy. The designation of Gaziantep and Hatay as UNESCO Cities of Gastronomy is regarded as a strategic step in the worldwide promotion of Turkish cuisine. Richards (2015) argues that gastronomy-based events are not merely tourism-oriented activities; they can also be used to foster international collaborations, cultural exchange, and the soft power strategies of nation-states. In this regard, festivals, exhibitions, and culinary workshops centered on Türkiye's regional cuisines are not only sites of touristic experience, but also powerful instruments of cultural diplomacy.

Within the framework of cultural diplomacy, gastronomic recreation contributes substantially to nation branding and to processes of cultural interaction. Chapple-Sokol (2013) notes that culinary culture is being used with increasing frequency in nation-branding efforts and that foods function as "silent ambassadors." In this sense, Türkiye's rich culinary heritage is presented not merely as a touristic attraction, but also as an indicator of cultural diversity, tolerance, and sharing at the international level. Consequently, gastronomic recreation possesses a strong potential to occupy a central place in Türkiye's soft power strategies within the broader scope of cultural diplomacy.

Contributions of Gastronomic Recreation

Gastronomic recreation is not merely an activity through which individuals occupy their leisure time; it is a phenomenon that generates wide-ranging effects at individual, social, cultural, and economic levels. With its multidimensional structure that encompasses the elements of entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism described by the experience economy, gastronomy plays a significant role in enhancing individuals' quality of life. Gastronomy festivals, workshops, street food tours, and grape harvest events organized in different regions of Türkiye do more than provide sensory pleasure; they also function as social mechanisms that contribute to identity construction, social solidarity, and local development.

At the individual level, one of the most important effects of gastronomic recreation is its capacity to increase life satisfaction and the quality of leisure experiences. Food experiences reinforce not only the sense of taste, but also individuals' emotional, aesthetic, and social gratification. When participants actively engage in the preparation of local dishes or try new flavors in a festival setting, they cease to be mere consumers and instead become part of the experience itself. This process can foster "flow" experiences, thereby strengthening psychological well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). At the same time, gastronomic activities offer educational benefits by enhancing cultural awareness and supporting knowledge acquisition (Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

From a societal perspective, gastronomic recreation plays a critical role in preserving cultural heritage and sustaining collective memory. The ways local dishes are prepared, the ingredients used, and the rituals of presentation all form part of the cultural values transmitted from past to present. Individuals who participate in such activities do not only gain a taste experience; they also participate in the reproduction of social identity. Dishes such as Gaziantep's baklava or Konya's etliekmek occupy symbolic positions in the collective memory of their respective cities. In this sense, gastronomic recreation serves as a tool that strengthens social belonging (Everett, 2016). In addition, festivals that bring together individuals from different cultural backgrounds enhance social solidarity and demonstrate the viability of living with cultural diversity (Richards, 2015).

Economically, gastronomic recreation makes substantial contributions to the tourism sector and local development. The marketing of local foods, gastronomy festivals, grape harvest tours, and local markets transform destinations into attractive nodes of touristic demand. Okumus, Okumus, and McKercher (2007) regard gastronomy as a core instrument in destination marketing and emphasize that local cuisines play a revenue-enhancing role in tourism. In Türkiye, cities such as Gaziantep, Hatay, and İstanbul have placed gastronomy at the center of their tourism strategies, thereby increasing the incomes of local producers and contributing to sustainable tourism policies. This process also supports the empowerment of small-scale producers and local farmers, enhances the value of agricultural products, and promotes rural development (Ellis et al., 2018).

In cultural terms, gastronomic recreation fulfils a crucial function in supporting the quest for authenticity. MacCannell's (1973) authenticity theory is highly relevant to the field of gastronomy, as individuals increasingly seek not only to taste food but also to experience the cultural context behind it. For this reason, gastronomic recreation contributes to the preservation of cultural continuity and to the strengthening of intergenerational transmission.

In sum, gastronomic recreation is a multidimensional phenomenon that enhances individual happiness, reinforces social identity, supports economic development, and protects cultural heritage. When evaluated alongside the four core dimensions of the experience economy, gastronomy in Türkiye emerges not merely as a realm of consumption, but as a form of recreation that elevates quality of life, strengthens social solidarity, and generates economic value. Consequently, gastronomic recreation is not only one of the key indicators of contemporary leisure practices but also bears strategic potential for the future of sustainable tourism and cultural heritage.

Gastronomic Recreation and Sustainability

Gastronomic recreation holds significant potential for minimizing environmental impacts in the context of sustainability. As Hall and Gössling (2013) suggest, reducing the environmental footprint of tourism and gastronomy activities, protecting natural resources, and lowering carbon emissions require strong support for local supply chains. In particular, the use of recyclable materials instead of single-use plastics at gastronomy festivals, the implementation of effective waste management practices, and the adoption of energy-efficient solutions strengthen environmental sustainability. Furthermore, raising festival participants' awareness through educational initiatives directly contributes to the dissemination of a sustainable gastronomy mindset.

Sustainability is not limited to environmental factors; it also encompasses the cultural dimension of gastronomic recreation. As Everett and Aitchison (2008) emphasize, the preservation of local dishes and the maintenance of authentic culinary practices are critically important for the sustainability of regional identity. Making local cuisines visible through festivals and celebrations creates opportunities for these values to be transmitted to younger generations and helps secure intergenerational cultural continuity. For example, local food festivals in Anatolia do more than simply celebrate gastronomic diversity; they also mediate the preservation of cultural heritage, thereby turning gastronomic recreation into a powerful instrument of cultural sustainability.

Another important dimension concerns the contribution of gastronomic recreation to social and economic sustainability. Prioritizing the products of local producers and small farmers in festivals encourages rural development and supports the economic independence of communities. In addition, sustainable gastronomy practices increase employment opportunities and contribute to the well-being of local populations (Ellis et al., 2018). In this sense, gastronomic recreation functions not only as a domain of individual pleasure and cultural experience, but also as a mechanism that supports economic sustainability.

In conclusion, gastronomic recreation should occupy a central place in sustainable tourism policies through its emphasis on ecological sensitivity, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the strengthening of local economies. In doing so, gastronomic recreation acquires strategic value as a holistic sphere of experience that aligns with sustainable development goals.

The Digitalization of Gastronomic Recreation

Digitalization constitutes one of the most significant domains of transformation in contemporary gastronomic recreation. Social media platforms enhance the visibility of gastronomic events and enable individuals to share their experiences. Richards (2015) emphasizes that, with digitalization, the experience economy has reached broader audiences and that social media has become a powerful tool in the global marketing of gastronomic events. Festival footage, workshop experiences, and street food content shared on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are not merely personal memories; they are also transformed into digital materials that serve destination marketing. In this way, gastronomic recreation gains digital visibility beyond physical participation and creates an arena of international interaction.

Another important aspect of digitalization is the emergence of online gastronomic experiences. The experience–technology interaction approach proposed by Neuhofer, Buhalis, and Ladkin (2014) demonstrates that digital tools are not only used to promote gastronomic events, but are directly involved in the production of experiences themselves. Especially in the post-pandemic period, virtual kitchen tours, online cooking workshops, and augmented reality–supported gastronomy applications have liberated gastronomic recreation from spatial constraints, allowing participants to access these experiences from their homes. These developments have not only increased accessibility but have also contributed to sustainability by reducing environmental impacts and by turning gastronomy into a more inclusive field of experience.

One of the most visible effects of digitalization appears in the gastronomic preferences of younger generations. Members of Generations Z and Y perceive gastronomy not merely as an act of tasting, but as a socially shareable online experience. The findings of Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) indicate that digital platforms are decisive in young tourists' destination choices and that gastronomy-focused content directly influences these preferences. In this context, influencer marketing, digital gastronomy festivals, and social media campaigns rank among the most important tools for capturing the interest of younger cohorts. Consequently, digitalization has become a strategic factor that transforms gastronomic recreation not only in terms of promotion and marketing, but also in relation to production experience, consumer motivation, and sustainability.

Post-Pandemic Gastronomic Recreation

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally transformed the nature of gastronomic recreation. Large-scale festivals, cooking workshops, and street food events came to a near standstill for an extended period. Gössling et al. (2021) note that the pandemic exposed structural vulnerabilities in the tourism industry and that gastronomy-focused events were directly affected by these fragilities. Participants' safety concerns, social distancing measures, and travel restrictions pushed gastronomic recreation away from its traditional forms and triggered a search for new types of experiences. In this respect, the pandemic reshaped gastronomic recreation as both a crisis and an opportunity for transformation.

During the pandemic, perceptions of hygiene and the process of digitalization gained critical importance in gastronomic recreation. The findings of Kim, Bonn, and Cho (2021) show that consumers' expectations regarding hygiene standards increased sharply during the pandemic and that food safety practices became one of the primary criteria in gastronomy experiences. In this period, online cooking workshops, virtual festival experiences, and digital tasting events became

widespread. Enabled by digital tools, gastronomic events were freed from spatial constraints and made accessible to participants from their own homes. These developments not only enhanced accessibility, but also contributed to sustainability by reducing environmental impacts and turning gastronomy into a more inclusive sphere of experience.

In the post-pandemic period, gastronomic recreation has taken on a hybrid structure. Hall et al. (2020) emphasize that health security, sustainability, and digitalization will be key determinants in the future of tourism after the pandemic. In this context, the future of gastronomic recreation is being shaped by hybrid models that combine hygiene-oriented safe event spaces with digitalization. For example, limiting the number of participants in festivals, prioritizing open-air venues, and reaching wider audiences through simultaneous digital broadcasts have become new norms of the post-pandemic era. In this way, gastronomic recreation is evolving into a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable form by drawing lessons from the pandemic experience.

Problems and Challenges

Although gastronomic recreation offers multidimensional benefits for individuals and societies, it also entails a range of problems and challenges. Chief among these are the loss of authenticity, excessive commercialization, health and hygiene issues, shortcomings in sustainability, and the pressures generated by globalization. In the Turkish context, gastronomic events are at times confronted with the risk of drifting away from cultural values due to rapid urbanization, intense tourism pressure, and market-driven dynamics.

One of the key challenges concerns the loss of authenticity. MacCannell's (1973) notion of "staged authenticity" is highly relevant to gastronomic recreation. At festivals, in restaurants, or during touristic events, supposedly authentic dishes are often reconfigured according to tourist expectations; modes of presentation are altered, and traditional ingredients may be replaced by industrial products. This creates a paradox in terms of satisfying participants' quest for authentic experiences (Sims, 2009). In Türkiye, especially in popular destinations, the tendency to make certain local dishes "suitable for tourists" has sparked debates regarding both taste and cultural value.

Another major difficulty lies in the excessive commercialization of gastronomic events, which may drift away from the original goal of preserving cultural heritage and become primarily oriented toward economic gain. Events organized in large cities and tourist regions are often treated as marketing tools; high entrance fees and festival content shaped under the influence of sponsors tend to commercialize participants' experiences (Richards, 2015). This situation limits the accessibility of gastronomic recreation and weakens its cultural dimension.

Health and hygiene issues constitute another significant set of problems for gastronomic recreation. While street foods and marketplaces offer rich experiential value, they can pose risks to participants if adequate hygiene conditions are not ensured. Food safety becomes a critical priority, particularly at festivals that bring together large crowds (Pilling, 2018). In Türkiye, the rapid proliferation of gastronomy festivals has further heightened the importance of rigorous health inspections.

Shortcomings in sustainability also pose substantial challenges. The procurement processes for local products used in gastronomic recreation may generate environmental problems. Due to high demand, some local products may be overexploited, risking the disruption of ecosystem balances, while the widespread use of single-use items creates serious problems in terms of waste management (Hall & Gössling, 2013). These issues underscore the urgent need to align gastronomic recreation practices with the principles of sustainable tourism.

Globalization, meanwhile, presents both opportunities and challenges for gastronomic recreation. On the one hand, global communication networks make Turkish cuisine more visible internationally; on the other, the spread of fast-food chains and the dominance of global taste preferences threaten the distinctiveness of local cuisines (Everett, 2016). In Türkiye, the growing inclination of younger generations toward global flavors raises concerns about the future of local gastronomic values.

In sum, the multidimensional opportunities offered by gastronomic recreation are accompanied by a series of risks. The loss of authenticity, commercialization, hygiene problems, sustainability gaps, and global pressures threaten the ability of gastronomic events to preserve cultural heritage, generate social benefits, and provide meaningful experiences for individuals. The future of gastronomic recreation thus depends not only on consumer demand, but also on the extent to which local governments, tourism policies, and academic research can develop effective solutions to these challenges.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Gastronomic recreation demonstrates that, in contemporary societies, leisure has moved beyond being a purely consumption-oriented activity and has become a multidimensional domain that offers individuals sensory, social, cultural, and aesthetic experiences. The case of Türkiye is one of the clearest examples of this multidimensionality. Gaziantep and Hatay as UNESCO Cities of Gastronomy, etliekmek workshops in Konya, grape harvest festivals in the Aegean and Thrace, anchovy festivals in the Black Sea region, and street food cultures in İstanbul all reflect, in an integrated way, the entertainment, education, aesthetic, and escapism dimensions of gastronomic recreation. These activities increase individuals' life satisfaction, reinforce social belonging, support the preservation of cultural heritage, and make significant contributions to local economies.

The Experience Economy Theory offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding gastronomic recreation. Pine and Gilmore's (1999) four-dimensional model helps explain why gastronomic events are so attractive: while participants enjoy themselves at a festival, they also acquire new knowledge, experience an aesthetic atmosphere, and find opportunities to escape from the routines of everyday life. At the same time, contemporary dynamics such as digitalization, changing tendencies among younger generations, and the new norms that emerged in the post-pandemic period have redefined gastronomic recreation along different dimensions. Social media–based experience sharing, virtual workshops, and hybrid festivals are concrete examples of this ongoing transformation.

However, alongside the opportunities it offers, gastronomic recreation also faces serious challenges. The loss of authenticity, excessive commercialization, hygiene problems, shortcomings in sustainability, and the pressures of globalization pose threats to the cultural value and social functions of gastronomic events. Younger generations' increasing orientation toward global flavors renders the future of local cuisines more contested, while heightened post-pandemic expectations regarding hygiene and the spread of digital participation models make new regulatory frameworks necessary. The future of gastronomic recreation therefore depends not only on individual demand, but also on the strategies developed by local governments, tourism policies, and academic research.

In this regard, several key recommendations can be proposed.

- Preserving authenticity: Local ingredients and traditional cooking methods should be actively promoted, and local producers should be placed at the center of festivals and workshops as primary actors to safeguard the integrity of regional food cultures.

- Ensuring hygiene and food safety: Especially at large-scale festivals, food safety inspections that comply with international standards should be made mandatory to minimize health risks and strengthen consumer trust (Pilling, 2018).

- Enhancing sustainability: Waste management practices should be improved, the use of single-use products should be reduced, and local production–consumption balances should be carefully monitored to align gastronomic recreation with sustainable tourism principles (Hall & Gössling, 2013).

- Developing digital and hybrid models: In line with post-pandemic trends, physical festivals should be supported by simultaneous online broadcasts, and the use of virtual workshops and digital marketing campaigns should be expanded to reach broader and more diverse audiences.

- Focusing on younger generations: For Generations Z and Y, the number of street food–based activities, short-format workshops, and social-media-oriented content should be increased, and collaborations with influencers should be used strategically to engage these cohorts.

- Promoting education and cultural awareness: Gastronomy-based cultural programs should be disseminated in schools and universities, and local cuisines should be taught explicitly in the context of cultural heritage to foster long-term appreciation and knowledge.

- Strengthening cultural diplomacy: Turkish cuisine should be more systematically employed as a powerful instrument in international marketing; new cities should be included in UNESCO processes, and comprehensive gastrodiplomacy strategies should be developed to leverage gastronomy as a tool of soft power (Okumus et al., 2007; Chapple-Sokol, 2013).

In sum, gastronomic recreation holds strategic importance in Türkiye not only for individual quality of life, but also for social and economic sustainability. When viewed through the lens of the experience economy, gastronomy emerges not merely as a leisure activity, but as a multidimensional sphere of experience in which individuals reproduce their identities, social ties, and cultural values. Future academic research and tourism policies that aim to develop gastronomic recreation in a sustainable, digitally compatible, youth-oriented, and culturally diplomacy-enhancing manner will generate lasting contributions at both local and global levels.

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A CULTURAL GASTRONOMIC JOURNEY THROUGH OCTOPUS AND OTHER SEAFOOD: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

Among the ecosystems on Earth, aquatic ecosystems harbour the richest areas of biological diversity. Aquatic organisms living in ocean, sea, lake and river ecosystems occupy a strategic position both in terms of maintaining ecological balance and human nutrition. Sustainable food supply, one of the fundamental problems facing humanity today, is directly related not only to terrestrial resources but also to organisms provided by marine and freshwater ecosystems. This relationship is naturally linked to the demand for protein necessary for human development. Among the ecosystems existing on Earth, aquatic ecosystems provide the most sustainable source of protein. In this context, the term "aquatic products" refers to a broad biological group that includes fish, crustaceans, molluscs, seaweed, and other aquatic organisms.

Research Aim and Methodology

The main objective of this article is to examine the journey of the "octopus" product in gastronomy, from "food chemistry to the cultural table," from a multidimensional perspective. The study will seek answers to the following questions:

(i)   How can the chemical composition and nutritional value of octopus be defined?

(ii)   How has octopus established its place in a historical and cultural context?

(iii)   What similarities and differences exist between the use of octopus in Turkish cuisine and in world cuisines?

(iv)   What is the level of sustainability in terms of octopus consumption and production, and what future recommendations stand out in this context?

A review study was adopted as the method. Within this scope, peer-reviewed articles published in English, Turkish and German, institutional reports (e.g. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations – FAO) and current databases were searched. Keywords such as "octopus", "cephalopod nutrition", "Turkish seafood culture", "Turkish seafood culture", "octopus gastronomy" and "Die Seefrüchte der türkischen Küche" were used in the literature search. The data was divided into sections using thematic analysis, and each section was synthesised with commentary. This allowed for a combined perspective on both the nutritional/scientific aspects and the gastronomic/cultural aspects of octopus.

Global Biological Diversity of Aquatic Products

Aquatic products represent a significant portion of the planet's biological diversity. The report "The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture" published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (2024) reveals that approximately 34,000 species of fish and more than 7,000 species of molluscs have been identified in the world's oceans and inland waters. Some of these species are

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used directly for human consumption, while others contribute indirectly to the food chain by maintaining ecosystem balance (FAO, 2024).

Aquatic ecosystems with such high biological diversity are extraordinarily rich not only in terms of species number but also in terms of genetic diversity, adaptability, and habitat diversity. In their study published in Nature magazine, Golden and colleagues (2021) emphasise that aquatic products are not limited to fish meat; invertebrates, crustaceans and molluscs also have extremely high potential in terms of biology and nutrition.

In this context, Octopus vulgaris (the most common octopus species), an important component of marine ecosystems, is noteworthy for both its high biochemical adaptation capacity and its ecological function. Octopuses, with their advanced nervous systems, camouflage abilities, and complex behaviours, are valuable subjects for study not only biologically but also culturally.

The Importance of Aquatic Products in Human Nutrition

Seafood is highly valuable in human nutrition in terms of both macro nutrients (protein, fat) and micro nutrients (vitamins, minerals, omega-3). Octopus meat is characterized by a high protein content, low total fat, and a favorable mineral profile when compared to terrestrial animal proteins (see Table 1)(FAO/INFOODS, 2013; USDA, 2024). Seafood, in particular, stands out in terms of the bioavailability of micronutrients that are critical to human health, such as long-chain omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA), vitamin B12, iodine, zinc, and iron, which cannot be supplemented externally (UN Nutrition, 2021).

Table 1. Comparative nutritional composition of octopus and selected common protein sources, including protein content, fatty acid profile, and key mineral contributions per 100 g edible portion. Data compiled from published food composition databases.
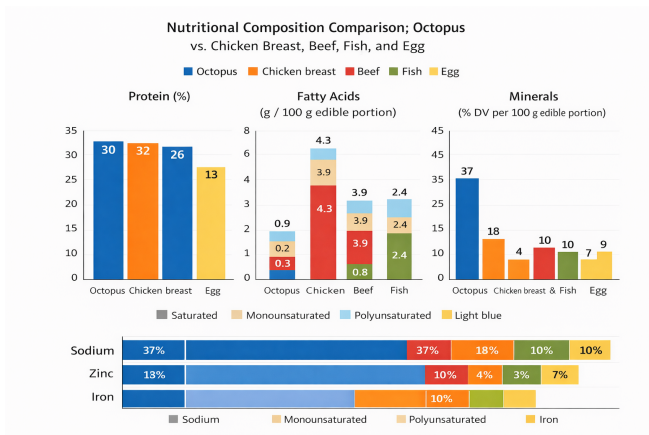

A study by Farmery et al. (2020) indicates that seafood directly impacts food security, particularly in low-income coastal communities, and has positive effects on child growth and development. In addition, it is emphasised that aquatic products have a lower environmental impact in terms of carbon footprint and land use compared to terrestrial animal protein production (Golden et al. , 2021).

Today, the gastronomic use of aquatic products is also rapidly expanding. Fish, shellfish and molluscs are valued in world cuisines not only as a source of protein but also as cultural identity elements. In this context, octopus has a special position due to both its nutritional value and gastronomic diversity.

Description and Biological Characteristics of the Octopus (Octopus vulgaris)

Octopuses belong to the Cephalopoda class of the Mollusca (Molluscs) family and, with their advanced nervous system and behavioural abilities, constitute one of the most complex groups of invertebrates. Octopus vulgaris (common octopus), which belongs to this class, is one of the most recognised species worldwide, both ecologically and gastronomically. This species belongs to the Octopodidae family and usually lives in sheltered areas such as shallow coastal waters, rock crevices, caves and seaweed beds (Norman, 2000).

The basic morphological characteristics of octopuses include eight muscular arms, a developed nervous system, the ability to change colour and texture, and a soft, boneless body structure. The hundreds of suction discs on each arm are highly functional for both hunting and movement. Studies have shown that Octopus vulgaris has approximately 500 million neurons, most of which are located in the arms, indicating that neural control is distributed in a decentralised manner (Hochner, 2012).
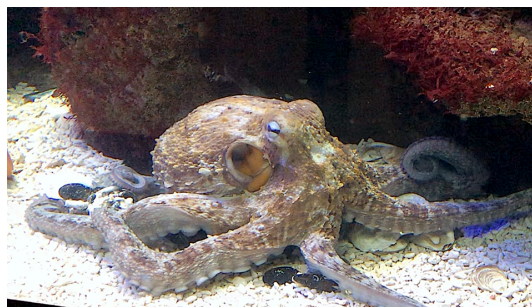
Figure 1. Octopus vulgaris showing the mantle cavity and funnel, photographed at Zoo am Meer in Bremerhaven (Olga Ernst, 2025). Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Physiologically, Octopus vulgaris adapts to its environment thanks to chromatophore cells that enable rapid colour change. This feature creates an effective camouflage mechanism during both defence and hunting (Hanlon & Messenger, 2018). Furthermore, this species can change its shape to match its surroundings by altering the muscle layers on its body surface.

In terms of feeding, octopuses are carnivorous organisms; they typically feed on crabs, mussels, oysters, and small fish. After capturing their prey, they break their shells with their powerful beak-like structure and consume their contents. This behaviour indicates that they occupy a top predator position in the marine ecosystem (Boyle & Rodhouse, 2005).

Figure 2. Veined octopus (Amphioctopus marginatus) capturing and eating a crab, demonstrating carnivorous feeding behavior (Silke Baron, 2009). Licensed under CC BY 2.0.

In terms of its reproductive cycle, Octopus vulgaris is one of the semelparous species with a single reproductive period; the female dies shortly after laying her eggs. The eggs are usually laid in sheltered environments such as caves or under rocks, and the female protects them until they

hatch. After passing through the planktonic stage, the larvae transition to a benthic lifestyle (González et al., 2010).
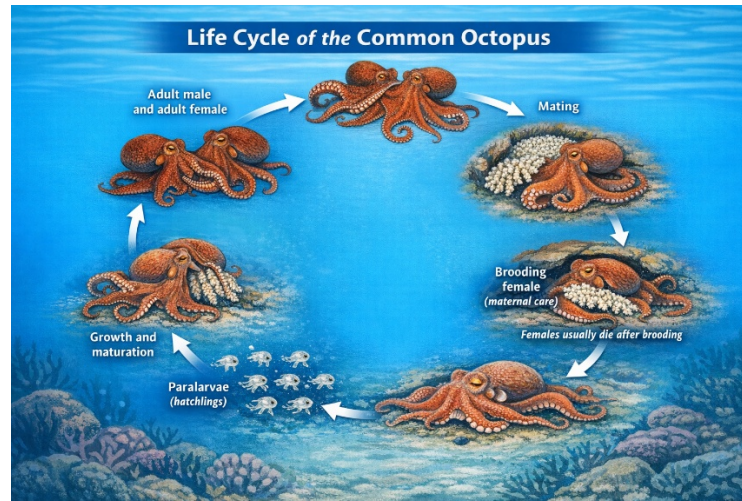
Figure 3. Life cycle of the common octopus (Octopus vulgaris), illustrating adult male and female stages, egg laying, maternal brooding behavior, post-reproductive death of the female, planktonic paralarval stage, juvenile settlement, and growth to adulthood.

These biological characteristics give octopuses a special place not only in ecological systems but also in the science of gastronomy. This is because Octopus vulgaris, with its high protein content, low fat content and rich mineral composition, is notable for both its nutritional value and sensory quality. In this respect, as will be detailed in the following sections, octopus has a versatile range of uses in world cuisines.

The introduction of Octopus into Turkish Culinary Culture

Among the traditional cuisines based on seafood along the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts, octopus (Octopus vulgaris) gained a foothold relatively late. With the increase in fishing in these regions, the rise in demand for seafood alongside tourism, and the diversification of coastal restaurants, octopus has gradually been incorporated into the dining culture (Yabanlı et al., 2022). For example, a consumption study conducted in Istanbul indicated that participants were hesitant about consuming seafood, particularly molluscs such as octopus, which were perceived as "unfamiliar" (Kurtaran & Pamuk, 2012).

Furthermore, cultural studies and field observations conducted in Türkiye show that octopus became part of the meze culture and began to be served grilled or in salads in the 1980s and 1990s. During this process, tourist expectations and the search for a "seafood experience," particularly in holiday regions, accelerated the octopus's rise to gastronomic symbol status (Akbulut, 2018). However, research conducted in Türkiye's coastal cities has shown that although octopus consumption is widespread, it is still considered "new" in terms of processing, cooking and presentation techniques and is still perceived as unusual by some consumers (Salman et al., 2023).

In this context, the adaptation of octopus into Turkish food culture represents a process of transformation not only as a biological resource but also in terms of tourism, regional identity, culinary modernisation, and seafood gastronomy. The following sections of this article will detail the forms of use in Turkish cuisine and the cultural factors playing a role in this process.

Food Chemistry and Health Aspects

Octopus is a mollusc that stands out among seafood for its high biological value protein structure, low fat content and functional components. Current research in both nutrition science and gastronomy indicates that Octopus vulgaris is a remarkable product not only as a protein source but

also due to its biological components that support human health (Özoğul & Özoğul, 2000; Lourenço et al., 2017).

Chemical Composition of Octopus (Protein, fat, vitamin, mineral content)

Octopus meat has a balanced composition with high protein (approximately 18–20 g/100 g), low fat (1–2 g/100 g) and high mineral content. The protein fraction is particularly rich in myofibrillar and sarcoplasmic proteins, and the digestibility of these proteins is over 90% (Özoğul & Özoğul, 2000).

Despite its low fat content, this fat fraction contains long-chain omega-3 fatty acids (especially EPA and DHA). These components are important for cardiovascular health and neurological functions and are rare components that cannot be supplemented externally (Toral et al., 2021). Furthermore, trace elements such as selenium, zinc, iron, and copper are found in high concentrations in octopus tissue; these minerals play a role in cellular antioxidant defence mechanisms (Lourenço et al., 2017).

In terms of vitamins, Octopus vulgaris meat is particularly rich in B12, niacin, and riboflavin. These vitamins are critical for energy metabolism and haematological functions. Therefore, in terms of its chemical composition, octopus is both a low-calorie and highly nutrient-dense seafood.

Nutritional Value and Dietary Importance of Octopus

In terms of nutritional value, octopus ranks among the sources of "high biological value protein". This designation relates to the fact that the essential amino acids it contains (especially leucine, isoleucine, and valine) are present in proportions close to human requirements (Toral et al., 2021). Additionally, octopus meat has a low cholesterol content and a high phospholipid content, making it a heart-healthy seafood option (Nunes et al., 2019).

From a dietary perspective, due to its low fat-high protein profile, it is recommended in nutrition models aimed at weight control, diabetes and cardiovascular risk reduction ( ) (Mourente & Rodríguez, 2020). The meat of Octopus vulgaris is a protein source with low allergenic potential as it does not contain gluten, lactose or collagen; it is therefore preferred in functional diets.

Health Effects (Cardiovascular health, nervous system, metabolism)

The health benefits of octopus are not limited to its nutritional value. The omega-3 fatty acids it contains lower triglyceride levels, exhibit anti-inflammatory effects, and support endothelial function (Toral et al., 2021). In addition, its high taurine content has a neuromodulatory effect on the nervous system, regulating the stress response (Shimada et al., 2015).

The selenium and zinc in its mineral composition strengthen immune system activity, while vitamin B12 plays an important role in nerve transmission and erythrocyte formation. All these properties indicate that octopus is a nutritious alternative, especially for older individuals and groups at risk of metabolic syndrome.

The Functional Food Potential of Octopus

In the current literature, octopus is also considered a functional food. This is because some bioactive peptides in its structure exhibit antioxidant, antithrombotic, and antimicrobial properties (Wu et al., 2019). These peptides are released during protein hydrolysis and are defined as components that support human health.

Furthermore, it has been reported that collagen-like structural proteins obtained from octopus have positive effects on skin health and tissue regeneration; therefore, they have also begun to be used in

non-food areas (e.g., nutraceutical products) (Kim et al., 2020). In this regard, octopus is not only a traditional seafood product but is also considered among the functional food sources of the future.

Historical and Cultural Use

The historical journey of seafood products has a past as old as humanity's relationship with the sea. Within this relationship, octopus is a marine creature that stands out in terms of both nutrition and cultural symbolism. From ancient Mediterranean societies to the Ottoman Empire, and then to today's Turkish cuisine, the consumption patterns, economic value, and symbolic meaning of octopus have undergone significant changes. This change should be considered not only as a gastronomic change but also as a cultural development intertwined with geography, beliefs, trade, and social stratification.

Throughout history, the place of octopus in gastronomy has been shaped in parallel with societies' approach to seafood. For example, while octopus was a staple food for the Aegean and Mediterranean communities living in close proximity to the sea, it remained an "exotic" or "unusual" food in continental cultures for a long time. In Turkish cuisine, this difference became more pronounced, particularly during the transition from the Seljuk to the Ottoman Empire and subsequently in coastal settlements during the Republican era. The following subheadings examine the historical traces, cultural representations, and socio-gastronomic meanings of octopus by period.

The Use of Octopus from Ancient Times to the Present Day

The historical presence of octopus in gastronomy dates back to Ancient Greek, Roman, and Aegean civilisations. Archaeological findings, particularly in Cretan (Minoan) ceramics, show that octopus figures are frequently depicted (Davidson, 2013). These figures carry both nutritional and mythological meanings. The earliest traces of octopus consumption on the Anatolian coast date back to the period when fishing communities in the ancient Lycian and Carian regions preserved seafood by drying or salting it (Güler, 2010).

From the perspective of Turkish culinary history, records of seafood in the Seljuk cuisine are limited; this is attributed to the land-based dietary habits brought from Central Asia (Batu, 2024). Although the Turks abandoned their Central Asian dietary habits to some extent in Anatolia, they still did not fully adopt the Mediterranean diet. This habit was also reflected to a certain extent in Ottoman culinary culture. Although fish was used in the Ottoman cuisine, it was mainly freshwater fish that were consumed (Yerasimos, 2002). Apart from this, various types of fish were still used in the Ottoman palace kitchen, but it is understood that molluscs (especially octopus and squid) were consumed more in the kitchens of non-Muslim communities or in coastal settlements (Öztürk, 2017). The concept of "sea creatures" in Ottoman cuisine was also intertwined with halal-haram debates; for this reason, octopus was mostly found in the cuisines of Greek, Armenian and Jewish communities and was labelled "makruh" (disliked) in Muslim households. In the post-Republic era, with the rise of tourism, octopus gained a gastronomic identity as an "Aegean meze" (appetiser), particularly in coastal cities such as Izmir, Bodrum, and Ayvalık (Salman et al., 2023).

Octopus in Mythology, Art, and Symbolism

Throughout history, the octopus has been not only a food source but also a figure symbolising humanity's complex relationship with the sea. In ancient artworks, its multi-limbed structure was interpreted as a symbol of "power, mystery and flexibility" (Smith & Jones, 2019), while in modern culture it has sometimes been referred to as a metaphor for "creatures of unknown depths".

In Turkish folk culture, this symbolic aspect continues to live on, particularly in Aegean fishing traditions. The practice of softening octopus by beating it against rocks is not merely a technical

step before cooking but is also seen as a ritual (Öztürk, 2017). This action can be interpreted as a symbolic narrative combining struggle with nature, patience, and mastery.

The Cultural Identity and Socio-Gastronomic Dimension of the Octopus

The octopus's cultural journey in Türkiye has not been limited to the livelihoods of coastal villages. Immigrants from Crete and the Aegean islands brought new octopus cooking and serving techniques to the Anatolian coast, establishing recipes such as "octopus salad", "grilled octopus" and "octopus stew" (Güler, 2010; Köse, 2019; Akbulut, 2018). The inclusion of these dishes in tourist restaurants over time has transformed octopus from a "local dish" into a symbol of cultural identity.

Today, octopus is considered one of the symbolic elements of Aegean cuisine. On restaurant menus, it is seen not only as a flavour element but also as a cultural expression of "connecting with the sea." In this respect, octopus is a powerful example of how gastronomy is intertwined with culture, identity and social memory.

Its Place in Turkish Cuisine

The position of seafood in Turkish cuisine has followed a variable course throughout history. Octopus is one of the most prominent indicators of this change. From the Ottoman era to the present day, society's view of seafood has been shaped by religious, geographical and socio-economic factors. While fish consumption was limited in inland areas, seafood became part of the cultural identity in coastal regions, serving as both a source of livelihood and a staple food (Güler, 2010; Batu, 2024).

The emergence of octopus in Turkish gastronomy is directly related to the development of coastal cuisines. In the years following the proclamation of the Republic, the development of tourism in coastal cities, the commercialisation of fishing, and the popularisation of the Mediterranean culinary approach strengthened octopus's place on the table (Öztürk, 2017). This transformation is discussed below in its periodical and regional dimensions.

Approach to Seafood in the Ottoman Period

Seafood, particularly in the records of the imperial kitchen, found limited representation in Ottoman cuisine. Although fish from the Bosphorus were frequently consumed due to Istanbul's geographical location, octopus and similar molluscs were generally more common in the culinary culture of non-Muslim communities (Faroqhi, 2006). This was due to both religious sensitivities and reservations among the general population towards these creatures, which were perceived as "cold" or "slippery" meat. Nevertheless, 17th and 18th century sources record that octopus was served as a meze with wine, particularly in Greek and Armenian taverns around Galata and Balat (Yerasimos, 2002).

This period also saw a clear distinction between seafood in the public kitchen and the royal kitchen. While consumption at the palace was limited to more select fish species, the "direct from the sea to the table" approach of the people living in coastal settlements ensured the octopus's continued presence (Batu, 2024).

The Introduction of Octopus into Coastal Cuisines After the Republic

In the post-Republic period, increased tourism activity in coastal regions led to the diversification of Mediterranean and Aegean cuisine. From the 1950s onwards, the proliferation of seafood restaurants in places such as Izmir, Foça, Bodrum, Ayvalık and Kaş accelerated octopus's transformation into a gastronomic symbol.

Recipes developed during this period, such as "octopus salad," "grilled octopus," and "octopus stew," both strengthened the Aegean people's connection to the sea and merged with elements of the Mediterranean diet (Köse, 2019). Furthermore, with the influence of Cretan and Rhodian chefs in Aegean and Mediterranean cuisines, octopus cooking methods, particularly boiling and grilling techniques, have been refined and its gastronomic identity strengthened ((Güler, 2010; Köse, 2019; Akbulut, 2018)).

Current research shows that octopus is perceived as a "local gourmet product," especially in tourist areas, and is considered a prestige factor in menu pricing (Salman et al., 2023). This reveals that octopus is not only a food but also a product with economic and cultural value.

Regional Use of Octopus in the Aegean and Mediterranean Regions

The Aegean cuisine is one of Türkiye's richest gastronomic regions in terms of seafood. The local population typically prepares octopus using techniques such as "beating on rocks," "grilling over coals," and "olive oil-lemon sauce." These techniques ensure both the tenderness of the meat and the preservation of its natural sea aroma. Octopus has become one of the most consumed meze products during the summer months, especially in regions such as Ayvalık, Seferihisar, Datça and Kaş (Akbulut, 2018).

In Aegean cuisine, octopus is prepared in a simple manner, focusing on the quality of the ingredients. In fish restaurants, it is usually served mixed with olive oil, garlic, lemon juice and fresh herbs. This simple approach is a typical example of the "product-oriented cuisine" principle, which is fundamental to Mediterranean gastronomy. Octopus is also presented as a symbol of the "seafood tradition" at regional festivals and gastronomic events (Yabanlı et al., 2022).

Modern Applications of Octopus in Contemporary Turkish Gastronomy

Today in Türkiye, octopus is being reinterpreted using both traditional and modern culinary techniques. Especially in gastronomy centres such as Istanbul, Izmir and Antalya, chef restaurants are including octopus dishes in their menus as part of their "fine dining" concepts. Modern cooking techniques such as sous-vide, confit and smoking enhance the textural quality of octopus, which is blended with local ingredients and incorporated into the "New Anatolian Cuisine" concept (Bayraktar, 2021).

Furthermore, with the increasing emphasis on sustainable fishing, the protection of local species and the establishment of seasonal supply chains are on the agenda. These efforts make octopus's presence in Turkish gastronomy important from both an ecological and cultural sustainability perspective.

Comparative Examples in World Cuisines

Octopus holds a special place in most world cuisines due to both its nutritional value and gastronomic richness. Cooking techniques, sauces used, and presentation styles applied in different regions demonstrate how cultural identities are reflected through cuisine. Mediterranean countries, Asian coastal communities, and Latin American coastal regions have treated octopus not only as a seafood product but also as an element of gastronomic heritage. In this respect, octopus has become a common denominator of both local identity and global gastronomy (García & López, 2021).

Octopus in Mediterranean Cuisines (Greece, Spain, Italy)

The Mediterranean region is one of the geographical areas where octopus is most strongly represented in traditional cuisines.

In Greece, octopus is considered a symbol of coastal life. Recipes such as "htapodi sta karvouna" (grilled octopus) and "htapodi me kokkino krasi" (octopus cooked in wine) are among the fundamental components of Greek gastronomy. The simple yet aromatic preparation of seafood in these dishes reflects the Greek culinary principle of "fidelity to natural flavours" (Karapanagiotis, 2020).

In Spain, the Galicia region in particular is famous for its "Pulpo a la Gallega" dish. Boiled octopus is seasoned with olive oil, sea salt and red pepper and served on wooden plates. This simple presentation is part of both the seafaring culture and local festival traditions (Vázquez et al., 2019).

In Italy, octopus is frequently found in the cuisines of Naples, Sardinia, and Sicily. Recipes such as "Insalata di polpo" (octopus salad) and "polpo alla luciana" (octopus stew with tomatoes) reflect the Italian cuisine's close connection to the sea. These dishes are usually prepared with Mediterranean ingredients such as olive oil, lemon, capers and parsley (Rossi, 2018).

The common ground between these three countries is their simple yet ingredient-focused approach to octopus. The culinary culture of Türkiye's Aegean coast also bears the influence of this approach; therefore, the Aegean cuisine belongs to the same family as Mediterranean cuisines in gastronomic terms (Köse, 2019).

Octopus in Asian Cuisines (Japan, Korea, China)

In Asian cuisines, octopus is consumed in both traditional and modern forms using different cooking techniques.

In Japanese cuisine, octopus is known as "tako" and is used especially in dishes such as sushi, sashimi and takoyaki (octopus balls). Japanese chefs prefer short boiling or steaming methods to preserve the octopus's textural characteristics (Murata, 2019). This approach is consistent with the fundamental principles of washoku, the aesthetic understanding of Japanese gastronomy.

In Korean cuisine, octopus is sometimes served live or partially cooked. This dish, called sannakji, is prepared by serving thinly sliced live octopus pieces with sesame oil and spices. This experimental "sensory-intense consumption" style reflects the bold and dynamic nature of Korean culinary culture (Lee, 2021).

In Chinese cuisine, octopus is prepared using the wok technique, especially in coastal regions. Stir-fried with aromatic ingredients such as garlic, soy sauce and ginger, octopus is seen as a food in harmony with China's "yin-yang" philosophy of balance (Zhao, 2020).

These three countries value octopus not only as a seafood product but also as a symbol of cultural identity. The "modern fusion" trends developing in Türkiye's Mediterranean cuisine, in particular, draw inspiration from Asian culinary techniques; for example, fusion examples such as "octopus with teriyaki sauce" or "octopus carpaccio" are frequently seen in contemporary restaurants in Istanbul (Bayraktar, 2021).

Use in Latin America and Other Regions

Octopus is common in Latin American countries, particularly in Peruvian, Chilean and Mexican cuisines. In Peruvian cuisine, the dish known as "Pulpo al olivo" ( ) is a typical example, where boiled octopus is served with a black olive sauce. This recipe demonstrates how Mediterranean-origin ingredients have adapted to Latin American cuisines (Morales, 2022).

In Chilean and Mexican cuisines, octopus is prepared in the form of "ceviche," marinated in lemon juice. This method is preferred for both food safety and the preservation of fresh seafood. Furthermore, on the Caribbean coast, octopus is cooked over charcoal and has become part of the "beach food" culture (Martínez & Rivera, 2020).

The most striking aspect of Latin American cuisines is their blending of indigenous ingredients with European influences. This reflects a similar process of "hybridisation" to that seen in Türkiye's Aegean cuisine, as octopus is a component of both local identity and global culinary heritage in both regions.

The Symbolic and Economic Value of Octopus in Global Gastronomy

In global gastronomy, octopus is not merely a foodstuff but also occupies the intersection of themes such as sustainable fishing, cultural heritage, and luxury consumption.

According to FAO (2023) data, an average of 370,000 tonnes of octopus is caught annually worldwide, with 60% of this amount consumed in Asian markets. However, increasing demand in Europe in recent years has put pressure on Mediterranean and Atlantic ecosystems. Therefore, "ethical consumption" and "responsible seafood" policies are seen as key factors that will determine the future position of octopus (FAO, 2023; European Commission, 2022).

Octopus is also associated with images of "wisdom, mystery and transformation" in gastronomic symbolism. This symbolic aspect is particularly supported in Mediterranean cultures by the metaphor of "wisdom from the sea" (Papadopoulos, 2019). Today, octopus plays an important role both in preserving local cuisines and in representing cultural diversity in world gastronomy.

Sustainability and Future Perspective

The sustainable management of marine resources is critically important not only in terms of nutrition and gastronomy, but also in terms of ecosystem health and future generations. Particularly for Octopus vulgaris (common octopus), which is among the species with high gastronomic value, multidimensional assessments are required in terms of both fishing and farming processes. This section will first address the situation in Türkiye, followed by an examination of farming and ethical approaches worldwide.

Octopus Fishing and Ecological Impacts – the Turkish Context

Octopus plays an important role in Türkiye's coastal fishing economy; however, current data presents some uncertainties in terms of both quantity and stock management. For example, according to one study, the amount of octopus caught in the Gulf of Mersin was reported to be approximately 223.7 tonnes in 2018 (Koşker, 2018). Furthermore, it is stated that the annual catch of cephalopod species in Türkiye is approximately 2,200 tonnes (Salman et al., 2012). These data show that, despite octopus traditionally being part of coastal fisheries in Türkiye, no systematic management practice has been established in terms of sustainability.

Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) data reports that fishery production will be 933,194 tonnes in 2024; however, statistics broken down by species do not provide detailed annual tables specifically for octopus (TÜİK, 2025). This situation points to data gaps for decision-makers regarding the stock status of the relevant species and whether they are under pressure.

In this context, the following sustainability measures can be recommended for octopus fishing in Türkiye: minimum catch size, seasonal fishing restrictions, registration of fishing vessels, and monitoring the dynamics between fishing pressure and tourist demand in coastal fishing communities. These measures are necessary both for the protection of the marine ecosystem and for the continued livelihoods of coastal communities.

Aquaculture Practices and Ethical Approaches

Octopus aquaculture has emerged as a means to meet increasing demand and reduce pressure on wild stocks, but it raises significant environmental and ethical concerns. An assessment by Gleadall

(2025) indicates that octopus farms require a "balanced approach" due to animal welfare issues and potential negative impacts on the ecosystem. Furthermore, the study by Powell et al. (2022) emphasised that mortality rates encountered during octopus domestication, changes in social behaviour, and intensive production conditions are not appropriate from an animal welfare perspective.

Ethically, a strong argument against hunting and farming this species has been presented in an article stating that "farming octopuses is neither ethical nor sustainable" (The Conversation, 2022). In this context, when considering octopus farming in Türkiye or worldwide, it is important to establish a production model that is not solely profit-driven but also ethically focused.

Sustainable Seafood Policies

At the international level, institutions such as the European Commission support the production of low trophic level species in aquaculture, such as mussels and oysters; in contrast, the intensive farming of high-trophic (predatory) species such as octopus is considered an ecologically controversial issue (European Parliament, 2021). These policies focus on sustainable fishing, production traceability and minimising environmental impacts. Türkiye must also develop appropriate strategies in this direction to monitor octopus resources, ensure a balance between production and consumption, and balance demand related to gastronomic tourism.

The Future Potential of Octopus in Gastronomy

In the field of gastronomy, octopus can stand out not only as a consumed seafood product but also as a food source whose sustainability has been strategically addressed. Türkiye's coastal cuisines and tourism sector recognise the potential of octopus to become part of the local identity. However, for this potential to be realised, transparency, traceability, and science-based management in fishing and farming processes are crucial. Otherwise, gastronomic demand may put pressure on natural stocks.

In conclusion, the octopus's journey in gastronomy and nutrition is a critical test case in the context of sustainability. In Türkiye specifically, more work needs to be done on both the control of fishing and the ethical and environmental dimensions of farming.

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HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL REFLECTIONS OF SHAMANISM IN TURKISH FOOD CULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Food is considered not merely a means of satisfying biological needs in human communities, but also a multi-layered practice that reproduces cultural identity, belief systems, and social relations. In anthropology, history, and cultural studies literature, dietary practices are considered fundamental indicators for understanding societies' relationship with nature, their sacred perceptions, and their collective values. In this context, food allows for cultural analysis when considered not only in terms of "what is consumed" but also in terms of "in what context, with what meanings, and with whom it is consumed" (Halbwachs, 1992).

When examining Turkish cultural history, it is seen that throughout the historical process stretching from the steppes of Central Asia to Anatolia, food culture was shaped not only by geographical and economic conditions but also by belief systems. The Shamanist belief system adopted by Turkish communities in the pre-Islamic period was based on a nature-centred cosmology, treating humans, animals and natural elements as parts of a sacred whole. This worldview deeply influenced not only everyday life practices but also dietary habits and ritual food practices (Eliade, 1964).

Shamanism has existed in the historical memory of the Turks not only as a religious system but also as a cultural framework that regulates life. Within the nomadic way of life, the livestock-based diet did not merely make foods such as meat and milk basic sources of nutrition; it also paved the way for these products to be imbued with symbolic meanings such as abundance, purity and sanctity. This led to the ritualisation of food and the consumption of certain foods at specific times, within a specific set of rules. Collective eating practices such as sacrifice, feasts and banquets are among the most prominent examples of this ritualisation (Roux, 1987).

Although the adoption of Islam brought about significant transformations in the belief systems of Turkish societies, it is evident that many symbolic elements from the Shamanist period did not disappear completely; on the contrary, they continued to exist, reinterpreted within the new religious framework. The sacrificial meals, mourning feasts, charity meals, and collective cooking practices observed on specific days in Anatolia are considered concrete manifestations of this cultural continuity. In this context, food culture offers an important field of analysis for observing transitions and transformations between belief systems (Kafesoğlu, 1980).

Cultural memory theory argues that societies re-enact their past experiences and belief systems through everyday practices. Food is one of the most resilient and continuous areas among these practices. Eating habits are passed down from generation to generation through ritual repetitions and play a central role in preserving cultural memory (Assmann, 2011). Within this framework, it can be said that many practices seen in Turkish food culture bear the transformed traces of the Shamanist worldview.

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The fundamental hypothesis of this study is that the effects of Shamanism are frequently and distinctly visible in Turkish food culture within a historical continuum. The aim of the study is to examine the effects of the Shamanist belief system on Turkish food culture from a historical, anthropological, and sociological perspective in line with this hypothesis; to reveal how these effects have been shaped through elements such as meat, milk, fire, cauldrons, sacrifice, and sharing. The study is not a field research; it is designed as an interdisciplinary compilation and interpretation based on historical and theoretical sources.

In this context, the research aims to evaluate Turkish food culture not only through recipes and culinary practices but also through the prism of belief, ritual, and symbolism, thereby laying a theoretical foundation for subsequent more specific, regional, or ethnographic studies.

Shamanism and the Ancient Turkish Belief System

Shamanism is recognised as one of the oldest belief systems, originating in Central Asian communities, which regulates the relationship between humans and supernatural powers. In anthropological literature, Shamanism is defined as a set of beliefs and practices centred around the figure of the shaman, who, in a trance state, communicates with the spirit world, heals illnesses, protects the community, and maintains cosmic balance (Eliade, 1964). This belief system was not limited to religious rituals; it permeated all areas of daily life and played a decisive role in the formation of social order.

In ancient Turkic communities, the Shamanist worldview was based on a three-tiered cosmology consisting of the sky, the earth, and the underworld. Within this cosmological structure, humans were positioned not as rulers of nature, but as beings living in harmony with it. The belief in the Sky God (Tengri), respect for earth and water spirits, and ancestor worship were among the fundamental elements that shaped the Turks' perception of the universe. This perception provided a broad cultural framework that also encompassed dietary practices (İnan, 1976).

In the Shamanist belief system, natural elements were accepted as living and spiritual beings. Animals, plants, mountains, waters and fire were considered sacred beings possessing specific spirits; it was believed that the relationship established with these beings had to be balanced. For this reason, hunting, slaughtering and consuming animals was bound by specific ritual rules. Showing respect for hunted or sacrificed animals, not harming their spirits, and acting with a sense of responsibility towards nature have been important parts of the Shamanist ethical understanding (Roux, 1987).

The sacrificial ritual in Shamanism is one of the central elements of the belief system. Sacrifice is not merely an offering to gods or spirits; it is considered a collective action aimed at ensuring the welfare, prosperity, and continuity of the community. The sharing of the sacrificed animal's meat within the community ensured that the relationship established with the sacred spread throughout the entire community; this sharing became a symbolic expression of social solidarity and equality (Ögel, 1988).

In the ancient Turkish belief system, horses, sheep and goats held a privileged position among animals. The horse was not only a means of transport and warfare; it was also perceived as a symbol of power, status and sanctity. The sacrifice of a horse or the consumption of its meat in certain rituals carried highly symbolic meanings. Sheep and goats were frequently used not only for daily sustenance but also in ritual contexts; they were sacrificed in particular ceremonies, contributing to the maintenance of the sacred order (Roux, 1987; Kafesoğlu, 1980).

Milk and dairy products also hold a special place in the Shamanist belief system. Milk has been associated with purity, cleanliness and fertility due to its white colour and production process. In

Turkish mythology, the colour white is associated with the celestial and positive forces. In this context, milk is considered not only a nutritious food but also a sacred offering. Fermented milk products such as kımız have been used in both nutritional and ritual contexts, serving as elements that strengthen the unity of the community (Bayat, 2007).

Fire was accepted as a purifying and transformative power in Shamanist cosmology. It was believed that fire drove away evil spirits, cured illnesses, and created sacred spaces. Therefore, every element that came into contact with fire indirectly gained sacredness. In this context, the process of cooking food meant the transformation of raw materials provided by nature through sacred fire; this transformation was perceived not only as a physical but also as a spiritual act (Eliade, 1964).

In ancient Turkish communities, the shaman was the guardian and interpreter of this sacred order. The rituals performed by the shaman were not merely religious ceremonies; they were also practices that kept social memory alive and ensured cultural continuity. In rituals related to food, the shaman's role was to determine what food should be consumed when and how, thereby preventing the disruption of the sacred order. This meant that eating ceased to be an individual choice and became a collective responsibility (İnan, 1976).

This holistic structure of the shamanistic belief system demonstrates that Turkish food culture is not merely a product of material conditions; it is a cultural sphere intertwined with belief, ritual, and symbolism. This structure underwent a transformation with the acceptance of Islam throughout the historical process; however, some of the fundamental symbolic elements have continued to exist in a different form. This continuity also provides a fundamental background for understanding the relationship between nomadic lifestyle, geography and nutrition, which will be discussed in the next section.

Nomadic Lifestyle, Geography, and Dietary Practices

Nomadic lifestyle and the natural conditions offered by the geography of Central Asia play a decisive role in understanding the historical formation of Turkish food culture. Cultural historians and anthropologists emphasise that dietary habits are not only a matter of cultural preference but also a direct result of environmental necessities and lifestyles. In this context, Turkish culinary culture has been shaped within the climatic, geographical and ecological conditions of the Central Asian steppes, integrating with the Shamanist belief system to acquire a unique character (Ögel, 1988).

The Central Asian steppes have an ecosystem that limits agricultural production due to harsh climatic conditions, a short farming season, and vast pasture areas; on the other hand, it encourages animal husbandry. This geographical structure has largely directed the economic activities of Turkish communities towards animal husbandry, leading to the emergence of a meat and milk-based diet. Within the nomadic way of life, animals were not only an economic resource but were also perceived as indispensable elements for the community's survival. This perception paved the way for animal products to acquire sacred meanings (Kafesoğlu, 1980).

In nomadic societies, nutrition is a matter of constant security. As production based on hunting and animal husbandry is directly dependent on natural conditions, the meaning attributed to food is not only material but also symbolic. The shamanistic worldview, which perceives nature as a living and spiritual entity, dictates that the slaughter and consumption of animals be carried out within specific ethical and ritualistic frameworks. This has elevated dietary practices beyond mere consumption to a sacred dimension (İnan, 1976).

Although meat was a fundamental element of nutrition in nomadic Turkish societies, its consumption was linked to specific times and rituals. In particular, the collective consumption of meat during feasts, banquets, and sacrificial ceremonies ensured the reproduction of social solidarity and a sense of unity. In this context, meat has become a symbol representing the shared values of the community rather than an individual food. The sharing of meat symbolises the multiplication of abundance and the preservation of the sacred order in the Shamanist belief system (Roux, 1987).

Milk and dairy products hold a place as important as meat in the nomadic way of life. Milk occupies a privileged position in the Shamanist understanding of nutrition due to its production method and symbolic meanings. Associated with purity and sanctity because of its white colour, milk stands out as a food used particularly in ritual contexts. Fermented milk products such as kımız have gained an important place in Turkish culture due to both their nutritional properties and their ceremonial functions. The serving of kımız at communal drinking sessions and ritual feasts has reinforced the collective and sacred aspects of nutrition (Bayat, 2007).

The mobile nature of nomadic life required cooking and eating utensils to be portable and functional. In this context, the cauldron became one of the central elements of the nomadic kitchen. In addition to allowing large quantities of food to be prepared, the cauldron served as a symbolic centre where the community gathered. Gathering around the cauldron in shamanistic rituals meant not only nourishment but also the re-establishment of social bonds and the reinforcement of the sacred order. This symbolism continues to exist in expressions and narratives used in Turkish culture today (Ögel, 1988).

Fire, as an indispensable element of nomadic life and nutritional practices, has served both a practical and symbolic function. In the shamanistic belief system, fire was accepted as a purifying and protective power; it was considered a means of protection from evil spirits and the creation of sacred spaces. The process of cooking food was therefore not merely a physical transformation; it signified the transformation of nature's bounty through the sacred fire. Food practices associated with fire were perceived as a sign of harmony with the sacred order (Eliade, 1964).

In nomadic Turkish societies, plant-based foods occupied a more limited place than animal products, but they were not entirely insignificant. Wild herbs, roots, and plants that grew naturally in the wild were gathered during certain periods and were often used for medicinal or ritual purposes. The belief in the Shamanist belief system that plants also carry spirits led to the adoption of a careful and respectful approach to the consumption of these products. This situation shows that dietary practices were shaped within the framework of an ethical relationship established with nature (İnan, 1976).

This strong interaction between geography, nomadic lifestyle, and the Shamanist belief system reveals that Turkish food culture is not merely a product of material conditions; it is also a cultural field steeped in belief and symbolism. This structure underwent change with the settlement process in Anatolia; however, it continued to exist by adapting to new geographical conditions while largely preserving its fundamental symbolic meanings. The nomadic understanding of nutrition continues to leave its mark on the deep layers of Turkish food culture.

The relationship between nomadic life, geography and nutrition discussed in this section provides a fundamental framework for understanding the topic of food and symbolism in Shamanist rituals, which will be examined in detail in the next section.

Food and Symbolism in Shamanist Rituals

In the Shamanist belief system, food is not merely an element that satisfies physical needs; it is one of the most concrete and visible tools for establishing a relationship with the cosmic order. In

ancient Turkish societies, food served as a symbolic agent enabling communication with nature spirits, ancestors, and celestial powers. Consequently, dietary practices gained meaning within a ritual context rather than as everyday consumption habits; certain foods were considered sacred and consumed at specific times and within specific rules (Eliade, 1964).

One of the most prominent examples of food playing a central role in shamanistic rituals is the practice of sacrifice. Sacrifice was considered the fundamental means of establishing a relationship with the gods or spirits in the ancient Turkish belief system. The sacrificed animal was not merely an offering; it was perceived as a sacred element that ensured the community's prosperity, health, and continuity. Sacrificial ceremonies were not individual acts of worship but collective rituals involving the entire community, and the sharing of meat in these rituals was of great importance (İnan, 1976; Roux, 1987).

The equal distribution of the sacrificed animal's meat within the community is based on the Shamanist worldview that sacredness should be experienced collectively rather than individually. The sharing of meat not only strengthened social solidarity but also ensured that the sacred order spread throughout the entire community. In this respect, the sacrificial meal served both a religious and a socio-cultural function. The offering meals and charity tables seen in Anatolia today can be considered examples of this understanding continuing in a transformed form in the post-Islamic period (Kafesoğlu, 1980).

In shamanistic rituals, meat occupies a privileged position not only because of its nutritional value but also because of its symbolic meanings. In a way of life based on hunting and animal husbandry, meat has been perceived as a symbol of power, life, and fertility. The consumption of meat, especially during feasts and banquets, led to this food gaining a ritual dimension, separate from everyday life. Meat dishes served at feasts created ritual spaces where social hierarchy became visible and where status, power, and belonging relationships were reproduced (Ögel, 1988).

Another important element of shamanistic dietary symbolism is milk and dairy products. Milk has been associated with purity, cleanliness, and fertility due to its white colour and production process. In the ancient Turkic belief system, the colour white is connected to the celestial and positive forces. Therefore, milk has been regarded not only as a food but also as a sacred offering. In rituals involving milk, nature spirits and ancestors were called upon for fertility; the welfare of the community was sought to be secured through this symbolism (Bayat, 2007).

In this context, kımız stands out as one of the most original examples of the Shamanist ritual understanding of nutrition. Kımız is not only a fermented drink but has also been regarded as a sacred drink used in a ritual context. The serving of kımız at communal drinking sessions and ceremonial feasts has served to strengthen unity within the community and reinforce the sacred order. This demonstrates that the drink is not merely a nourishing element but also a ritual symbol (Roux, 1987).

In shamanistic rituals, fire is one of the fundamental elements that determine the symbolic meaning of food. Fire has been regarded as a purifying, transformative, and protective power. The belief that evil spirits fear fire has reinforced fire's function of creating sacred spaces. The cooking process is therefore not merely a physical act; it signifies the transformation of raw materials provided by nature through sacred fire. Food prepared with fire is perceived as a sign of harmony with the sacred order and spiritual purification (Eliade, 1964).

The cauldron, together with fire, appears as a central symbol in Shamanist ritual food practices. Beyond being a practical tool for preparing large quantities of food in nomadic life, the cauldron has served as a sacred centre where the community gathered. Gathering around the cauldron was not merely an act of nourishment; it signified the strengthening of social bonds and the rebuilding

of collective identity. This symbolism continues to live on in the cultural memory, as seen in expressions still used in Turkish culture today, such as "eating from the same cauldron" (Ögel, 1988).

In shamanistic rituals, sharing stands out as one of the most fundamental principles of eating. Food was perceived as a collective responsibility and a sacred duty beyond individual consumption. Sharing was seen as an element that ensured increased fertility and the preservation of the sacred order. This understanding is directly related to the collectivist structure of the Shamanist worldview and has survived to the present day as one of the fundamental characteristics of Turkish food culture (Halbwachs, 1992).

Mourning meals also hold an important place in Shamanist eating rituals. Death, in the Shamanist belief system, is not seen as an end but as the transition of the spirit to another dimension. Therefore, the meals prepared during mourning periods have been seen as both a way to strengthen solidarity among the living and a way to pay respect to the spirit of the deceased. These practices are concrete reflections of the understanding of establishing a connection with the spirit world through food (İnan, 1976).

When the elements discussed in this section, such as meat, milk, kumis, fire, cauldrons, and sharing, are considered together, it is clear that food in the Shamanist belief system carries not only a material but also a deep symbolic and cultural meaning. These elements formed the historical foundations of Turkish food culture and continued to exist in a transformed form after the advent of Islam. Therefore, the frequent presence of Shamanism's influence in Turkish food culture can be considered not merely a historical assumption but a phenomenon supported by ritual, symbolism, and cultural continuity.

Post-Islamic Continuity and Transformation

The Turks' acceptance of Islam was a significant turning point in terms of their belief system and social structure; however, this transformation did not result in the complete disappearance of cultural elements. On the contrary, many symbolic practices that took shape in the pre-Islamic period continued to exist, reinterpreted within the new religious framework. Food culture stands out as one of the areas where this continuity and transformation can be most clearly observed. Ritual food practices that emerged during the Shamanist period changed in content and form after Islam and became an integral part of Turkish culinary culture (Kafesoğlu, 1980).

While sacrifice was one of the fundamental tools for establishing balance with supernatural powers in the pre-Islamic Shamanist understanding, the ritual of sacrifice acquired a new meaning within the Islamic belief system in the post-Islamic period. However, the sharing of sacrificial meat, the organisation of communal meals, and the purpose of these meals as acts of charity, blessing, and solidarity largely correspond to the collective feeding practices of the Shamanist era. This demonstrates that although the sacrificial practice has undergone formal changes, it has retained its social and symbolic function (Roux, 1987).

Similarly, milk and dairy products, which were considered sacred in the Shamanist period, continued to be perceived as symbols of cleanliness, abundance, and purity in the post-Islamic period. In Anatolia, postpartum sherbet, beliefs about milk and fertility, or the preference for dairy foods during certain periods can be considered examples of this symbolism reflected in the present day. These practices demonstrate that the Shamanist understanding of the colour white and purity continues to live on in the cultural memory (Bayat, 2007).

The cult of fire and the hearth is also an important element that has continued in post-Islamic Turkish societies. The purifying and protective power of fire in the Shamanist belief system has

continued to exist as a symbolic and cultural value in the post-Islamic period, rather than carrying a directly religious meaning. Beliefs about the sanctity of the hearth in Anatolia, as reflected in expressions such as "the hearth going out" or "keeping the hearth burning," reveal traces of ancient beliefs centred around fire and the hearth in the cultural memory (Ögel, 1988).

The concept of social solidarity, reinforced through communal meals during the Shamanist period, has continued to exist in different forms in the post-Islamic period. Mevlit meals, ashura distribution, charity meals, and meals served after funerals are concrete examples of this continuity. These practices strengthen social bonds and reproduce collective identity through food. In this respect, food is a carrier of cultural continuity independent of religious identity (Halbwachs, 1992).

Therefore, post-Islamic Turkish food culture has not completely erased the traces of the Shamanist period; rather, it has transformed these traces to make them compatible with the new belief system. This transformation reveals the multi-layered structure and historical depth of Turkish culinary culture. In this context, food can be considered a powerful cultural practice that bridges the past and the present.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examines the traces of Shamanist beliefs in Turkish food culture from a historical, anthropological and sociological perspective, revealing that dietary practices are not only a product of geographical and economic conditions but also of belief systems. The findings show that the Shamanist worldview played a decisive role in the formation of Turkish food culture and that this influence has been carried forward to the present day with historical continuity.

The study's fundamental hypothesis, that "the effects of Shamanism are frequently seen in Turkish food culture," is supported by the examples examined. Elements such as sacrificial rituals, meat and milk-based nutrition, the symbolism of fire and cauldrons, collective eating practices, and mourning meals reveal that the nutritional symbolism shaped during the Shamanist period has continued to exist in a transformed form even after the advent of Islam. When evaluated within the framework of the theory of cultural continuity, this situation demonstrates that Turkish food culture has a multi-layered and transformative structure (Assmann, 2011).

From an anthropological perspective, food rituals in Turkish society function not only as consumption practices but also as spaces where social relations, values, and beliefs are reproduced. The sacred order established through food during the shamanistic period ( ) was nourished with different religious meanings in the post-Islamic period; however, the basic symbolic structure has been largely preserved. This situation suggests that food culture is a "resilient" area in the transitions between belief systems (Eliade, 1964).

From a sociological perspective, food emerges as one of the most powerful carriers of collective memory. Food practices transmitted through ritual repetition ensure that past experiences and beliefs are reproduced in contemporary life. In this context, Turkish food culture can be considered an important area that carries traces of the Shamanist belief system in cultural memory (Halbwachs, 1992).

One of the important limitations of this study is that it is not based on field research and is a historical-conceptual compilation. However, this is in line with the study's aim of providing a theoretical framework and laying the groundwork for future research. Future studies involving ethnographic research on regional cuisines, oral history studies, and comparative gastronomy analyses could reveal the reflections of Shamanist influences in the present day in greater detail.

In conclusion, Turkish food culture contains traces of the Shamanist belief system not only as a legacy of the past but also as a living cultural structure that has transformed and been reinterpreted

to reach the present day. This situation makes Turkish cuisine not only a gastronomic field but also a rich area of research where history, belief, and cultural identity intersect.

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HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND CULTURAL SYMBOLISM OF KONYA WEDDING FOODS FROM PAST TO PRESENT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Osman Özer [*]

INTRODUCTION

Food appears in all societies as an important domain beyond a biological need, where social relationships are established, cultural values are transmitted, and identity is constructed. Particularly during critical moments defined as transitional periods, such as birth, marriage, and death, food acquires a ritual dimension, becoming a carrier of social memory and collective consciousness (Beşirli, 2010; Ceyhun Sezgin & Onur, 2017). Turkish culinary culture and traditional food practices have been among the topics of increasing academic interest in recent years (Büyükşalvarcı et al., 2016). Factors such as the impact of globalization processes on local cultures, the need to preserve cultural heritage, and the development of gastronomic tourism have been influential in this increased interest (Okur & Çalışkan, 2023).

The Anatolian geography hosts a unique culinary culture due to its position at the intersection of thousands of years of civilizations (Halıcı, 2022a). Konya, an important part of this rich mosaic, has been a significant center during the Hittite, Phrygian, Roman, and Byzantine periods throughout its history, served as the capital of the Seljuk civilization, played an active role during the Ottoman period, and developed a distinctive food culture throughout all these processes (Seçim & Akyol, 2022). Konya possesses a unique culinary culture and wedding traditions due to its status as the capital of the Anatolian Seljuk State and its position as a religious and cultural center as the city of Rumi. In Konya, the center of Rumi's philosophy of tolerance, the values of hospitality and sharing have been reflected in wedding traditions (Görkemli et al., 2013). With its rich historical accumulation and distinctive culinary culture, Konya is one of the noteworthy destinations in this field.

Weddings, as one of the most important transitional rituals of social life, are social events where not only two individuals but also two families and even two communities come together (Önçel & Boz, 2023). In this context, wedding meals function as tangible cultural elements where hospitality is displayed at its highest level, families demonstrate their social status, and cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation (Gürsoy, 2013). The wedding meal tradition in different regions of Türkiye has been shaped by the historical, geographical, economic, and sociocultural characteristics of that region (Kızıldemir, Özsoy & Sarıışık, 2014). Wedding ceremonies are among the fundamental rituals ensuring the continuity of social structure, and the meals served during this process carry symbolic meanings. Konya's traditional wedding meals are cultural indicators reflecting the region's historical accumulation, social values, and economic structure (Büyükşalvarcı et al., 2016).

Today, globalization, urbanization, and modernization processes are significantly transforming traditional wedding practices (Kartal, 2023). Transformations in traditional culinary practices are occurring under the influence of globalization, urbanization, and technological developments (Şengül & Türkay, 2016; Denk, 2023). Traditional collective cooking methods and tables prepared through neighborhood solidarity are being replaced by professional organizations and wedding halls. This transformation process reveals the necessity of preserving cultural heritage on one hand,

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while bringing the need for adaptation to the agenda on the other. This transformation also brings concerns about cultural heritage.

The primary aim of this research is to comparatively examine the symbolic meanings of wedding meals in different cultures and to reveal the historical origins, rituals, and cultural continuity of Konya's wedding meal tradition. The study opens for discussion the role of food culture in social identity construction from the perspectives of gastronomic anthropology and cultural studies.

Because Konya was the capital of the Turkish Seljuk State, it has possessed a palace cuisine tradition spanning over 900 years from then until today. This historical heritage offers a unique laboratory for understanding the origins and evolution of the wedding meal tradition. As one of Türkiye's most conservative cities, Konya demonstrates strong adherence to traditional values. This characteristic has enabled traditional wedding rituals and food practices to be better preserved compared to other cities, thus providing access to authentic data. Konya has experienced rapid urbanization and economic transformation over the past 30 years while simultaneously attempting to preserve its traditional identity. This dual dynamic presents a rich case for analyzing the effects of modernization on cultural heritage, which is why Konya province was chosen as the subject of this research.

Despite the existence of general studies on Turkish cuisine (Bilgin, Gürsoy, Halıcı, Samancı, Yerasimos), there is no academic study that comprehensively and systematically examines wedding meals specific to Konya. This research attempts to fill this gap by documenting Konya's distinctive gastronomic heritage. Theories of *cultural capital*, *symbolic systems*, and *rites of passage* are reinterpreted within the context of Turkish-Islamic culture, demonstrating how universal theories operate in local contexts. Particularly, explaining young generation attitudes through the concepts of selective modernism and hybrid cultural forms brings an original analytical framework to the literature. It presents concrete recommendations for the preservation of cultural heritage, development of gastronomic tourism, and creation of sustainable cultural policies. These recommendations demonstrate how academic literature can engage in dialogue with policymakers, civil society, and the business world, thus contributing to the transformation of academic knowledge into social benefit.

Local/Regional Culinary Culture, Ritual, and Food Relationship

Culinary culture is a multidimensional phenomenon reflecting societies' historical experiences, geographical conditions, economic structures, and social values (Erdentuğ, 1977). Traditional foods function as objects of cultural memory and contribute to identity construction in the intergenerational transmission process (Ögel, 2001). Gastronomy is not only an activity that meets nutritional needs but also one of the fundamental tools for the expression and transmission of cultural identity (Batu, 2024; Oğan & Denk, 2025). With these perspectives, gastronomy plays an important role in the acceptance of local culinary traditions as an academic field of study. In this context, it is possible to say that UNESCO's 2003 convention on intangible cultural heritage was a turning point in the recognition of culinary traditions as cultural values. It is evident that gastronomic studies require a multidisciplinary approach and the contribution of fields such as anthropology, sociology, history, and geography is important (Santich, 2004).

In anthropological literature, rituals have critical importance in maintaining social order and strengthening social bonds (Dağı & Mınez, 2022). Dağı and Mınez (2022) explained the social functions of wedding ceremonies by developing the concept of "rites of passage." The relationship between rituals and food has been systematically examined since Douglas's (1972) pioneering studies. Wedding ceremonies are evaluated in the category of rites of passage that create changes in individuals' social statuses (Çetin, 2008). This theoretical framework constitutes one of the basic

reference points in the analysis of wedding meals. In the context of ritual, food appears as an element loaded with symbolic meanings and consolidating social unity (Özer, 2020; Özer & Özcan, 2023). When evaluated from this perspective, wedding meals are not merely objects satisfying physiological needs but symbolic tools that regulate social relationships and transmit cultural values (Ögel, 2001). Çetin (2008), in a study examining the ritual perspective, defined the three-stage structure of wedding ceremonies (separation, transition, incorporation) and revealed that food assumes different functions at each stage. This approach is critically important in understanding the symbolic meanings of wedding meals.

Culinary ritual experiences increase touristic motivation sources and the attractiveness of local dishes as destinations. In other words, local culinary traditions are important resources that increase the touristic attractiveness of destinations (Özdemir & Dülger Altıner, 2019). Gastronomic tourism is a rapidly developing type of tourism in line with the increasing demands of tourists seeking authentic experiences (Akdağ & Üzülmez, 2017). Cohen and Avieli's (2004) study addressed the complexity of the concept of authenticity in gastronomic tourism and analyzed the transformations experienced in the tourism-oriented presentation of local culinary traditions. This perspective provides an important framework for evaluating the tourism potential of traditional wedding meals. From this standpoint, Konya's rich culinary heritage is one of the fundamental factors increasing its gastronomic tourism potential (Çalışkan, 2013). Traditional wedding meals are among the unique resources that can be used in realizing this potential (Sormaz et al., 2023).

Symbolic Meanings of Wedding Meals in Different Cultures

A wedding is a ceremonial practice celebrating the legal and social union of two individuals, generally taking place with the participation of large communities (Van Gennep, 1960). From an anthropological perspective, weddings are among the classic examples of rites of passage (Turner, 1969). These rituals mark changes in individuals' social statuses and contribute to the reproduction of social order (Önçel & Boz, 2023). In Turkish society, weddings are social events symbolizing the union of two individuals and, along with them, two families (Boratav, 1994). In traditional structure, weddings are important domains where social capital is strengthened, social bonds are consolidated, and social hierarchy is made visible (And, 2012). Therefore, wedding ceremonies and the meals served during these ceremonies become tools through which families display their social prestige (Makal, 2007).

Wedding meals stand out as ritual objects symbolizing fertility, abundance, prosperity, and the beginning of a new life in all cultures. Anthropological literature emphasizes that food is a tool that provides social unity and consolidates collective identity (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).

In Turkish wedding traditions, pilaf has a central place as a symbol of fertility and abundance (Özer, 2020). Particularly wedding pilaf prepared with diced meat demonstrates the family's economic power, while this meal served to guests is stated to carry the wish for establishing a fertile home (Halıcı, 1993). In Central Asian Turkish societies, pilaf also has a special place in weddings; this meal called toy aşı symbolizes the coming together of the community (Kartal, 2017). In Arab wedding culture, lamb or mutton is served as the highest expression of hospitality and generosity (Zubaida, 1994). Particularly the dish called mansaf, lamb meat cooked with fermented goat yogurt, stands out as an element showing social status in Jordanian and Palestinian weddings (Kanafani, 2011). The collective sharing of this meal from a large tray symbolizes social solidarity and family unity. In Indian wedding traditions, sweets carry special meaning (Achaya, 1994). Sweets prepared from sugar syrup such as laddu and jalebi represent the wish for the newlywed couple's life to be sweet (Appadurai, 1988). Additionally, the abundant presence of vegan and vegetarian options in Indian weddings is directly related to the importance Hindu belief places on animal rights (Khare, 1976). Table 1 summarizes the symbolic meanings of wedding meals in different cultures.

Table 1. Symbolic Meanings of Wedding Meals in Different Cultures

Culture	Characteristic Dish	Symbolic Meaning	Source
Turkish	Wedding Pilaf	Fertility, abundance, social unity	Özer, (2020)
Arab	Mansaf	Hospitality, generosity, status	Karaca & Karacaoğlu (2016)
Indian	Laddu, Jalebi	Wish for sweet life, sacred union	Achaya (1994)
Iranian	Sabzi Polo	Rebirth, spring, new beginning	Shaida (2009)
Chinese	Long Noodles	Long life, uninterrupted happiness	Chang (2008)

Source: Created by the author.

The Effect of Religious and Ethnic Origins on Wedding Meals

Religious beliefs play a determining role in the selection and preparation of wedding meals. The use of halal meat in Muslim societies' wedding meals, slaughter methods complying with Islamic rules, and the complete exclusion of pork are the most fundamental principles. In Islamic culture, organizing a feast called *walima* at weddings is a tradition coming from the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (Tirmizi, cited in Çolak, 2012). Serving meat, rice, and sweets at the walima feast is evaluated as a reflection of Islamic tradition (Demirgül, 2018). Particularly the sharing of sweets such as halva, Turkish delight, and zerde in Ottoman palace weddings has been an indicator of social hierarchy and generosity (Bilgin, 2004).

In Jewish wedding traditions, dietary rules known as *kashrut* are the fundamental factors determining food choices (Cooper, 1993; cited in Görgülü, 2023). Not consuming dairy and meat products in the same meal, using only kosher-certified products, and excluding certain animal types constitute the characteristic features of Jewish wedding menus. Challah bread has a special place in wedding ceremonies as a symbol of fertility (Roden, 1996).

In Christian wedding traditions, the wedding cake has a central place, and the roots of this tradition extend back to the Roman Empire period (Charsley, 1992). Traditionally white in color, the cake symbolizes purity and new beginnings (Wilson, 2005). In Catholic tradition, the blessing of wine and bread after the wedding ceremony refers to Jesus's Last Supper (McGowan, 2014).

In Orthodox Christian weddings, particularly in Greek and Russian traditions, fish dishes have an important place (Caldwell, 2007). Fish is accepted as one of the symbols of Jesus in Christianity and is considered auspicious for a fertile marriage (Dalby, 2003).

Historical Origins of Turkish Wedding Meals

The Turkish wedding meal tradition has a long historical process extending from Central Asian nomadic culture to Anatolian settled life. In written sources from the Göktürk and Uyghur periods, it is stated that the tradition of toy and feasts had an important place in Turkish societies (Ögel, 2001).

With the acceptance of Islam during the Karakhanid and Ghaznavid periods, the wedding meal tradition was shaped by synthesizing both Islamic elements and Central Asian traditions (Qutluq, 2024). Particularly, dishes such as tutmaç soup and casserole kebab are thought to have originated from this period. During the Seljuk period, with the development of palace cuisine, wedding meals became more refined and diverse (Soy & Şengül, 2024). The role of the Ahi organization in social life contributed to the formation of certain standards in the preparation and presentation of wedding meals (Yediyıldız, 1991). During the Ottoman Empire period, wedding meals became an important element displaying social hierarchy and economic power (Yerasimos, 2011). The serving of hundreds of varieties of dishes at palace weddings reflects the richness of Ottoman culinary culture

(And, 2012). Sweets such as zerde, güllaç, and halva have a special place in weddings. During the Republican period, modernization movements and urbanization led to significant changes in the wedding meal tradition (Özer, 2020). The traditional collective cooking and table-setting tradition gradually transformed into organizations held in restaurants and wedding halls (Esen & Seçim, 2020).

Reflection of Regional Differences on Wedding Meals

The geographical and cultural diversity of Anatolia has created distinct differences in the wedding meal tradition among regions. In the Central Anatolia Region, wheat and bulgur soups are frequently served at weddings as a reflection of the grain-based dietary tradition (Şad, 2023).

In Aegean Region wedding meals, olive oil vegetable dishes and seafood stand out (Andaş, 2023). Particularly in coastal areas, the inclusion of fish menus at weddings is directly related to the region's economic structure and dietary habits (Cömert & Durlu Özkaya, 2014). In Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia regions, meat-based dishes dominate wedding menus due to the prevalence of animal husbandry. Local dishes such as küflü and stuffed ribs have a special place in wedding rituals (Özer, 2020). In the Black Sea Region, dishes such as muhlama made from corn flour and anchovy being included in wedding tables are reflections of the region's distinctive agricultural and geographical conditions (Aksoy & Sezgi, 2015). Particularly anchovy pilaf has become a popular choice in modern Black Sea weddings (Çoşan & Seçim, 2020).

Table 2. Regional Wedding Meal Differences in Anatolia

Region	Characteristic Dishes	Main Ingredients	Source
Central Anatolia	Wedding pilaf, okra soup, keşkek	Wheat, bulgur, meat	Şad (2023)
Aegean	Olive oil vegetables, seafood	Olive oil, vegetables, fish	Andaş (2023)
Eastern Anatolia	Küflü, stuffed ribs	Meat, bulgur	Özer (2020)
Black Sea	Muhlama, anchovy pilaf	Corn, anchovy	Çoşan & Seçim (2020)
Southeast	Çiğ köfte, stuffed mumbar	Bulgur, meat	Cömert & Durlu Özkaya (2014)

Source: Created by the author.

The Collective Cooking Tradition in Death, Birth, and Wedding Ceremonies in Konya

In social life in Konya, the tradition of collective meal cooking and sharing during transitional rituals such as death, birth, and weddings has a central place (Konyalı, 2007; Kartal, 2017). This tradition is one of the most important indicators of social solidarity and collective identity (Büyükpekci, 2019).

The tradition of distributing lokma at death ceremonies is quite common in Anatolia, but encountering this practice is quite low in Konya. The lokma sweet prepared to earn rewards for the soul of the deceased creates an opportunity for the community to share grief and remember the deceased (Özkan et al., 2023). From an anthropological perspective, the lokma distribution ritual can be evaluated as an example of reciprocity economy. In birth ceremonies, there is a tradition of preparing puerperant sherbet and puerperant soup (Özkan et al., 2023). These foods are believed to have both nutritious and healing properties (Halıcı, 2022a). Particularly the use of spices such as cinnamon, ginger, and clove is a reflection of traditional folk medicine knowledge (Irmak, 2024). The collective cooking tradition in wedding ceremonies is the strongest expression of social unity (Ceyhun Sezgin & Onur, 2017). Particularly the cooking of dishes such as keşkek and tirit in large cauldrons symbolizes the coming together of all segments of society and solidarity (Sormaz et al., 2023). Table 3 shows collective meal traditions in transitional rituals in Konya.

Table 3. Collective Meal Traditions in Transitional Rituals in Konya

Ritual Type	Characteristic Dish	Social Function	Symbolic Meaning	Source
Death	Semolina halva	Sharing grief	Merit, remembrance	Gürsoy (2013)
Birth	Puerperant sherbet	Celebration, support	Fertility, health	Beşirli (2010)
Wedding	Keşkek, tirit	Unity, solidarity	Social approval	Sormaz et al. (2020)
Circumcision	Zerde, pilaf	Celebration, sharing	Religious transition	Halıcı (2022a)

Source: Created by the author.

Historical and Cultural Origins of Konya Wedding Meals

Konya possesses a rich cultural heritage and distinctive culinary tradition due to being the capital of the Anatolian Seljuk State. Rumi's philosophy of tolerance and sharing has been an important factor shaping the Konya wedding meal tradition (Büyükpekci, 2019). The most characteristic element of Konya wedding meal tradition is wedding pilaf (Halıcı, 2022a). These pilafs prepared with diced meat in Konya weddings or with chickpeas in different regions symbolize the wish for a fertile and happy marriage (Gürsoy, 2013). The abundance of meat or chickpeas in pilaf is interpreted as a symbol of wealth (Kut, 1996).

Okra soup is another indispensable element of the Konya wedding menu. It is believed that the slippery nature of okra symbolizes the smooth and trouble-free progress of marriage (Türker & Çelik, 2012). Additionally, okra soup has a special place in Mevlevi tables (Halıcı, 2022b). Tirit is a traditional dish served at weddings especially in Konya rural areas (Sormaz et al., 2023; Albayrak Sak, 2024). This dish prepared by cooking lamb meat for a long time reflects the spirit of community gathering and solidarity (Kartal, 2017). Among Konya wedding sweets, höşmerim, baked rice pudding, and semolina halva stand out (Halıcı, 1993). Particularly, it is narrated that höşmerim has been made since the Seljuk period and its name comes from the phrase "hoş meramım" (Baysal, 1993b). Table 4 shows Konya wedding meals and their symbolic meanings.

Table 4. Konya Wedding Meals and Symbolic Meanings

Dish	Main Ingredient	Symbolic Meaning	Historical Origin
Wedding Pilaf	Rice, meat	Fertility, wealth	Seljuk period
Okra Soup	Okra, meat broth	Smooth marriage	Mevlevi tradition
Tirit	Bread, lamb meat	Social solidarity	Central Asian Turkish culture
Höşmerim	Milk, cheese, semolina	Sweet home	Seljuk palace cuisine
Semolina Halva	Semolina, sugar, butter	Fertility, fortune	Ottoman tradition

Source: Created by the author using Halıcı, 1993; 2022; Kartal, 2017; Baysal, 1993b; Sormaz et al., 2023; Karaman, 2023; Albayrak Sak, 2024 sources.

Identity and Belonging in Konya Wedding Meals

Konya wedding meals function not only as biological products meeting nutritional needs but also as cultural symbols playing critical roles in the construction of identity and development of a sense of belonging (Seçim & Akyol, 2022). Particularly for Konyans who have experienced migration, traditional wedding meals become nostalgic elements reminding them of their homes and origins (Özer, 2020).

The continuation of the wedding meal tradition within diaspora communities is critically important for preserving collective identity and ensuring intergenerational cultural transmission (Ademoğlu & Durlu Özkaya, 2023). Particularly the effort of Konya-origin families living in European countries to serve traditional meals at their weddings is a reflection of the desire to maintain ties with cultural roots (Kızıldemir et al., 2014).

Food practice functions as a carrier of social memory (Sutton, 2001). The taste of wedding pilaf, the smell of okra soup, and the texture of höşmerim trigger individual and collective memories, enabling connection with the past (Halıcı, 2022a). These sensory experiences can be defined as "the tasted past" and are concrete expressions of cultural continuity (Proust, 1913; cited in Artun, 2013). Table 5 shows the role of Konya wedding meals in identity construction.

Table 5. Role of Konya Wedding Meals in Identity Construction

Identity Dimension	Food Element	Function	Transmission Mechanism	Source
Local Identity	Wedding pilaf	Emphasis on being from Konya	Recipe transmission	Halıcı (2022a)
Religious Identity	Halal meat, prayers	Islamic values	Ritual practices	Büyükpekci (2019)
Ethnic Identity	Central Asian origin dishes	Turkish consciousness	Oral tradition	Karaman (2023)
Class Identity	Food variety	Status display	Social comparison	Beşirli (2010)
Gender Identity	Cooking roles	Femininity/masculinity definitions	Socialization	Gürsoy (2013)

Source: Created by the author.

As with identity construction, the influence of family and community traditions on Konya wedding meals is quite high. In Konya society, the wedding meal tradition is an important part of family knowledge and social memory transmitted from generation to generation (Ceyhun Sezgin & Onur, 2017). Particularly the food cooking practice occurring between mother and daughter is one of the most fundamental mechanisms of cultural transmission (Alpyıldız, 2022). Konya's conservative social structure has been effective in preserving the wedding meal tradition. Families' concern for maintaining their social reputation creates pressure for traditional meals to definitely be served at weddings (Gürsoy, 2013). The imece tradition plays an important role in the preparation of Konya wedding meals (Sormaz et al., 2020). Particularly in rural areas, the coming together of neighboring and relative women to prepare wedding meals is a concrete expression of the spirit of social solidarity and mutual assistance (Kartal, 2017). In Konya, where neighborhood and district culture is still strong, neighborhood relations have a special place in the process of preparing and distributing wedding meals (Büyükpekci, 2019). Particularly the tradition of delivering food the day after the wedding serves to consolidate social ties (Türker & Çelik, 2012).

The Role of Meals in Konya Wedding Rituals and Their Evolution Over Time

In Konya wedding tradition, meals function as ritual elements that consolidate social ties and transmit cultural values beyond meeting nutritional needs. The spoon-feeding tradition has a special place in this context (Gürsoy, 2013). Spoon-feeding is the tradition of specially serving wedding pilaf to the bride and groom and guests placing money on top of the pilaf (Adıgüzel, 2024). This ritual, in addition to economically supporting the newlywed couple, shows that the community approves their union (Beşirli, 2010). From an anthropological perspective, the spoon-feeding tradition can be evaluated as an example of gift economy (Birdir & Akgöl, 2015). Foods served during ceremonies such as opening the dowry bundle and displaying the trousseau also carry important ritual meanings (Halıcı, 2022a). Particularly, it is stated that the offering of Turkish delight, sweets, and nuts symbolizes the wish for a sweet life (Kızıldemir et al., 2014). In Konya, special meals are also prepared for the bride's bath tradition. Serving pilaf, pastries, and sweets to women going to the bath is part of the social celebration of the bride's integration into her new family (Sormaz et al., 2023). During ceremonies known as oil night or henna night, the prominence of sweets is related to emphasizing the bride's chastity and purity (Irmak, 2024). Treats such as henna candy and cookies served on these nights are indispensable elements of the ritual (Berber, 2009).

The Konya wedding meal tradition has undergone transformation, being affected by social, economic, and technological changes. Particularly, urbanization and modernization processes have led to significant changes in traditional wedding meal practice (Okur & Çalışkan, 2023). The tradition of cooking wedding meals collectively in families' homes or gardens has now largely been transferred to wedding halls and catering companies. This change has created certain differences in the preparation method and flavor profile of meals (Kızıldemir et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the inclusion of traditional meals in wedding menus has been largely preserved in Konya. Particularly wedding pilaf and okra soup continue to be indispensable elements in modern wedding organizations. In recent years, the nostalgic wedding concept has gained popularity, and a trend has emerged toward preparing traditional Konya wedding meals with their original recipes (Sormaz et al., 2020). This situation is evaluated as a positive development in terms of preserving cultural heritage and reproducing local identity (Sormaz et al., 2020). Table 6 shows periodic changes in the Konya wedding meal tradition.

Table 6. Periodic Changes in Konya Wedding Meal Tradition

Period	Preparation Method	Venue	Dominant Dishes	Source
Traditional (pre-1950)	Collective cooking, imece	Home gardens, open spaces	Tirit, keşkek, wedding pilaf	Halıcı (1993)
Transition (1950-1980)	Semi-industrial	Neighborhood homes, local halls	Wedding pilaf, okra soup	Özer (2020)
Modern (1980-2000)	Catering services	Wedding halls	Traditional + modern mix	Beşirli (2010)
Contemporary (post-2000)	Professional preparation	Luxury wedding halls, hotels	Fusion cuisine + nostalgic options	Durlu-Özkaya & Sünnetçioğlu (2015)

Source: Created by the author.

Preparation and Presentation Rituals of Konya Wedding Meals

The preparation process of Konya wedding meals is a process regulated by detailed rituals and social norms. Traditionally, wedding preparations begin at least one week before the ceremony, and various rituals are performed during this process (Halıcı, 2022a; Albayrak Sak, 2024). The cauldron boiling tradition is an important part of Konya wedding rituals (Gürsoy, 2013). In this ritual, the

large cauldrons in which wedding pilaf will be cooked are cleaned and blessed. Particularly, elderly and experienced women leading this process ensures the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation (Türker & Çelik, 2012). The tradition of reciting certain prayers and wishes while cooking wedding meals gives a spiritual dimension to the meals. Particularly, reciting the Basmala when pilaf begins to be cooked and wishing for a fertile home is a reflection of Islamic tradition in culinary practices (Görkemli, 2013).

The presentation of wedding meals in Konya is also subject to certain rules (Seçim & Akyol, 2022). Traditionally, soup is served first, followed by pilaf and meat dishes, and finally sweets. This order can be evaluated as a reflection of Ottoman palace tables (Yerasimos, 2011). Table etiquette, known as meal eating rules, is meticulously applied at Konya weddings. Particularly rules such as showing respect to elders, starting the meal together, and leaving the table after praying and saying "Alhamdulillah" are reflections of social hierarchy and religious values in meal rituals (Sormaz et al., 2020). The tradition of serving food after weddings is also an important ritual specific to Konya (Irmak, 2024). Distributing leftover food from weddings to neighbors and those in need is seen as an extension of the Islamic charity tradition (Kızıldemir et al., 2014).

The Future of Cultural Heritage in Konya Wedding Meals

The globalization process creates a paradoxical dynamic that both threatens and revalues local food traditions (Robertson, 1995). While the spread of fast-food culture and the dominance of standardized flavor profiles put pressure on local cuisines (Ritzer, 2011), on the other hand, interest in local and authentic foods is increasing as a reaction to globalization (Bessière, 1998).

Globalization, modernization, and changing lifestyles create both opportunities and threats for the future of Konya wedding meal tradition. Young generations' distancing from traditional food knowledge carries the risk of losing cultural heritage (Kızıldemir et al., 2014). However, in recent years, increasing interest in local culinary culture and the slow food movement offer new opportunities for preserving traditional Konya wedding meals. Particularly the development of gastronomic tourism contributes to local food traditions gaining economic value and therefore being preserved. The role of educational institutions is critically important in transmitting cultural heritage to future generations (Beşirli, 2010). Adding local culinary culture courses to the curricula of gastronomy and culinary arts departments can ensure cultural transmission on a scientific basis (Sormaz et al., 2020). The use of digital technologies offers new possibilities for documenting and sharing traditional food recipes (Bayrakcı & Akdağ, 2016). Particularly the increase in content about local culinary culture on social media platforms has the potential to attract young generations' interest (Sormaz et al., 2020). Institutional initiatives such as Konya Metropolitan Municipality's Konya Culinary Museum project are evaluated as important steps in terms of preserving cultural heritage and transmitting it to future generations (Türker & Çelik, 2012). Such projects both create resources for scientific research and raise social awareness.

The Konya wedding meal tradition presents a concrete example of this global-local tension (Sormaz et al., 2020). The addition of international cuisine elements to menus in modern wedding halls is an indicator of globalization penetrating local practices (Kızıldemir et al., 2014). However, insistence on including traditional meals in the menu is an expression of the effort to preserve and reproduce local identity (Görkemli, 2013). The process of synthesis of global and local elements, defined as glocalization, can be observed in Konya wedding meal practice (Robertson, 1995). For example, serving traditional wedding pilaf with modern presentation techniques or reinterpreting classic sweets with a fusion cuisine approach are examples of this synthesis (Okur & Çalışkan, 2023).

UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List's inclusion of food cultures offers important opportunities for the international recognition and preservation of local culinary traditions (UNESCO, 2003; Yapıcı; 2024). The inclusion of Turkish coffee and keşkek on this list shows that the Konya wedding meal tradition can gain similar recognition.

Comparative Analysis: Wedding Meals of Konya and Other Cultures

The Konya wedding meal tradition shows both similarities and distinctive differences when compared with other cultures (Irmak, 2024). While the theme of fertility, abundance, and social unity carries a common symbolic meaning in all cultures, the ways of expressing this theme vary according to cultural context (Bayrakcı & Akdağ, 2016).

The central role of pilaf in Turkish culture parallels the sacredness of rice in Indian culture (Achaya, 1994). In both cultures, grain products symbolize the wish for a fertile marriage as a reflection of agricultural society structure (Appadurai, 1988). The status indicator of lamb meat in Arab culture shows similarity to the importance of meat dishes in Konya wedding meals (Karaca & Karacaoğlu, 2016). However, serving meat together with pilaf in Konya carries a distinctive feature as a reflection of Central Asian Turkish culinary tradition (Karaman, 2023). The central role of wedding cake in Western cultures can be compared with the diversity and special meanings of sweets in Konya tradition (Charsley, 1992). However, the cake being an individual symbol in the West differs from sweets being symbols of social sharing and fertility in Konya. Table 7 provides a cross-cultural comparison of wedding meals.

Table 7. Cross-Cultural Wedding Meal Comparison

Criterion	Konya	Arab Culture	Indian Culture	Western Culture
Central Dish	Wedding pilaf	Mansaf	Biryani	Wedding cake
Main Symbol	Fertility, unity	Generosity, status	Sacred union	Purity, beginning
Religious Influence	Islam	Islam	Hinduism/ Islam	Christianity
Presentation Style	Communal table	Large tray	Buffet	Individual service
Social Dimension	Strong	Very strong	Medium	Weak

Source: Created by the author using Appadurai, 1988; Charsley, 1992; Achaya, 1994; Wilson, 2005; Gürsoy, 2013; Kartal, 2017; Karaca & Karacaoğlu 2016; Irmak, 2024 sources.

Socio-Economic Dimension of Konya Wedding Meals

The Konya wedding meal tradition functions as an important indicator showing social class differences and economic status (Seçim & Akyol, 2022). The variety, quality, and quantity of meals served at wedding organizations become a means for families to display their economic power to society. In traditional Konya society, serving keşkek or tirit at weddings is evaluated as a way of showing that the family is generous and respectful to society even if not wealthy (Kartal, 2017). The prominence of social solidarity in the preparation process of these meals can be seen as a strategy for overcoming economic limitations (Sormaz et al., 2020). In the modern period, the professionalization of wedding organizations and the spread of wedding halls has transformed wedding meals into a prestige indicator (Ademoğlu & Durlu Özkaya, 2023). Particularly in Konya's upper-income group, adding international cuisine elements to the menu along with traditional meals can be interpreted as an effort to construct a cosmopolitan identity (Kızıldemir et al., 2014). However, Konya's conservative social structure has also led to developing a critical attitude toward ostentatious wedding organizations. Particularly in religious circles, emphasis is placed on avoiding waste in wedding meals and giving charity (Büyükpekci, 2019).

The rapid dissemination of digital technologies is leading to fundamental changes in the transmission mechanisms of cultural knowledge (Rheingold, 2000). Food knowledge traditionally transmitted through face-to-face communication and master-apprentice relationships is now also being shared through digital platforms (Okur & Çalışkan, 2023). Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok offer new possibilities for visually documenting Konya wedding meal recipes and reaching wide audiences (Sormaz et al., 2020). Particularly young generation's activity on these platforms creates opportunities for increasing interest in traditional meals. However, digital transmission has some limitations. The tactile, olfactory, and emotional dimensions of cooking may not be fully transmitted in digital environments (Sutton, 2001). Additionally, verbal knowledge sharing, storytelling, and social bonding that occur during meal preparation carry the risk of being lost on digital platforms. Therefore, adopting a hybrid approach is recommended. Combining digital documentation and sharing with face-to-face learning and experience transmission can be effective both in preserving traditional knowledge and reaching new generations (Kızıldemir et al., 2014). Table 8 shows the distribution of food expenditure in Konya wedding organizations as percentages.

Table 8. Distribution of Food Expenditure in Konya Wedding Organizations (%)

Traditional Neighborhood Weddings	Modern Hall Weddings
Meat and rice materials: 45%	Catering service: 38%
Vegetables and legumes: 20%	Meat and main materials: 32%
Sweets and beverages: 15%	Sweets and cake: 15%
Labor (voluntary): 10%	Beverages and drinks: 10%

Source: Created by the author using Gigbi, 2025 source.

Evaluation of Konya Wedding Meals in Terms of Health and Nutrition

When Konya wedding meals are examined from a nutritional science perspective, they contain both positive aspects and aspects that need improvement (Baysal, 1993b). The fact that traditional meals are generally homemade, prepared with fresh ingredients and without preservatives provides an advantage in terms of nutritional value.

The high carbohydrate content of wedding pilaf is important in terms of providing energy, but from the perspective of balanced nutrition principles, it is recommended to increase the variety of vegetables and salads. Okra soup is evaluated as a healthy choice due to its fiber content and low calories (Seçim & Akyol, 2022). The density of meat dishes is positive in terms of meeting protein needs, but carries the risk of increased saturated fat consumption. From a modern nutritional science perspective, adding fish and white meat alternatives to wedding menus can be recommended. The high variety of sweets and high sugar consumption stand out as points requiring attention, particularly in terms of diabetes and obesity risks (Baysal, 1993a). However, the fact that most traditional Konya sweets are prepared with calcium-rich materials such as milk and cheese increases their nutritional value.

Seasonality and Sustainability in Konya Wedding Meals

The use of seasonal products in traditional Konya cuisine provides an important advantage in terms of sustainable nutrition (Kartal, 2017). Preferring vegetables and fruits grown in season in the preparation of wedding meals is the right approach both economically and ecologically.

The preference for lighter meals at weddings held in summer months and denser, energy-providing meals in winter is an indicator of seasonal adaptation (Ermeçli, 2023). Particularly okra soup as a summer vegetable, and winter vegetables such as cabbage and dried beans are included in wedding menus during cold months (Gürsoy, 2013). The use of materials procured from local producers both supports the local economy and reduces the carbon footprint. Particularly Konya's status as an agricultural production center facilitates access to fresh and quality materials (Kızıldemir et al., 2014). However, modern wedding halls offering standard menus and reducing seasonal diversity is evaluated as a negative development in terms of sustainability (Ademoğlu & Durlu Özkaya, 2023). In this context, developing policies to support local and seasonal products is recommended (Okur & Çalışkan, 2023).

Climate change and environmental sustainability concerns have become important factors shaping the future of food cultures (Garnett, 2011). Re-evaluating the Konya wedding meal tradition from a sustainability perspective is important both in terms of environmental responsibility and cultural continuity. The richness of soup and vegetable dishes based on plant products in traditional Konya cuisine can be evaluated as a positive feature in terms of sustainable nutrition (Willett et al., 2019). Okra soup, lentil soup, and various olive oil vegetable dishes offer options with low carbon footprint (Halıcı, 2022a). However, excessive meat consumption and waste at weddings stand out as problematic areas in terms of environmental sustainability. Particularly, conducting awareness-raising studies on controlling portion sizes and effectively utilizing leftover food is necessary (Kartal, 2017). Planning wedding organizations in line with the zero waste principle offers an approach compatible with both environmental responsibility and the Islamic prohibition of waste (Büyükpekci, 2019). Supporting the tradition of delivering leftover food to those in need with institutional mechanisms will be an important step in this context (Kızıldemir et al., 2014).

Touristic and Economic contribution of Konya Wedding Meals

Food is not only materials carrying nutritional value but can also be evaluated as art objects offering aesthetic experience (Korsmeyer, 1999; cited in Artun, 2013). The presentation of Konya wedding meals is an important reflection of this aesthetic dimension. In traditional Konya cuisine, the lamb roast placed in the center of wedding pilaf served on large trays creates a visual center, attracting guests' attention. This presentation style shows that food is prepared not only to be eaten but also to be looked at and admired (Bulut Solak & Eken, 2021). Color harmony and contrast use are elements determining the aesthetic features of Konya wedding tables. Placing green salads, white yogurt, and red salad next to white pilaf creates visual richness. This color palette is also an indicator of nutritional diversity (Baysal, 1993b). In the modern period, particularly with professional catering services, the presentation of wedding meals has acquired a more refined and artistic dimension (Ademoğlu & Durlu Özkaya, 2023). The application of the art of plate arrangement called plating to Konya wedding meals creates a synthesis of traditional and modern aesthetics (Kızıldemir et al., 2014).

The Konya wedding meal tradition carries important potential in terms of gastronomic tourism. Particularly domestic and foreign tourists visiting the Rumi Museum's interest in Konya cuisine contributes to the local economy. The promotion of local culinary culture at Rumi-related events organized internationally offers important opportunities for the city's cultural branding (Sormaz et al., 2020). The inclusion of wedding meal tradition in such events contributes both to the preservation of cultural heritage and to creating economic value (Türker & Çelik, 2012). The wedding organization sector occupies an important place in Konya's economy. Wedding halls, catering companies, traditional food producers, and related auxiliary sectors create significant employment and income (Görkemli, 2013). The branding of local products and geographical indication registration can increase the economic potential of Konya wedding meal tradition.

Particularly, products such as Konya Wedding Pilaf and Konya Höşmerim obtaining geographical indication will provide advantages both in terms of protection and marketing (Kızıldemir et al., 2014).

Semiotic Analysis of Konya Wedding Meals

Food carries deep psychological and emotional meanings in addition to meeting human biological needs (Lupton, 1996). Konya wedding meals create powerful emotional experiences for participants (Irmak, 2024). The smell, appearance, and taste of wedding meals can trigger feelings of nostalgia in participants (Holak & Havlena, 1998). Particularly wedding meals experienced during childhood create powerful memories and emotional bonds in adulthood. Shared meal experience creates emotional closeness and social bonds among participants (Fischler, 2011). The act of eating at the same table consolidates the feeling of social unity and solidarity (Görkemli, 2013).

The common effort experienced during the preparation process of wedding meals offers a meaningful and satisfying experience for participants (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Particularly women coming together to prepare food creates an important opportunity for social interaction and emotional support (Türker & Çelik, 2012). From a semiotic perspective, Konya wedding meals function as complex sign systems (Barthes, 2012). Each food's color, texture, taste, and presentation can be read as symbols encoding certain cultural meanings (Lévi-Strauss, 1975).

The abundance of meat in wedding pilaf functions not only as a result of wanting to reach satiation in the meal but also as an indicator of wealth (Adıgüzel, 2024). This meat use choice carries a wish and hope for the newlywed couple's material prosperity (Türker & Çelik, 2012). Similarly, chickpea grains in pilafs made in different regions symbolize abundance and multiplication (Ünüvar & Yıldırım, 2025). The slippery texture of okra soup encodes the wish for the marriage path to proceed smoothly, that is, without problems (Görkemli, 2013). This linguistic metaphor represents a transfer from the physical properties of food to social relationships (Lakoff & Johnson, 2022). The consumption of sweets is directly related to the sweet home metaphor. The taste of sugar has been culturally coded as an indicator of happiness and peace (Mintz, 1986). Therefore, the high variety of sweets at weddings is not only to satisfy the palate but also to express a hope and wish for the sweetness of future life (Halıcı, 2022a).

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Research findings show that wedding meals carry complex social, cultural, and symbolic functions beyond meeting a biological need. This finding supports Levi-Strauss's (1983) thesis that foods are cultural code systems.

Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of habitus and cultural capital explain that families' socio-economic situations and cultural accumulations play a determining role in the selection of Konya wedding meals. While wealthy families display their social prestige by offering more diverse and ostentatious menus, middle and lower-income groups preserve their cultural capital by adhering to traditional menus.

When evaluated in the context of Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage theory, wedding meals are important symbolic tools that mark changes in individuals' social statuses and contribute to the reproduction of social order. The symbolism of okra soup for harmony and softness in marriage is a concrete example of this symbolic function. The Mevlevi tradition's values of tolerance, love, and inclusiveness also contribute to Konya's distinctive hospitality culture (Albayrak Sak, 2024).

Collective preparation processes based on neighborhood solidarity in traditional societies have been transformed into specialized division of labor and market relations in modern society. This

transformation, while facilitating wedding organization on one hand, contributes to the weakening of social bonds and individualization on the other. Kıray's (1999) analyses of urbanization and social change in Türkiye explain this process.

The findings of this research largely overlap with other studies on Turkish culinary culture (Gürsoy, 2013; Halıcı, 2022a; Okur & Çalışkan, 2023). However, the central place of okra soup specifically in Konya can be evaluated as this city's distinctive contribution. Comparisons made with other regions of Anatolia (Şengül & Türkay, 2016; Ademoğlu & Durlu Özkaya, 2023) show how geographical and cultural differences shape wedding meal traditions. Each region has distinctive practices stemming from its own historical, economic, and cultural context. When compared with international literature (Charsley, 1992; Kraemer, 2007), the universal functions of wedding meals (fertility, abundance, unity, etc.) emerge, but how these functions are culturally coded differs.

This research has revealed that wedding meals are cultural elements universally symbolizing fertility, abundance, and social unity. In different cultures, wedding meals have been shaped by the influence of that society's history, religious beliefs, geographical conditions, and economic structure. The central role of pilaf in Turkish culture, lamb meat in Arab culture, and sweets in Indian culture are concrete examples of this influence.

The Konya wedding meal tradition has a distinctive character formed from the synthesis of Anatolian Seljuk heritage, Mevlevi culture, and Central Asian Turkish traditions. Traditional dishes such as wedding pilaf, okra soup, tirit, and höşmerim not only meet nutritional needs but also undertake critical roles in the construction of social identity, transmission of cultural values, and consolidation of social bonds.

Dishes such as wedding pilaf, okra soup, tirit, and höşmerim have been transmitted from generation to generation over centuries, reaching the present day and being enriched through reinterpretation by each generation. Rituals such as spoon-feeding, collective cooking, and food sharing reflect Konya society's spirit of solidarity and collective consciousness. These rituals' historical origins have been found to be based on Central Asian nomadic culture, Islamic sharing tradition, and Anatolian settled life culture (Karaman, 2023).

Over time, significant changes have been experienced in the Konya wedding meal tradition; traditional collective cooking and home weddings have largely been replaced by professional catering services and wedding halls. However, the tradition of including traditional meals in wedding menus has been largely preserved and has regained value with nostalgic trends.

While globalization, modernization, and young generation's distancing from traditional knowledge pose significant threats, gastronomic tourism, slow food movement, digital documentation opportunities, and educational programs offer important opportunities. The future of Konya wedding meal tradition is shaped by opportunities such as gastronomic tourism, local food movements, digital documentation possibilities, and educational programs in the face of globalization and modernization threats. The preservation of this tradition and its transmission to future generations is critically important not only as a nostalgic concern but also in terms of maintaining cultural diversity and preserving social identity. The Konya wedding meal tradition continues its existence as a living cultural heritage that carries the wisdom of the past to the present, nourishes social solidarity, and gives hope for the future. The preservation and enrichment of this heritage is the common responsibility of all social actors.

This study has the characteristic of being a comprehensive academic research addressing the Konya wedding meal tradition from a multidimensional and comparative perspective. The research

not only lists the meals but also deeply analyzes the sociocultural dynamics, historical roots, symbolic meanings, and social functions behind these meals.

The basic contributions of the study can be summarized as follows: First, it determined universal and specific elements by comparatively examining different cultures' wedding meal traditions. Second, it systematically traced the historical evolution of Konya wedding meal tradition from Central Asia to the present. Third, it adopted an interdisciplinary approach integrating food anthropology, sociology, nutritional science, and tourism perspectives (Karaman, 2023).

The research has the characteristic of being one of the first comprehensive academic studies conducted specifically on Konya. Particularly the anthropological analysis of rituals such as spoon-feeding, collective cooking, cauldron boiling, and food sharing presents original contributions to the literature.

As a result of this study, it is possible to offer recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions, society, and future research. Incentive and support programs should be developed for the preservation of local culinary culture. Geographical indication registration processes should be accelerated and supported. Strategies for the international promotion of Konya cuisine within the scope of gastronomic tourism should be developed. Local culinary culture courses should be added to the curricula of gastronomy departments. Mentorship programs should be created between traditional food masters and the young generation. Applied workshop studies and festival organizations should be supported. Intrafamily cultural transmission mechanisms should be strengthened. The documentation and sharing of traditional food recipes should be encouraged. Awareness should be raised about the use of local and seasonal products. Areas that have not been examined in the literature so far regarding Konya wedding meal tradition can be investigated from a neurogastronomy perspective. Measuring the young generation's approach to traditional meals using quantitative methods will be useful. Detailed comparison of Konya tradition with other Anatolian cities can be made through comparative anthropological studies. In-depth qualitative research on the psychological and emotional meanings of wedding meals can be conducted.

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CULTUREL HERITAGE OF ANATOLIA:
KEŞKEK

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INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy, defined as a discipline that views eating and drinking as integral components of civilization and social structures, thoroughly analyzes culinary culture through the lens of art and science (Gillespie & Cousins, 2001). In this context, regional dishes serve as a gastronomic component representing the dietary habits shaped by the historical processes of a region, city, or country, thereby acting as an important element reflecting the cultural identity of that community (Bostan et al., 2024).

Anatolian culinary culture has been shaped by centuries of interaction between different civilizations and enriched by the unique flavors of each region. Keşkek, a cornerstone of this culinary heritage, has a long history, particularly in rural areas of Anatolia, and is a ritualistic dish prepared for special occasions such as weddings, holidays, and community events. Although keşkek is essentially a simple yet nutritious dish made by cooking wheat and meat for extended periods and then pounding them to a homogeneous consistency, its cultural significance and ritualistic nature elevate it beyond mere sustenance, making it a symbol of social unity (UNESCO, 2011). When prepared with diverse recipes and techniques across Türkiye's geographical regions, keşkek holds a particularly prominent place in Central Anatolian and Aegean cuisines (Sarı, 2011).

In the Central Anatolia Region, keşkek is enriched with aromatic spices and red meat, typically cooked in traditional stone ovens or over wood fires. Conversely, it is often prepared with local ingredients such as olive oil and white meat in the Aegean Region, thereby adapting to the regional culinary identity. Keşkek, with its ingredients and preparation methods varying by region, is more than just a simple food item; it is a symbol representing the social and cultural fabric of the respective geography. (Sarı, 2011). Owing to these characteristics, it is considered not only a part of culinary practices but also an intangible cultural heritage passed down through generations. This study aims to examine the central position of keşkek in Turkish culinary culture in detail by analyzing its historical journey, local variations, and symbolic meanings.

METHOD

In this study, a qualitative literature review was adopted as the primary research method. A literature review is defined as a systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers and practitioners (Fink, 2019). The literature review aims to examine the place and importance of keşkek in Anatolian culinary culture from a multifaceted perspective. Through this systematic approach, the study intends to access previous studies on this subject, identify information gaps, validate the historical data, and provide a conceptual framework for future studies (Hart, 2018).

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Regional Food Culture

The discipline of gastronomy which has known for its profound effects on human eating habits and living standards, has got Greek etymological roots. The term is derived from the Greek words 'gaster' and 'nomos', representing 'stomach' and 'law or custom' respectively, and refers to a broad field of expertise related to food culture (Yaylı and Sürücü, 2016). Gastronomy that is as a discipline encompassing foods, eating and drinking culture, and preparation techniques specific to a country or region, reveals the fundamental elements that distinguish world cuisines from one another (Kivela and Crotts, 2005). Gastronomy also embodies the unique identities and ways of life of societies and serves as a primary cultural expression mechanism. In this context, gastronomic tourism refers to travel undertaken with the aim of experiencing foreign culinary cultures and their distinctive flavors directly within their local and authentic settings (Durlu-Özkaya et al., 2012).

The most prominent reflections of eating and drinking habits in Turkish traditions can be understood by examining the meals prepared during important milestones in social life, such as lavish feasts, gatherings organized through communal labor, births, deaths, and weddings. At such events, tables are set according to tradition, local dishes are prepared, and the entire community eats together, sharing their joys or sorrows. Such traditional practices continue to exist in Anatolia today (Eröz, 1977; Talas, 2005).

Türkiye's geographical diversity, elevation differences, varied soil structures and distinct climate zones have led to the formation of different climatic regions. This environmental diversity has enabled the growth and cultivation of unique plant and animal species in each region. Consequently, this rich biodiversity forms the basis of the diversity found within Traditional Anatolian Culinary Culture (Bostan et al., 2024). Food carries the unique characteristics of each culture; these flavors, shaped through historical and cultural development processes, are one of the cornerstones that form the identity of the society concerned (Sanchez-Cañizares and Castillo-Canalejo, 2015). One of the most effective methods of analyzing a society's cultural fabric is to thoroughly examine the local culinary practices of its people. In this regard, today's tourists show a keen interest in the gastronomic heritage of the regions they visit, making the experience of these unique flavors a primary travel motivation (Yilmaz, 2017).

Traditional Anatolian culinary practices are the product of a historical depth and cultural interaction spanning millennia. The unique customs brought by each community that settled in this region during different periods are considered the fundamental elements that shaped and enriched the heterogeneous structure of Anatolian cuisine (Akın et al., 2015). This multicultural foundation has allowed traditional dishes to evolve into complex cultural symbols rather than mere food items (UNESCO, 2011).

Historically, when traditional culinary culture was widespread, natural plant species adapted to local ecosystems were cultivated. These plants had been growing in the same geographical area for hundreds or even thousands of years. Consequently, they were fully adapted to the environmental conditions of that region. Similarly, animals raised for meat, milk, eggs, and leather were fed on local vegetation and roamed in their natural environment, resulting in healthy, natural, and highly nutritious products. The processes of gathering and storing food were also carried out using natural methods; products were preserved in jars, wooden barns, or food storage pits to ensure that their appearance, structure, and nutritional content were maintained (Akın et al., 2015).

This symbiotic relationship between nature and nutrition is a fundamental characteristic of the Anatolian diet (Sarı, 2011). In traditional cooking methods, thick pots made of materials such as clay, porcelain, or tin-plated copper were used to apply slow-cooking techniques over wood or charcoal fires. This method preserved the natural structure of foods, thereby enriching the visual,

flavor and aroma characteristics of the dishes. The seasonings and aromatic herbs used in cooking, such as onions, garlic, lemon, tomatoes, peppers, oil, salt, mint, parsley, thyme, bay leaves, and red pepper, were nutritionally organic and fresh because they were grown in local ecosystems (Akın et al., 2015). In the pre-industrial era, animal manure was used as fertilizer because the soil, air, and water where farmers grew their crops and raised their animals were unpolluted, the food exhibited superior appearance, aroma, and taste (Özer et al., 2010; Akın, 2011).

In the contemporary era, because the soil, water, and air in agricultural and livestock environments are significantly more degraded than in the past, food products have lost much of their former nutritional value and flavor. As plants and animals develop in polluted environments, harmful substances accumulate within their tissues through bioaccumulation. Consequently, when humans consume these foods, these contaminants are ingested, potentially leading to a deterioration in public health over time (Akın, 2009; Çepel, 2008). This decline in food quality further underscores the importance of preserving traditional dishes like Keşkek, which rely on local and natural ingredients (UNESCO, 2011).

Nutrition, the fundamental driver of vital activities, is a critical factor that directly determines an individual's level of well-being. Organisms that cannot meet their nutritional needs in a balanced manner face serious risks in terms of survival. From a historical perspective, variables such as geographical conditions, technological capabilities, and the accumulation of knowledge make it possible to examine nutritional culture within different periods (Akın et al., 2015).

The traditional culinary culture of Anatolia can be analyzed in five main stages throughout its historical development. The evolution of this culture has been shaped by the socio-economic structures and environmental conditions of the societies that inhabited Anatolia. While the hunter-gatherer period is considered a universal starting point, subsequent periods diversified according to geographical conditions, accumulated knowledge, and technological advancements. Consequently, Anatolian cuisine has attained a unique structure under the influence of these factors. It is particularly evident that high-income groups residing in palaces and mansions had access to more nutritious and high-quality foods (Sürücüoğlu, 1999; Yılmaz, 2004).

Keşkek

Keşkek is not merely a nutritional component; it also represents a deeply rooted tradition classified as intangible cultural heritage, forming an integral part of collective memory (Deniz and Yavaş, 2020). Ceremonial keşkek was recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2011, because of reflecting the spirit of social unity and solidarity it embodies. This tradition continues to be one of the most vivid examples of Anatolian culture, characterized by its ritualistic dimension that fosters community cohesion (Teyin, 2020). It exhibits regional variations in its culinary techniques and presentation methods, prepared across all geographical regions of Türkiye. While wheat is the primary ingredient of this dish, additive ingredients vary locally. Furthermore, elements such as the nomenclature, presentation, and preparation methodologies also vary across regions (Çelik et al., 2021).

In Anatolia, keşkek has been regarded as one of the indispensable dishes of social ceremonies since ancient times (Çekiç, 2015, p. 9). Although the Turkish term for this dish is 'döğme aşı', historical texts also refer to it using the Persian name 'keşkek' and the Arabic term 'herise' (Ayverdi, 2005).

When examining the culinary inventories of Islamic states and the Seljuk Empire, it becomes clear that the dish known as 'herise' and 'keşkek' held strategic importance. The fact that this dish was professionally produced and sold in establishments designated as 'Dükkân-ı Herras' also reveals its commercial dimension within the culinary history of Anatolia and the Islamic world

(Şahin, 2018). In the Ottoman Empire, keşkek was not only a popular winter staple but also a prominent flavor frequently prepared for wedding ceremonies (Ayverdi, 2005, p. 87). Today, keşkek has become a less preferred dish at weddings and special occasions compared to former times due to its labor-intensive preparation process (Çınar, 2019, p. 85).

The preparation of cracked wheat, the primary ingredient of keşkek, involves selecting ripe wheat grains, lightly moistening them, and softening them in a stone mortar. The softened wheat grains are then separated from their husks by pounding them with wooden mallets at a specific rhythm, ensuring the grains remain intact during this process (Deniz-Yavaş, 2020, p. 684).

Keşkek is defined as a 'complex' food due to its widespread geographical distribution, regionally varying preparation techniques, the diverse ingredients used, and the broad range of dishes referred to as keşkek (Sarı, 2011).

As one of the traditional dishes of Turkish cuisine, it is widely consumed across various geographical regions of Türkiye. Depending on the characteristics of regional cuisines, significant differences are observed in keşkek recipes and cooking methods (Şahin, 2018, p. 206). It is noted that keşkek, recognized as one of the oldest known dishes, holds a prominent place in the culinary culture of the Yörük communities, who predominantly reside in villages within the Aegean region. This culinary tradition, which mainly utilizes the meat of small ruminants, is characterized by dishes such as gözleme, bazlama, yufka, güveç, and keşkek (Bostan et al., 2024).

It is stated that eating and drinking habits are clearly observed in social rituals. Chicken pilaf and lemonade/ ayran are usually served at funerals and military send-offs, while sherbet and lokma sweets are served at birth celebrations. In traditional culinary culture, holidays are special occasions when delicacies such as baklava, kalburabastı, and keşkek are served. In wedding organizations, the preparation of meals with ritualistic significance, such as keşkek and kulaklı soup, has become a tradition. In addition, it is seen that dough-based foods, such as bazlama and sourdough bread, have a strategic importance on all kinds of celebrations and special days (Bostan et al., 2024).

Regional Variations of Keşkek in Türkiye

Due to cultural diversity across the various regions of Türkiye, there are distinct variations in the preparation of keşkek. Türkiye is comprised of seven regions, and while the preparation methods remain similar in some areas, the ingredients used differ in others. These discrepancies also extend to the occasions on which keşkek is prepared. While it is consumed for celebratory purposes in some regions, it is also served as a funeral meal in others (Bostan et al., 2024).

Mediterranean Region

Within the region, it is regarded as a sacred dish and is recognized as an indispensable component of festivals and sacrificial ceremonies. A significant aspect of the ritual dictates that the individual preparing the dish must be male and a morally and religiously respected member of the community. In addition, the kitchen utensils utilized in the preparation of hrisi must be cleaned with prayers (Türk and Şahin, 2004). Known locally as 'aşür', this dish is served with the addition of cumin and butter (Çekiç, 2015, p. 57).

In Adana, on various special occasions ranging from weddings to forty-day memorial meals and Eid al-Adha celebrations, hrisi (herise/heresi)—a meat dish prepared with wheat—takes its place on the table alongside bulgur pilaf.

In the Antalya city center and surrounding rural areas, it holds a significant place, especially during weddings, religious ceremonies, and other special occasion meals. Its primary ingredient is wheat. The wheat is prepared by pounding it in a mortar without grinding it, followed by winnowing

to separate the husks. It is then cooked for an extended period over low heat with an ample amount of water until it reaches the desired consistency. Keşkek is served hot, topped with sautéed butter infused with red chili powder, and is usually accompanied by meat dishes (Çimrin, 2006).

Aegean Region

The Aegean Region stands out as one of the primary cultural hubs where the tradition of keşkek is maintained with the highest level of ritualistic devotion. In this region, keşkek is more than a meal and it is a communal symbol often associated with weddings and village feasts. Particularly in provinces such as Aydın, Muğla, and İzmir, the preparation process involves communal participation, where the pounding of the wheat reflects the collective spirit of the local people (Bostan et al., 2024).

In Afyonkarahisar, there is a special variant of keşkek cooked overnight in large clay pots called 'hevik' within extinguished stone ovens. Enriched with marrow bones and lamb shank, this delicacy is refined with a special touch before serving. With the addition of buffalo cream unique to the Afyonkarahisar region, it is pounded until it reaches the ideal texture (Çelik, 2019). Known as 'Şuhut keşkeği', this dish holds a geographical indication registration. In some districts, it is also served without being pounded. This practice, which brings family members together in the early hours of Eid al-Adha, is a long-standing holiday tradition that unites generations (Çelik et al., 2021).

In Denizli, keşkek—prepared using lamb meat, particularly by high-income groups—stands out as a regional delicacy (Çınar, 2019, p. 75). The 'Babadağ keşkek' consumed in the Babadağ district consists of a mixture of fatty goat or ram meat and pounded wheat. This delicacy, predominantly served at wedding celebrations, is prepared by boiling the meat and wheat components independently in separate pots initially. As the wheat's cooking water decreases, the meat's boiling water is gradually added to the mixture. Once cooked, the meat is pounded until the bones are removed and the fibers are separated, then mixed with the wheat. Keşkek is traditionally served with pickles and salad, with sautéed butter infused with red pepper added as a topping during serving (Çelik et al., 2021). In the version known as 'Çivril keşkeği' in the Çivril district of Denizli, a meat sauce with tomato paste is drizzled on top of the keşkek before serving (Çelik et al., 2021).

In Izmir, keşkek, an indispensable element of wedding ceremonies, is widely prepared throughout the city (Çelik et al., 2021). In the past, this dish was typically cooked with lamb meat (Çınar, 2019, p. 52). Primarily composed of wheat and meat (either red or white meat), keşkek is cooked in the same pot on the wedding day. After cooking, it is thoroughly crushed with a mallet to achieve a paste consistency. Depending on regional preferences, it is served with a sauce consisting of red pepper, tomato paste, and butter (Çelik et al., 2021)

In Muğla, keşkek is a traditional dish prepared specifically during Newroz celebrations and wedding ceremonies. Keşkek produced in this region is usually vegetarian, utilizing an ample amount of butter instead of meat. It is typically cooked slowly over a wood fire in large copper pots while being stirred continuously to ensure the proper texture (Çekiç, 2015, p. 26; Çınar, 2019, p. 55).

In Aydın, keşkek is a staple dish typically served at wedding ceremonies. Meat and wheat, cooked independently in separate pots, are later combined in a single cauldron and vigorously beaten with a wooden spoon until achieving a chewy consistency. During serving, sautéed butter infused with red pepper is added (Aydın, 2000, p. 47). The geographically indicated 'Dedebağ keşkek' in the Karacasu district of Aydın is distributed for charitable purposes. Prepared using traditional methods that have remained unchanged for seven centuries, this delicacy is created by combining goat meat in copper pots over a wood fire. The smooth paste consistency obtained through an intensive pounding process, combined with the unique smoky aroma infused into the

dish, creates a fundamental flavor profile that distinguishes this particular variant from other regional variations (Çelik et al., 2021).

Central Anatolia Region

As the historical heartland of Anatolia, the Central Anatolia Region preserves the tradition of keşkek as a symbol of hospitality and social endurance, deeply rooted in its agrarian lifestyle. In Aksaray, a variation of keşkek known as 'herse' is presented, distinguished by its preparation in earthenware pots over a tandoor fire. This dish derives its flavor from the ribs of both cattle and small ruminants, and it can likewise be produced with dried meat as part of winter preparations. In a social context, this delicacy is regarded more as a staple local foodstuff that can be consumed daily rather than being restricted to celebratory occasions (Çelik et al., 2021).

In the preparation of Çankırı-style keşkek, wheat that has been pounded in stone mortars for a specific period of time forms the primary ingredient. The wheat is combined with meat sautéed in butter, after which water and salt are added; the mixture is then left to cook slowly in the oven until it attains its characteristic texture (Çelik et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is regarded as an indispensable dish for weddings in this region (Şentürk, 2019).

Figure 1: The traditional preparation of keşkek in the province of Çankırı, Central

Anatolia Region.

In Sivas cuisine, keşkek is prepared using bulgur, yogurt, water, and butter. The boiled bulgur is blended with yogurt and served; subsequently, a well is formed in the center of the dish and melted butter is poured into it to complete the presentation (Çelik et al., 2021).

In Kırşehir, keşkek is referred to as 'keşgâh' (Yurday and Kıngır, 2019). Pounded wheat and shredded fatty meat are cooked until they reach a velvety, pudding-like consistency. The final dish is served with a tomato paste-based sauce added on top (Çelik et al., 2021).

Eastern Anatolia Region

In the high altitudes of Eastern Anatolia, where pastoral traditions remain dominant, keşkek serves as a vital and robust culinary staple that reflects the region's rich livestock culture and social hospitality. In Elazığ, keşkek is known as "masuta" and is prepared with yogurt, bulgur, and eggs. Butter is added as a topping during serving, and it is typically a dish consumed within domestic settings (Çelik et al., 2021).

In the Kemaliye district of Erzincan, a variant called 'Kemaliye keşkeği' is prepared. This dish, cooked in cauldrons using lamb meat, attains a paste-like consistency and is consumed either as a main course or during weddings (Yücel et al., 2013, p. 41). In Erzincan, this preparation is usually

referred to as 'aşür', 'etli aşür', or 'etli aşure' (Çekiç, 2015, p. 10). In the Hınıs district of Erzurum, a local dish known as 'Hınıs keşkeği' is prepared with meat on the bone, crushed wheat, and chickpeas. After boiling, a well is formed in the center, and melted butter is poured over it before serving (Çelik et al., 2021).

In the Ağrı region, this traditional dish is known by various names such as 'herise', 'halise', 'keşkek', and 'aşur', though its most prevalent name is 'halise'. After wheat and lamb meat are cooked overnight in a copper pot within an oven, the ingredients are crushed with wooden mallets. Before serving, hot yellow oil—typically clarified butter—is added on top (Akkor, 2016, p. 160).

Figure 2: The traditional preparation of "Halise" in the province of Ağrı, Eastern Anatolia

When examining the gastronomic elements unique to the Kars and Iğdır regions, one encounters haşıl which is an alternative to keşkek. This dish utilizng wheat as its primary ingredient and is thickened with flour, gains a rich flavor profile with the addition of garlic yogurt and butter. Prepared with similar ingredients and techniques in the Iğdır basin, this dish represents a typical example of regional culinary habits (Saatci, 2019, p. 373).

Known as 'çideme' in Malatya, keşkek is cooked, after which the water is drained from the crushed wheat. Subsequently, fried paprika and tomato paste are added, and the mixture is cooked for a short duration before being served (Çelik et al., 2021).

In the Muş region, alliterative rhymes are recited as part of the oral tradition at keşkek feasts. Those who cannot correctly pronounce rhymes such as "Keşkeklenmiş keşkekçinin keşkek kepçesi" traditionally bear the responsibility of organizing the feast (Çekiç, 2015, p. 50). In Muş, it is also called "herse." The meat is separated from the bones and boiled, while wheat having been pre-boiled is prepared in a separate pot. The meat is then incorporated into the boiling wheat and mixed thoroughly. Before serving, a generous amount of oil is added, and it is portioned into bowls (Çelik et al., 2021).

In Van, keşkek is prepared using wheat, chickpeas, and meat. Similar to the Muş region, this dish which attains a porridge-like consistency is served with tomato paste or chili flakes infused into hot oil (Çelik et al., 2021).

Southeastern Anatolia Region

As a cradle of ancient civilizations, the Southeastern Anatolia Region offers a vibrant interpretation of the keşkek tradition, where culinary practices are often intertwined with religious rituals and local proverbs. In Kilis cuisine, keşkek is usually prepared with minced meat and is therefore referred to as 'kel keşkek'. This dish holds an important place in Kilis's daily food culture (Çekiç, 2015). Prepared as a tradition specific to the commencement of Ramadan, keşkek possesses

a deep spiritual dimension. According to a widespread belief, the individual preparing the dish sanctifies the process through a religious ritual, reciting prayers for each grain of crushed wheat as a tribute to the souls of their deceased relatives (Alptekin, 2021, p. 166).

Herise, prepared in Gaziantep by combining meat and crushed wheat, represents one of the region's significant culinary values (Çekiç, 2015, p. 10). The requirement that the meat in this dish be fatty is reinforced by a local proverb: "herise is made from fatty meat, let the man earn it and bring it home." Thus, the composition of the dish is solidified through a cultural narrative (Çelik et al., 2021).

Known as "herse" in Diyarbakır's gastronomic literature, keşkek represents a unique interpretation of the regional cuisine (Karakaş and Alkış, 2015). This dish, which contains either fresh or roasted meat alongside ingredients such as crushed wheat, chickpeas, tomatoes, and peppers, stands out from other regional variations due to its crimson color and dense, porridge-like texture (Çelik et al., 2021).

In Mardin, keşkek is prepared using lamb meat, wheat, and chickpeas. Clarified butter is incorporated into the dish, which is traditionally served bone-in. Mardin-style keşkek possesses a distinct compositional structure compared to other regions (Çelik et al., 2021).

Black Sea Region

The Black Sea Region is characterized by a keşkek tradition that mirrors its rugged social and geographical landscape, where the intensive labor required to prepare the dish serves as a testament to communal resilience. In Amasya cuisine, the keşkek recipe prepared specifically for wedding celebrations includes wheat, lamb meat, lamb tail, chickpeas, and cumin as its primary components. In Merzifon in particular, these ingredients are subjected to a mechanical pounding process within a clay pot to transform them into a homogeneous paste (Yörgüç, 2010), giving the dish its characteristic texture (Çekiç, 2015, p. 55).

Keşkek, a traditional dish from Çorum, is primarily prepared using wheat and meat; however, the incorporation of onions and tail fat is also common. This dish, which is cooked by continuously mashing it in copper pots with wooden spoons, is frequently served with a meat-based stew added as a topping (Atasoy, 2019). The 'İskilip keşkek', unique to the İskilip district of Çorum, is cooked in clay pots and develops a distinctive crust on top (Çelik et al., 2021).

Known as 'kara fırın keşkeği' in Karabük, this dish, baked in earthenware pots, represents a deep-rooted culinary heritage flavored with beef or cow neck (Deniz and Yavaş, 2020). In addition to this dish, which is essential during special occasions such as holidays and weddings, 'milk keşkek soup' also maintains its place within the regional gastronomy. Cooked with milk and topped with a tomato paste-infused butter, this version offers a unique profile specific to the region with its distinct color and consistency (Çelik et al., 2021).

In the Bolu region, keşkek is prepared by cooking aşure-grade wheat together with beef or lamb. Once the meat is completely tender, it is shredded and combined with the wheat again, then pounded together to achieve the desired consistency. The addition of finely chopped onions sautéed in butter before serving is one of the characteristic methods of presenting this dish (Çelik et al., 2021).

Marmara Region

The Marmara Region that is a bridge between diverse culinary traditions, presents a multifaceted keşkek culture where the inclusion of dairy products and unique local fats reflects a transition

toward a more refined, settled gastronomy. A characteristic element of Edirne's culinary culture, 'Thracian-style keşkek' is crafted by mixing chicken breast, wheat, butter, and milk with red pepper. This dish, which holds an important place in the regional culinary hierarchy, is traditionally served as a gesture of hospitality at events involving intense social sharing, such as wedding ceremonies and Mevlit gatherings (Çelik et al., 2021).

In Çanakkale, keşkek is prepared by cooking hulled wheat and mutton together, supplemented by oil and chickpeas. It is primarily served at communal meal events (Erol, 2004). This dish, known as 'Adapazarı Dartılı Keşkek' in Sakarya's gastronomic heritage, is an indispensable treat at traditional ceremonies such as hen nights (Uğurkan, 2019). Made primarily from milk, chicken, and wheat, this delicacy was registered in 2009 and attained its place among geographically indicated products (Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, 2012). The most fundamental characteristic that distinguishes this dish from similar variants is the inclusion of 'dartı'—a specialized dairy product derived from milk fat—in the mixture (Uğurkan, 2019).

In Balıkesir, keşkek is prepared using lamb bones, wheat, tomato paste, and butter. The meat is pounded until it attains an unrecognizable, unified texture (URL-37, 2021). This ointment-like dish is served predominantly at wedding ceremonies (Demirel and Karakuş, 2019, p. 1391).

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

This research highlights the role of gastronomy in the formation of social identity and its tourism potential by subjecting Anatolia's ancient culinary heritage to a comprehensive analysis, particularly through the lens of the keşkek tradition. It has been observed that culinary practices in Turkish tradition are not merely physical necessities but symbolic expressions shaped at the most critical junctures of social life. Anatolia's biodiversity and geographical richness have allowed keşkek to retain its fundamental form while acquiring a unique character on a regional basis. In this context, keşkek, as an element of intangible cultural heritage, has been reinterpreted in every region from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea with local ingredients and specialized techniques. For instance, in Sakarya, this dish acquires a characteristic aroma through the inclusion of "dartı," while in Amasya and Merzifon, it is defined by a unique blend of cumin and lamb tail fat. Concurrently, in southeastern provinces such as Diyarbakır and Gaziantep, it exhibits visual and structural distinctiveness in the form of "herse," incorporating tomato paste, chickpeas, and various vegetable additions.

This diversity in culinary culture also serves as a reflection of technical capabilities and local customs. The transformation of wheat pounded in stone mortars in Çankırı through the baking stage, the slow-cooking in earthenware pots over the intense heat of the tandoor in Aksaray, or the thickening with flour as seen in the "haşıl" example in the Kars/Iğdır basin, illustrates how the dish has evolved according to technological and geographical constraints. The social significance of keşkek extends beyond its ingredients, encompassing a broad spiritual dimension ranging from birth-related and holiday celebrations in Karabük to devotional rituals performed in memory of the deceased across various parts of Anatolia.

Ultimately, keşkek transcends being a mere culinary product; it represents a tradition, a social consensus, and a deep sense of belonging. As one of the most strategic elements of Türkiye's rich gastronomic mosaic, preserving this heritage—along with its local nuances—and passing it on to future generations is of vital importance for cultural sustainability.

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