

EVALUATION OF GASTRONOMY TOURISM POTENTIAL OF SAKARYA PROVINCE WITHIN THE SCOPE OF SUSTAINABILITY

AVALIAÇÃO DO POTENCIAL DE TURISMO GASTRONÔMICO DA PROVÍNCIA DE SAKARYA NO ÂMBITO DA SUSTENTABILIDADE

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to determine the gastronomy tourism potential of Sakarya province within the scope of sustainability. In order to determine the contribution of gastronomy tourism to the tourism potential of Sakarya province in a sustainable manner and to ensure its efficient contribution to the tourism activities of the province, it is aimed in the study to examine the thoughts and attitudes of the stakeholders involved in the tourism of Sakarya province regarding gastronomy tourism. Qualitative research method is used in the research to analyze the answers to the questions in depth and to have an idea about the perceptions, experiences, behaviors and attitudes of the participants. Within the scope of the research, interviews (semi-structured) were conducted with 15 participants (public and private sector) who are stakeholders of tourism in Sakarya province by using qualitative research method. In the study, a six-question interview form was used within the scope of the semi-

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é determinar o potencial do turismo gastronômico da província de Sakarya sob a perspectiva da sustentabilidade. Para determinar a contribuição do turismo gastronômico para o potencial turístico da província de Sakarya de forma sustentável e garantir sua contribuição eficiente para as atividades turísticas da província, o estudo visa examinar os pensamentos e atitudes dos atores envolvidos no turismo da província de Sakarya em relação ao turismo gastronômico. O método de pesquisa qualitativa foi utilizado para analisar as respostas às perguntas em profundidade e obter uma ideia sobre as percepções, experiências, comportamentos e atitudes dos participantes. No âmbito da pesquisa, foram realizadas entrevistas (semiestruturadas) com 15 participantes (setores público e privado) que são atores do turismo na província de Sakarya, utilizando o método de pesquisa qualitativa. No estudo, foi utilizado um formulário de entrevista com seis



structured interview technique. According to the findings, while associating gastronomy and gastronomy tourism with food, beverage, food culture, food science and local food, it is stated that gastronomy tourism has taken its place in tourism activities as a new type. All participants have knowledge about gastronomy and agree on the effectiveness of gastronomy tourism as a new type. The participants stated that the food establishments operating in Sakarya do not have local flavors in their menus due to the low demand, and that there are more standard foods. It has been understood that there are no local flavors in the menus of food establishments operating in Sakarya due to the low demand, but rather standard foods. It has been concluded that it is important in terms of gastronomy tourism to organize festivals in Sakarya province where gastronomy-related values will be highlighted and to ensure the national promotion of Sakarya local products. Although Sakarya province has many different values in gastronomy tourism, it has been determined that it is not at a sufficient level in terms of gastronomy tourism and suggestions have been made to overcome this deficiency and to create a sustainable gastronomy tourism.

Keywords: Sustainability. Gastronomy. Gastronomy Tourism. Local Food. Sakarya Cuisine.

perguntas dentro da técnica de entrevista semiestruturada. De acordo com os resultados, ao associar gastronomia e turismo gastronômico a alimentos, bebidas, cultura alimentar, ciência dos alimentos e produtos locais, constatou-se que o turismo gastronômico se consolidou como uma nova modalidade de atividade turística. Todos os participantes demonstraram conhecimento sobre gastronomia e concordaram com a eficácia do turismo gastronômico como essa nova modalidade. Os participantes afirmaram que os estabelecimentos gastronômicos em Sakarya não incluem sabores locais em seus cardápios devido à baixa demanda, havendo, em sua maioria, pratos padronizados. Entendeu-se que a ausência de sabores locais nos cardápios dos estabelecimentos gastronômicos em Sakarya se deve à baixa demanda, com predominância de pratos padronizados. Concluiu-se que é importante, em termos de turismo gastronômico, organizar festivais na província de Sakarya que destaquem os valores gastronômicos e garantir a promoção nacional dos produtos locais de Sakarya. Embora a província de Sakarya apresente diversos valores no turismo gastronômico, constatou-se que o nível de desenvolvimento ainda não é suficiente, e foram apresentadas sugestões para superar essa deficiência e criar um turismo gastronômico sustentável.

Palavras-chave: Sustentabilidade. Gastronomia. Turismo Gastronômico. Comida Local. Culinária de Sakarya.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the increased prosperity resulting from industrialization and technological advancements has led people to seek out different places and cultures, giving rise to the concept of tourism. Tourism stands out due to its rapid growth potential, economic, social and cultural impacts and contributions to employment and the balance of payments. People participating in tourism are increasingly seeking alternative tourism types outside of mass tourism (Kavaklı et al., 2020). Gastronomy tourism, an alternative tourism type, has become quite popular in recent years. The primary motivation for tourists visiting these areas may be local food and beverages. Within the scope of gastronomy

tourism, tourists experience the regional cultures of the areas they visit (Yener, 2013). The collaboration between scientific studies and food cultures supports the development of gastronomy as a science (Santich, 2024).

People, regardless of their location, have met their physiological need for food and drink in various ways. The dietary habits developed by all communities over time have evolved under the influence of various factors. Interaction between people living in different regions has led to the encounter with diverse food cultures. If regions possess their own unique cultures and diversity, then it is possible to speak of food cultures as well. Türkiye's geography, having hosted different civilizations, has been the stage for the formation of diverse food cultures. Turkish cuisine holds a significant position among food cultures worldwide, with its unique cooking techniques and presentations. Türkiye's reputation for gastronomy is particularly supported by its provinces that hold titles within the country (Gaziantep, İzmir, Adana, Kayseri, Konya, Şanlıurfa, etc.).

Gastronomy, a concept with very ancient etymology, has become widely used and encountered in recent years. The increasing habit of eating out and the desire to experience different cuisines have significantly impacted cultural change. These changes in gastronomy have led to the emergence of numerous food businesses producing regional products. Competition among these businesses has intensified, making institutionalization inevitable for market survival and sustainable practices. For businesses producing regional products to operate as customer-focused organizations and build a sustainable structure, customer satisfaction is crucial. Ensuring customer satisfaction is vital for regional food businesses to gain a competitive advantage and ensure their sustainability. The fundamental challenge and defining factor in their operations is achieving customer satisfaction.

The sustainability of gastronomy tourism businesses depends on ensuring customer satisfaction. Achieving customer satisfaction, which is not easily accomplished, must be continuous and sustainable, not just a one-time event. Customer satisfaction guarantees the future of businesses, while dissatisfied customers represent a disadvantage. Factors such as hygiene, taste, gestures, quality of service and hospitality are influential in ensuring customer satisfaction. Meeting customer needs and preferences provides competitive advantages, while businesses offering conscious service enable them to stand out from the competition. This study aims to determine the potential of gastronomy tourism within the

tourism supply resources of Sakarya province, and to identify and develop recommendations for businesses to achieve sustainable gastronomy tourism. The study on the gastronomy tourism potential and sustainability of Sakarya province, which has diverse regional food cultures, was conducted using a qualitative research method with tourism stakeholders who directly or indirectly affect tourism in Sakarya province. Participants were asked semi-structured interview questions, and six public and nine private sector representatives were interviewed.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Gastronomy

According to the Turkish Language Association dictionary, gastronomy is defined as a well-organized, healthy, delicious, and pleasant culinary system and arrangement (URL 1, 2018). The aim of gastronomy is to ensure that people enjoy life and nutrition while maintaining their health and providing the best possible nutrition. The activities of producing and preparing food and beverages in hygienic environments and ready for consumption are described as gastronomy (Sormaz et al., 2016). Gastronomy is defined as a type of science that contributes to scientific and artistic subjects by examining, understanding, applying, developing, and adapting to current conditions all the qualities of beverages and foods in detail (Çavuşoğlu, 2011).

Gastronomy is a concept that addresses not only people's physiological needs but also their psychological and sociological needs, having a physical and mental impact (Sarioğlu, 2014). It is defined as a branch of science that examines various aspects, starting from nutritional knowledge and encompassing cooking techniques, flavor, taste, and aroma, through research, interpretation, experience, and discovery. Gastronomy is not limited to concepts related to the procurement, preparation, and presentation of food; it also covers economic, social, and political issues (Kurgun, 2016). In the phenomenon of gastronomy, a common basis for how food and beverages should be used is offered, and it is possible to see how the cultural structures of different countries intersect with food and beverages.

Gastronomy encompasses studies aimed at maximizing the enjoyment of produced beverages and foods, while also revealing the food and beverage-related variables of local populations in different regions (Uyar & Zengin, 2015). Gastronomy is a phenomenon that covers a wide range of different fields, not only as the art of food and beverage, but also establishing a relationship between food and beverage with art, science, culture, and history (Çalışkan, 2013). The word gastronomy, composed of the Greek words “gastros” (stomach) and “nomos” (rule, law), entered our language from French (Ballı, 2016). While aiming to preserve people with the best foods, gastronomy is explained as the set of rules that enable the preparation, research, and transformation of food. Regardless of the titles of those who prepare food, it is the science that motivates hunters, farmers, cooks, and fishermen (Brillat, 2018).

Gastronomy is the science that examines the distinctive characteristics, eating and drinking habits, and preparation stages of the culinary cultures of regions or countries (Cömert & Özkaya, 2014). Within culinary culture, it studies the relationships between the preparation, flavors, table presentation and arrangement of food and beverages; it involves researching delicious foods and drinks, transforming them into activities and evaluating them from an artistic perspective (Şengül & Türkay, 2016). In the food and beverage activities of countries, every detail, from the production to the preparation and presentation of products, reflects characteristic features; gastronomy acts as a cultural mirror, conveying cultural characteristics. Eating and drinking, a basic physiological need that people enjoy, has been important in all stages of life, influenced by cultural factors, economic structures, sociological factors, and political events, and has been an indicator of social status. The scientific and artistic study of eating and drinking practices, which are essential activities in people's lives, is described as gastronomy (Özbay, 2017).

People plan, discuss, and experience the most special moments of their lives around food. Birthday parties, business dinners, marriage proposals, social gatherings, feasts, anniversaries, and leisurely outings are all activities where gastronomy plays a role. While gastronomy is initially described as a physiological need, it later evolved into Maslow's hierarchy of needs, specifically self-actualization. Drinking and eating are physiological needs, ranking first in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A newborn baby expressing hunger through crying demonstrates the influence of gastronomy at every

stage of human life. In today's working conditions, the reduced time allocated for cooking at home has led to an increased tendency to eat out (Brillat, 2018).

2.2 Gastronomy tourism

Gastronomy tourism refers to travel undertaken by tourists who wish to experience local food and beverages in restaurants and hotels (Yüncü, 2010). It is a type of travel where tourists travel to destinations with the aim of experiencing local food and beverages (Steinmetz, 2010). Gastronomy tourism is based on agricultural, cultural, and traditional values. The tourism sector provides the presentation of local and agricultural production elements (Du Rand & Heath, 2006). The tourism sector utilizes gastronomic values to increase tourism types. In tourism, gastronomic values are a key factor in attracting both domestic and foreign tourists (Küçükaltan, 2009). The presentation of local food and beverage cultures combined with hospitality constitutes gastronomy tourism. In recent years, it has become increasingly common for tourists to consider the gastronomic values of regions when choosing destinations and to want to experience the local food and beverages (Özkaya & Gündeğer, 2014).

Food festivals, visits to food producers, and restaurants to experience local cuisine contribute economically to local farmers while supporting the production of high-quality products. Gastronomy tourism increases sales revenue for businesses, leading to increased profitability and accelerated investment (Yarış, 2014). In marketing destinations, local products and cultural values provide competitive advantages, while fostering a sense of identity and recognition for local people and strengthening the regional economy (Barkat & Vermignon, 2006). The bonds formed between tourists visiting the regions and the local population contribute to the enhancement of the destinations' positive image (Kalkstein, 2007). The main motivations in gastronomy tourism are discovering new dishes, observing their preparation, visiting local producers, and participating in local food events (Hall & Sharples, 2003).

In gastronomic tourism, hotels, individual producers, restaurants, tourists, and tour operators are stakeholders, and the desire to eat and experience new flavors is a significant source of motivation (Cömert & Özkaya, 2014). Gastronomy events are among the most important activities that increase tourism revenue by creating positive

effects on the local population (Güzel, 2009). Gastronomy tourism is important in increasing the tourism revenue and recognition of countries. It has been determined that approximately ten percent of the forty million tourist visits to Paris, France, are influenced by gastronomy during their visit (Altinel, 2009). Thanks to gastronomic tourism, it is possible to spread the destination's offerings throughout the year. The important reasons why gastronomy is a tourism activity are as follows (Wolf, 2006):

- Food is one of the most important aspects of tourism activities.
- Gastronomy activities can be done throughout the year.
- Gastronomy appeals to all age groups.
- Gastronomy aims to help tourists explore and experience.
- Gastronomy products appeal to all the senses.
- In tourism activities, tourists' dining activities take place outdoors.

Local cuisines are influential in preferences. Furthermore, gastronomic tourism has positive effects such as providing sales opportunities for local consumers and restaurants, increasing occupancy rates, supporting regional tourism and increasing finance and skilled labor. A tourism approach centered on food and beverage consumption supports the economies of local agricultural producers while enabling the provision of high-quality food and beverages. In recent years, gastronomic tourism has become one of the types of tourism heavily used in the marketing of destinations, sold as gourmet holiday package tours (Kank, 2014). The gastronomic values of countries are considered a significant force in international and national tourism potential as a crucial cultural asset. Napa Valley in America, San Sebastian in Spain, Champagne in France and Tuscany in Italy are important regions in terms of gastronomic tourism. Alongside national regions and historical values, local gastronomic values stand out, creating a strong attraction. The fact that Gaziantep province has attracted the attention of national and international tourists in recent years, the recognition of its potential for gastronomy tourism and the determination of its volume can be given as an example (Altinel, 2009).

2.3 The concept of sustainability

Sustainability is the interconnectedness and partnership of social, economic and environmental phenomena (Dasgupta, 2000). As a concept, sustainability, when compared

to concepts such as economic, human and social development, represents transitional phases. It is the continuation and sustainability of existence through the management of organizations and local resources in a way that ensures their continued existence and interdependence. Deteriorations in structures directly impact economic and social areas of work (Farley & Smith, 2020). Efficient and effective use of resources during the implementation of these phases, which should be supported by institutional management and should be bottom-up or top-down, are fundamental elements of sustainability. What is important is the efforts to ensure the continuity of social and economic systems in the long term (Gallopín, 2003).

In countries, societal progress, economic development, and the implementation of all future strategies must be based on ecological constraints. For an application to be sustainable, sustainable guidance support must be provided. The key to providing this support is establishing a balance. Addressing rapid consumption, anticipating the needs of future generations, and being mindful of the resources allocated to the system are fundamental elements of this balance (Sachs, 2002). While ecological constraints are needed for sustainability, achieving balance by ensuring equality between those who consume less and those who consume more is among the most important reasons for economic development (Maclaren, 1996). The crucial point is that resources should not be negatively impacted by economic development. For the well-being and happiness of societies to be sustainable, individuals need to interact and form relationships with each other or with non-human natural elements. These relationships can vary depending on geographical location and time period (Hummels & Argyrou, 2021).

Achieving sustainable development requires attention to the element of equality between consumers and the environment, and the programming of natural resources in a way that ensures their transfer to future generations. The approach that aims to reduce the harm caused by natural resources, ensure their long-term use, increase prosperity through economic development, and lower costs is the sustainable development approach (Sachs, 2002). The continuation of life, the survival of businesses and firms and the achievement of goals are closely related to the availability of resources. Especially in the field of gastronomy, gourmets, chefs, business owners, restaurant managers, and food experts are much more sensitive to issues such as food, energy and water conservation, focusing on

sustainability. In gastronomy, the continuity of the industry depends on the demand and the environmental conditions associated with food (Micheletti & Stolle, 2012).

2.4 Sustainable gastronomy tourism

Environmental problems arising from industrial development, such as the degradation of natural resources, have led to the emergence of the concept of sustainability (Gündüz, 2004). The tourism sector, as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world, interacts with the natural and cultural values of destinations. Damage to the cultural and natural values of destinations makes it difficult to carry out tourism activities. The concept of sustainability is very important for the tourism sector, aiming to increase capacity and quality while protecting natural and environmental resources (Demir & Çevirgen, 2006). Ensuring the long-term use of cultural, social, and natural resources is crucial for the future and development of tourism (Getz & Timur, 2005).

Since one-third of tourism expenditures consist of food and beverage expenses, gastronomic tourism is becoming popular, and experiencing local cuisines positively contributes to satisfaction levels. The sustainability of gastronomy in tourism is evaluated in terms of economic, social, and environmental aspects (Yüncü, 2010). Thanks to sustainable gastronomic tourism, local products are used, supporting both the social and economic development of the local population. The support provided to producers of local products enables them to produce high-quality and good products (Üzümcü, 2018). For sustainable gastronomic tourism to be realized, the production of local food and beverages, the transfer and teaching of production knowledge to future generations are important issues that need to be considered and implemented (Yurtseven, 2011).

In gastronomic tourism, fostering a positive attitude towards tourists is crucial for regions to achieve economic returns. Gastronomy tourism promotes interaction and communication between tourists and locals (Kalkstein, 2007). Tourism systems must ensure and support environmental sustainability from a gastronomic perspective (Scarpato, 2002). In tourism policies aimed at the development of regional areas, gastronomic heritage elements and local food and beverage values should be protected and used as a promotional tool (Durlu et al., 2013). Sustainable gastronomic tourism is defined as tourism activities that support the production of regional foods with regional sensitivity

and aim to improve quality (Yurtseven, 2011). Local food and beverages shed light on cultural heritage and identity while creating a significant competitive advantage (Çalışkan, 2013). Studies on geographically indicated foods that have existed from ancient times to the present, rural cities and foods, culinary processes, and local products form the basis of sustainable gastronomic tourism (Kivela, 2006).

2.5 Gastronomy tourism assets of Sakarya Province

Sakarya province, due to its diverse cultural heritage, boasts a rich variety of regional foods. These flavors, along with the businesses that produce them, significantly contribute to gastronomic tourism. The diverse culinary and food production habits of the various cultural groups within Sakarya province are preserved as cultural values for future generations. The use of agricultural products grown in Sakarya's geography in the food and beverages used in its culinary culture further enhances its gastronomic richness (Aktaş, 2008).

Some of the regional delicacies of Sakarya province include: Abkhazian pastry, Islama meatballs, Circassian chicken, Kazım Pasha meatballs (Adapazarı), Uhut dessert, foamy halva (Taraklı), Cizleme, walnut spread (Pamukova), Tarhana soup, Dartılı keşkek, pumpkin dessert (Kaynarca), and various fish dishes in the Black Sea coastal districts. Potatoes, quince, and pumpkins are renowned and symbolic foods of Sakarya province. The regional delicacies of Sakarya province are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Local Dishes of Sakarya Province

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Soups | | |
| Potato soup | Corn soup | Pumpkin soup |
| Rice | | |
| Millet rice | Circassian rice | Yufka rice |
| Pastries | | |
| Escape | Haluj | Walnut Turkish delight |
| Skipping | Curling | Malay |
| Meals | | |
| Meatballs in the Sausage | Dartılı keşkek | Circassian chicken |
| Miyani | Roast | Pumpkin dish |
| Desserts | | |
| Foamy halva | Pumpkin dessert | Uhut dessert |
| Walnut spread | Pumpkin jam | Quince dessert |

Source: Aktaş, (2008).

3 METHOD

In research, qualitative research methods are used to gain insight into participants' perceptions, experiences, behaviors, and attitudes by analyzing the answers to questions in depth (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Interviewing participants is a method used in qualitative research that aims to determine the experiences, perceptions, feelings, and perspectives of the sample (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Using qualitative research methods, the aim is to reach a comprehensive understanding of the research problem through the findings obtained from the sample participants. Data can be collected to reach the research conclusion using flexible question types created for in-depth analysis (Kozak, 2015). In this study, a six-question interview form was used within the scope of the semi-structured interview technique. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, and participants' personal information was kept confidential and stated to be used for scientific purposes by filling out a voluntary consent form.

3.1 Purpose and significance of the study

The aim of this study is to determine the gastronomy tourism potential of Sakarya province within the scope of sustainability. The study seeks to sustainably identify the contribution of gastronomy tourism to Sakarya province's tourism potential and to ensure its efficient contribution to the province's tourism activities. The study examines the opinions and attitudes of stakeholders involved in Sakarya's tourism sector regarding gastronomy tourism. Participants were asked the following questions:

- What are your thoughts on the current tourism potential of Sakarya province? What do you consider to be its most prominent tourism assets?
- What are your thoughts on the concept of gastronomy and its relationship to tourism?
- What do you know about the local food and beverages of Sakarya province?
- What are your thoughts on the inclusion of local food menus in food establishments in Sakarya province?
- What are your thoughts on the potential and sustainability of gastronomy tourism in Sakarya province?

- What are your suggestions for developing and sustaining gastronomy tourism in Sakarya province?

This study is significant for its originality, as it is conducted within the framework of sustainability and complements previous studies on gastronomy in Sakarya. The aim of the study is to provide a resource for stakeholders in Sakarya's tourism sector, offering ideas and contributions, and to contribute to other researchers and the existing literature on the subject.

3.2 Universe and sample of the study

In research, defining the population involves determining from whom and what information should be obtained, and ultimately identifying who will be included in the evaluations to be made and how (Ural & Kılıç, 2011). The population in research consists of classifications specific to the study, categorized according to variables and characteristics appropriate to the study's objective (Karasar, 2012). In determining the sample, purposive sampling techniques were used, and observations and inquiries were conducted on segments of the population considered most relevant to the problem, in line with the study's objective (Sencer, 1989). The sample group consisted of representatives from the public and private sectors engaged in tourism activities in Sakarya province.

3.3 Analysis and interpretation of the research

Descriptive analysis and content analysis are frequently preferred methods in qualitative research. Descriptive analysis involves using quotations from the original data obtained from the studies, while remaining faithful to the original sources (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Analyzing the collected interview transcripts, on the other hand, uses content analysis to reveal more comprehensive information and to examine the data in depth (Özdemir, 2010). In research, developing questions on the topics without formulating hypotheses and then trying to find the answers to these questions stems from the inductive approach (Uzuner, 1999). In this study, the descriptive analysis method was used to analyze the data. The data obtained from face-to-face interviews with fifteen public and private sector representatives, who were the study participants, were analyzed. The

interviewees were randomly numbered G1, G2, G3...G15 without disclosing personal information.

4 FINDINGS

The 15 participants in the study consisted of representatives from Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality, Adapazarı Municipality, Sakarya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, Karasu Municipality, Sakarya University of Applied Sciences Information Technologies Vocational School Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Services Department, Sakarya University of Applied Sciences Kırkpınar Tourism Vocational School Culinary Arts Program, Sakarya Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Seçkin Hotel, Lima Park Hotel, Carpediem Hotel, Karasu Hotel, Karasu Elmas Hotel, Sakarya Hotel, Vizyon Resort Hotel, and Baltürk Hotel. Participants were specifically selected from individuals with the necessary expertise and experience in gastronomy. Interviews were conducted between January 1, 2025, and March 30, 2025, at locations chosen by the participants. Preliminary interviews were conducted, appointments were scheduled, and the interviews took place. Demographic information of the participants is provided in Table 2.

According to Table 2, which contains the demographic information of the participants, six participants represent the public sector and nine represent the private sector. Six of the participants are women and nine are men; nine participants have a bachelor's degree, two have a master's degree, two have an associate degree, and two have a doctorate. Two participants work as food and beverage managers, two are academics, four are department heads, two are general managers, two are operations managers, two are front office managers, and one is in a management position.

Table 2*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

| | Gender | Institution | Education | Position |
|------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| P1 | Female | Private Enterprise | Graduate | Manager |
| P2 | Male | Private Enterprise | Graduate | Front Office Manager |
| P3 | Male | Private Enterprise | Graduate | Front Office Manager |
| P4 | Female | Private Enterprise | Undergraduate | Business Manager |
| P5 | Male | Private Enterprise | Graduate | Food and Beverage Manager |
| P6 | Male | Private Enterprise | Master | Food and Beverage Manager |
| P7 | Female | Private Enterprise | Graduate | General Manager |
| P8 | Male | Private Enterprise | Graduate | Business Manager |
| P9 | Female | Private Enterprise | Undergraduate | General Manager |
| P10 | Male | Public Enterprise | Doctorate | Academic |
| P11 | Male | Public Enterprise | Doctorate | Academic |
| P12 | Female | Public Enterprise | Master | Department Head |
| P13 | Male | Public Enterprise | Graduate | Department Head |
| P14 | Male | Public Enterprise | Graduate | Department Head |
| P15 | Female | Public Enterprise | Graduate | Department Head |

4.1 What are your thoughts on the current tourism potential of Sakarya province? What do you consider to be its most prominent tourism assets?

All participants agreed that Sakarya province's natural riches are unique in terms of tourism. Sapanca Lake, Poyrazlar Lake, Acarlar Longoz, Taraklı tranquil town, plateaus, Karasu, and Kocaali coast are among the natural tourism assets of Sakarya province. The majority of participants stated that different types of tourism, such as nature tourism, thermal tourism, and cultural tourism, can be implemented in Sakarya. The potential for diverse tourism types throughout the year is crucial for developing and sustaining Sakarya province's potential. Some participants' opinions on the question are as follows:

P3.5.6.8.11.14: "Sakarya is a place with truly rare beauties in Türkiye. Akyazı and Taraklı have great potential in terms of thermal tourism. The ease of transportation and its proximity to major cities are significant advantages."

G8.2.13: "When people think of Sakarya, it is one of the cities most preferred between İstanbul and Ankara. Places like Taraklı and Sapanca, known throughout Türkiye, are the main attractions. While different types of tourism are carried out in our city, the combination of cultural and historical artifacts with natural resources creates a complete tourism destination."

G5.9.2.4: *“The current tourism potential of Sakarya province is very good. A large number of tourists visit, mainly for day trips. We are working to increase the number of days tourists stay.”*

G10.12.11.9: *“Sakarya has an advantageous location. Thanks to its proximity to major cities, it uses this advantage to attract tourists. Since transportation is quite easy from major cities, there is potential for more tourists to come to the city. This potential...” Sapanca and Taraklı, for example, can be used to attract tourists. What Sakarya lacks is a winter tourism center.”*

4.2 What are your thoughts on the concept of gastronomy and its relationship to tourism?

Participants coded G5, G7, G9, and G12 stated that gastronomy is the science consisting of food culture. Some of the participants' opinions on the concept of gastronomy and its relationship with tourism are as follows:

G14.12: *“I consider conscious eating as the art of eating, as the activities of discerning people to access the right and healthy foods. Naturally, what those who carry out these activities do is tourism. It is considered an inseparable part of the tourism sector in recent years.”*

G1.2.5: *“Gastronomy is the science of food. It is the adaptation of a region's food culture to tourism. It is the reflection of the culture that regions possess in their food.”*

G7.8.12: *“It is a concept that has become popular in Türkiye in recent years. Gastronomy is the presentation of topics such as culinary culture and healthy eating to people by supporting them with scientific studies. Meeting people's physiological need to eat can be considered a new type of tourism.”*

G4.9.10: *“It is the preparation of ingredients in a healthy way that appeals to the palate and the eye.”*

According to the conclusions drawn from the opinions, a significant portion of the participants stated that gastronomy is an important type of tourism, and that it plays a significant role in tourists' desire to revisit regions. In recent years, it has been observed that gastronomy tourism has been effective in motivating travel to destinations with rich culinary cultures, both globally and in Türkiye. In Türkiye, especially in provinces such

as Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Konya, Kayseri, Mersin, Gaziantep and Diyarbakır, gastronomy tourism-based policies are important in terms of tourists' travel motivation and positively influence their desire to travel again.

4.3 What do you know about the local food and drinks of Sakarya province?

The regional flavors of a country are among the most important elements in the formation of gastronomic tourism. All participants mentioned delicacies such as potato soup, pumpkin soup, kaçamak (a type of Turkish pastry), walnut lokum (Turkish delight), ıslama köfte (meatballs in sauce), dartılı keşkek (a type of stew), meyane (a type of Turkish roux), köpük helvası (a type of Turkish dessert), pumpkin dessert, quince dessert, and walnut spread. Depending on the climatic conditions in the geography of Sakarya province, certain types of mushrooms such as red mushrooms, cincile mushrooms and bear mushrooms can be found during specific periods. Sakarya's culinary culture includes dishes made from various types of pastries. Products such as pumpkins and potatoes grown in the Sakarya region are used extensively in dishes produced in the regional cuisine. Some participants' opinions regarding regional food and beverages are as follows:

G2.6.9: “Sakarya cuisine is rich in pastries and soups. It is necessary to develop and register as geographically indicated products flavors such as tarhana soup, potato dishes and soup, ıslama köfte (meatballs in sauce), Kazım Pasha meatballs, pumpkin dishes, and pumpkin dessert, while remaining true to their essence. Promoting these values to the public will be very beneficial for the regional economy.”

G11.8.9: “As the people of Sakarya, we know and consume all food and beverage products. Local products are heavily present in our daily lives. All the people of Sakarya go to districts like Geyve and Pamukova to participate in festivals where products made from quince grown in the region are sold. We have friends who go to the Taraklı region just to eat köpük helva (foamy halva).”

G12.1.3: “I don't go a week without eating ıslama köfte at least twice. The first place we take our guests from out of town is the ıslama köfte restaurant. A pumpkin dessert after the meal is a traditional practice. Tourists should visit the famous meatball restaurant in the Yeni Cami area.” It is included in package tour programs.”

4.4 What are your thoughts on the inclusion of local food menus in food establishments in Sakarya province?

It is noteworthy that when participants were asked whether regional foods were included in the menus of food and beverage establishments, all of them stated that standard menus were available. It was observed that only a small number of food and beverage establishments offered regional foods, while the rest generally had standard menus. The reason given by food and beverage business managers was that regional foods were removed from menus due to low demand and high demand for ready-to-eat food. According to the statements of participants in managerial positions in the food and beverage sector, regional dishes are not included in establishments due to reasons such as supply problems and commercial concerns regarding sales. Some participants' opinions in response to the question were as follows:

G1.5.7.9.12: “Fast food businesses are in higher demand. Businesses serving regional cuisine are few and far between. Regional cuisine businesses create supply, but when demand is insufficient, they are forced to change their menus.”

G4: “As hotels, we also create standard menus. Only for incoming package tours, if there is a special request, we plan for production and supply a day in advance and include regional delicacies in the menu the next day.”

G6: “I work as a food and beverage manager. Like other hotels, we use a standard menu. For some special events, if there is a request in advance, we offer regional delicacies to groups staying at the hotel or coming from outside. Our production staff at the hotel have sufficient knowledge and skills in this area. I think this makes us stronger and gives us a competitive advantage.”

Consequently, the low demand for regional delicacies in Sakarya province means that supply capacity cannot meet expectations, leading businesses to include standard foods on their menus. This results in regional dishes being either completely absent from menus or present in very limited quantities.

4.5 What are your thoughts on the potential and sustainability of gastronomic tourism assets in Sakarya province?

According to the answers given to this question, all participants stated that gastronomy tourism does not have a place among the types of tourism that Sakarya province has. Participants stated that tourists visiting Sakarya do not engage in any activities other than eating "ıslama köfte" (a type of meatball) and pumpkin dessert, and that they do not visit for gastronomic purposes. Some of the participants' opinions on this issue are as follows;

G1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12.13.14.15: "In Sakarya province, gastronomy is not implemented as a tourism activity. It is a practice carried out only partially in some businesses if there is demand. Sakarya province has gastronomy tourism potential, but it is not being utilized. If Sakarya province is developed in terms of gastronomy, like other cities that have become brands, it can utilize its regional flavors as a type of tourism. If the gastronomy tourism potential is developed correctly, it can contribute to its economy in a sustainable way."

4.6 What are your suggestions for developing and sustaining gastronomy tourism in Sakarya province?

When participants were asked what their suggestions were for the sustainable development of gastronomy tourism in Sakarya province, the following opinions emerged: gastronomy promotion activities are insufficient; food and beverage businesses should be supported to include local flavors in menus; and cooperation among all tourism stakeholders is absolutely necessary. Some participant opinions on the subject are as follows:

G5.9.12.14: "In Sakarya province, businesses producing and serving local dishes should be established in tourist areas where visits are frequent."

G5.1.8: "Activities should be carried out with all stakeholders to ensure sustainable gastronomy tourism and the creation of brand value in Sakarya province."

G13: "It is necessary to create brand value in terms of gastronomy. Sakarya province should receive professional support in promoting its gastronomic values and

creating brand value. Planned and scientific studies should be conducted. Existing inventory studies on food should be improved and local dishes should be produced by restaurants.”

G2: “I believe that gastronomy tours organized in Sakarya province will be beneficial in terms of sustainable gastronomy tourism.”

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In recent years, a wide variety of tourism activities are being carried out all over the world. Gastronomy tourism activities have begun to occupy a more prominent place among tourism types in various destinations. Today, food and beverage activities are undergoing changes. Within these changes, preserving and presenting regional food and beverages is crucial. In societies where dining out habits have developed due to improvements in living standards, it is possible to establish a healthy relationship between food and beverage culture and tourism. In this respect, revealing and utilizing the gastronomic potential of regions is important. Since the gastronomic values of countries reflect their cultures, all details, from the production to the preparation and presentation of food and beverages, reflect the characteristics of those countries.

Gastronomy tourism contributes to the economies of countries or regions while also supporting the sustainability of food and beverage cultures. To ensure the sustainability of gastronomy tourism, businesses producing local food and beverages must provide services and presentations that satisfy customers. Local food businesses should pay attention to hygiene rules, manage lengthy food preparation processes effectively, and present food in a way that minimizes customer time loss. The most important element in ensuring sustainability in gastronomy tourism is customer satisfaction. To achieve this, it is crucial for businesses producing local products to be open to innovation and build trust with customers through their production processes.

Customers who experience local cuisine show a desire to revisit, which is a necessary element for sustainability. The knowledge and experience of local people producing regional products, reflected in their production, positively contributes to the sustainable gastronomic image of businesses and regions. This study investigates the existing potential of Sakarya province in terms of gastronomy tourism, its place within

Sakarya tourism, and what can be done to ensure the sustainability of this potential. As part of the research, information was collected and analyzed through face-to-face interviews with tourism stakeholders in Sakarya province. Participants stated that Sakarya province has very important values in terms of tourism potential, has advantages in terms of transportation, and that many different types of tourism can be carried out together. Participants also indicated that while nature tourism, cultural tourism, and historical tourism activities are carried out in Sakarya, gastronomy tourism is not sufficiently known and does not actively contribute to the province's tourism, and is only partially implemented.

Participants linked gastronomy and gastronomic tourism to food, beverages, culinary culture, food science, and regional foods, noting that gastronomic tourism has taken its place as a new type of tourism activity. As can be understood from this, all participants are knowledgeable about gastronomy and agree on the effectiveness of gastronomic tourism as a new type of tourism. Participants stated that they are familiar with and occasionally consume Sakarya's regional delicacies, especially "ıslama köfte" (a type of meatball), "keşkek" (a type of stew), and pumpkin dessert. Participants also indicated that the menus of food establishments operating in Sakarya do not include regional delicacies due to low demand, and instead feature mostly standard dishes. Participants expressed the importance of organizing festivals that highlight the gastronomic values of Sakarya province and promoting Sakarya's regional products nationally for the benefit of gastronomic tourism.

5.1 Recommendations for public and private sector representatives

Sakarya, despite possessing significant tourism assets as supported by the participants' statements, is not performing well in terms of tourist numbers. Despite its transportation advantages, natural, historical, and cultural values, and its gastronomic culture, it is far from achieving the desired tourist numbers. To address this issue, increasing the number of activities that can attract and engage tourists in Sakarya could be crucial.

- To develop and sustain gastronomy tourism in Sakarya, a unit representing all tourism stakeholders could be established.

- A structure that ensures coordination and cooperation among stakeholders in gastronomy tourism in Sakarya could organize gastronomy-based events.
- After creating an inventory of Sakarya's gastronomy tourism potential, shortcomings could be identified and necessary interventions could be made.
- Promotion, marketing, and advertising strategies could be developed with the support of professionals or volunteers.
- In today's technology, inviting individuals who are popular figures in travel and gastronomy on social media to events could increase Sakarya's recognition.
- Incentives and investment support could be provided to food businesses in Sakarya to include local flavors in their menus.
- Specifically, buffets or cafes dedicated to the production and sale of local delicacies could be established in areas with high tourist traffic.
- In terms of gastronomic tourism, the primary goal should be to attract domestic tourists; once these goals are achieved, targets for international tourists can be set. Academic studies can be supported by organizing congresses, conferences, symposiums, and seminars on gastronomy in collaboration with Sakarya University of Applied Sciences.
- The deficiencies in the necessary infrastructure for gastronomic tourism can be addressed and improved.
- The training of qualified workforce can be ensured in a way that will improve the service quality of local food businesses.
- Standard recipes can be prepared for the production of local food and beverages, and production can be carried out in accordance with these recipes.
- Services can be provided taking into account the difficulties in terms of production time and seasonal conditions of local flavors.
- Awareness meetings can be held to inform the local people about local flavors and gastronomy tourism and their importance.
- All necessary efforts to brand the important assets of gastronomic tourism can be carried out within the framework of strategic plans.
- For gastronomic tourism, it is crucial that businesses producing local food gain the trust of both tourists and the local population. Efforts can be made to build trust in food production businesses in terms of sustainability and customer loyalty.

5.2 Suggestions for future planned study

- This study has the potential to contribute to future national and regional studies. Subsequent studies could use different samples to conduct research on the capacity of gastronomy tourism in terms of tourists and visitors.
- In future studies, identifying the potential production and customer capacities of businesses producing local products and promoting them could benefit the development and sustainability of gastronomy tourism.
- Subsequent studies could use quantitative analysis methods to study the capacities and sustainability of gastronomy tourism stakeholders in Sakarya province.
- Future studies could examine the interaction of local food businesses with different brands.

5.3 Ethical statement

The Sakarya University of Applied Sciences Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee granted permission for this study on January 18, 2025, with approval number E-26428519-050.99-156857. “This article complies with research and publication ethics, journal ethics, journal writing guidelines, and publication principles. The author is responsible for any violations that may occur regarding this article.”

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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