

The Development of Gastronomy Tourism in the Context of Destination Marketing: A Qualitative Study on Travel Agencies

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose – The main purpose of the research is to reveal the place and significance of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing from the perspective of travel agencies. In this context, the aim is to identify geographically indicated and non-geographically indicated products in Nevşehir, to create a gastronomy route, to organise gastronomic events and to promote Nevşehir as a gastronomy city.

Design/methodology/approach – In the research in which the qualitative method was adopted, phenomenology was set as the research design. Fifteen people were interviewed using the criterion sampling method. The data obtained from the interviews were subjected to content analysis and descriptive analysis using the Maxqda 20 programme.

Findings – Three main themes were identified as a result of the analyses: gastronomic products, gastronomic routes and gastronomic events. Geographically indicated, non-geographically indicated, local restaurants, local product sales points, places where local products are harvested, home-cooking tours, food and beverage themed festivals and cooking courses are the identified sub-themes. The most frequently coded main theme was the main theme of gastronomic products.

Discussion – In addition to cultural and balloon tourism in Nevşehir, the development of gastronomy tourism is expected to increase the number of visitors to the destination and contribute to higher revenues for tourism stakeholders.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many factors such as globalisation, intense competition, variable markets, the spread of information and communication technologies and crises in recent years have led to the significant development of tourism and travel industry (Sotiriadis, 2021). In this way, governments have become aware of the role that the tourism industry plays in improving the trade performance of countries (Faulkner, 1997). Ritchie, Crouch & Hudson (2000) state that the most important product in tourism is the destination experience, and consider the destination as the central point in tourism around which everything revolves. Most tourism activities take place in destinations, and tourists plan their travel activities according to the attractions that destinations offer. Destinations that are aware of this situation distinguish themselves from other destinations by focusing on marketing and management issues and draw up strategies to attract target markets. Destination marketing is a collaborative process of many stakeholders who have a say in destination management (Wang, 2011). In the tourism industry, destinations have started to turn to different types of tourism as part of their appeal in order to differentiate themselves from others. The natural beauty, cultural values and gastronomic elements present in tourism destinations have reached a level that increases their attractiveness and importance (Zağralı & Akbaba, 2015).

It is noted that interest in local gastronomic products has grown within the context of changing tourist behaviour and accordingly, local food plays a significant role in destination selection (Aydoğdu, Okay Özkaya & Köse, 2016). In recent years, the development of culturally rich cities into tourist attractions has made destination marketing and competition important. Destinations that keep up with this development try to

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make a difference by using their attraction elements in the right way. Gastronomy tourism has developed worldwide. Therefore, destinations looking to increase their share of tourism revenue have begun to turn to gastronomy tours. Travel agencies that are in direct communication and interaction with gastronomy tourists also come to the fore at this point. As they conduct sales activities with consumers through face-to-face marketing and other means, they are the only businesses that can identify tourist groups that visit or have the potential to visit destinations and attract them to the destination (Güçer, Hassan & Pelit, 2013). In this context, the main purpose of the study is to reveal the place and importance of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing from the perspective of travel agencies. As in almost all countries in the world, the destinations in Turkey also aim to promote their gastronomic richness and values. Nevşehir was chosen as the study area. This is because, according to the findings obtained from the relevant literature and interviews, it is known that Nevşehir does indeed have gastronomy tourism potential, but it is overshadowed by two important types of tourism (cultural and balloon tourism) in this destination (Hatipoğlu, 2014). In this sense, the study aims to reveal the significance of gastronomy tourism in Nevşehir and to provide information on the potential and feasibility of gastronomy tourism in Nevşehir. In this context, it is expected to make a significant contribution to the relevant literature. In examining the national and international literature, we note that there are studies on the place and importance of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing (Alyakut, 2021; Güzel Şahin & Ünver, 2015; Kardeş Çolakoğlu & Sarıışık, 2021; Kivela & Crofts, 2006) and on gastronomic tours organised by travel agencies (Cankül & Demir, 2018; Horng & Chen-Tsang, 2012; Sezer, 2017; Şenel & Doğan, 2021). This study evaluates gastronomy tourism from the perspective of travel agencies within the scope of destination marketing and differs from other studies in this respect.

It is essential that travel agencies within organisations involved in destination marketing and management fulfil their responsibilities. In this context, the main problem of the research is what the travel agencies should do to increase the awareness and recognition of Nevşehir in terms of gastronomy tourism. In accordance with the research problem, the employees of travel agencies were interviewed about Nevşehir's geographically identified and possible gastronomic products, how to design an itinerary in Nevşehir, home-cooking tours organised or that can be organised in Nevşehir, festivals and cooking courses. In this context, interview technique, which is an important data collection tool in qualitative research methods, was used in the study. Research questions were posed to the staff of the travel agencies and they were asked to answer relevant questions by drawing on their experiences. The aim of the researchers in this study is to encourage the employees of the travel agencies in Nevşehir to turn to alternative types of tourism within the scope of the attractiveness of the destination, to ensure the diversification of the tours and to create awareness in the agencies in this regard. The study discussed the relationship between destination marketing, gastronomy tourism and travel agencies, and presented information on the feasibility and potential of gastronomy tourism in Nevşehir, as well as suggestions for travel agencies in light of the interviews and literature studied.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Destination Marketing

Today, it has become inevitable to conduct destination-related marketing activities, because countless similar destinations are trying to brand themselves by setting themselves apart from others, and each destination is in a race to promote itself to the target market and show that it is superior to others. All destinations try to offer quality goods and services that meet the needs of potential tourists by highlighting aspects that are different from those of other destinations. Moreover, destinations need to develop an effective marketing strategy in order to obtain maximum benefits by introducing themselves to the target market, which reveals the concept of destination marketing (İşbilir Yüceışık & Özer, 2019).

Kotler, Bowen & Makens (2003: 721) define the concept of destination marketing, which is based on the promotion of destinations in the target market and the creation of a positive image and brand perception among the potential audience in relation to that destination, as *"the building block in the development and support of a particular place"*, unlike goods and services marketing activities. The World Tourism Organisation (2004: 10) defines destination marketing as *"a process that brings sellers and buyers together, involves focusing on activities and customer needs, and involves decisions about product, brand, price, market segmentation, promotion and distribution."* Elbe, Hallen & Axelsson (2009: 283) argue that destination marketing is *"a concept used to denote planned and often strategically developed activities that are carried out to attract tourists to a particular location."*

The tourism industry consists of many service sectors with unique interests and objectives. To achieve these goals, each company chooses different paths. The main objective of travel agencies, which are one of the organisations responsible for managing and marketing the destination, is to occupy an important place in the tourism market (Pender & Sharpley, 2005). In today's world where there are horizontal and vertical integrations, travel agencies have achieved a strong position and have a greater say in the tourism industry. Travel agencies, which direct and accelerate the flow of tourists towards a destination, hold the future of these destinations in their hands thanks to their accessibility to thousands of people (Carey, Gountas & Gilbert, 1997).

The increasingly competitive nature of the tourism industry is forcing destinations to develop effective plans and strategies for marketing their tourist attractions, as destinations compete on perceived image and brand size. Travel agencies play the leading role in this race. Since travel agencies act as idea generators for tourists, they have a great influence on the travel decisions of potential tourists depending on the image of the destination and the knowledge they offer. In this case, travel agencies need to act as both a distribution channel and an image builder in the process of destination selection (Baloğlu & Mangaloğlu, 2001). Travel agencies have important and sensitive functions in destination marketing as they play an active role in influencing and directing demand in the tourism distribution system. They provide tourists with information and contribute significantly to the development and marketing of destination tour packages. In both cases, they have the effect of changing the vital processes of the tourism destination (Middleton & Clarke, 2001).

It is well known that the travel agencies play a greater role in marketing destinations and creating an image, as tourists are more inclined to refer to intermediary in choosing destinations, especially for their international travels (Baloğlu & Mangaloğlu, 2001). Accordingly, destinations should conduct their marketing efforts not only directly to the consumer but also to travel agencies, which are distribution channels of tourism. Thus, it is possible to reach and stay in touch with millions of tourists through these intermediaries. Since a travel agency's decision to organise tours for a particular destination or its efforts to increase the type and number of tours it organises means that many tourists will turn to that destination, it is a strategic approach to direct marketing activities towards travel agencies (Özdemir, 2014). In the context of destination marketing, travel agencies are obliged to steer the destination towards the development and progress it needs, taking into account tourists' criteria for destination preference. In this way, destinations recognise their position in the market and gain information. Travel agencies are an essential intermediary in the tourism marketing system and also help tourists to choose destination (Huybers, 2003).

2.2. *Gastronomy Tourism*

The term gastronomy, which originated from the combination of the words "gastros" and "nomos" in Greek, means, in short, gastric laws. The term is also defined as the art of eating and good cooking in a general sense. In addition, it is considered a science as it involves many processes such as experimentation, research, experience, tasting, writing and preparation (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). The fact that gastronomy has a detailed production and consumption process means that it comes into contact with different branches of science. Understanding the cultivation of food and beverage raw materials in a particular region, preparation and consumption of food and beverages specific to that region explains the relationship between gastronomy and tourism. Gastronomy tourism is generally defined as "*a type of tourism that is undertaken with the aim of gaining unique experiences related to food and beverages specific to a destination*" (Yücel Güngör, Şenel & Doğan, 2021: 76). In the relevant literature, gastronomy tourism is discussed in connection with different types of tourism. Gastronomy tourism is associated with cultural tourism as cuisine is a significant cultural element, with eco-tourism and rural tourism as they involve processes such as sowing and harvesting food and beverages, and with the types of activity tourism because festivals and celebrations are organised in connection with sowing and harvesting (Beşirli, 2010).

Gastronomy tourism can be used as a marketing and promotional tool in destinations as it can be easily adapted to other types of tourism and boosts attractiveness by diversifying tourism (Bulut, 2019). Gastronomy is considered one of the most important attraction elements of history and culture (İpar, 2011). Local gastronomic products are found to stand out as a distinctive feature in destinations, offer a sustainable competitive advantage and are therefore actively used in destination marketing (Rinaldi, 2017). In this context, the stakeholders who have a say in destination marketing and management take initiatives to organise and

announce various gastronomic events. In this context, travel agencies play the biggest role. Gastronomic elements are at the top of the attraction factors that interest tourists most when choosing their destination because every tourist is curious about the destination's cuisine and wants to experience it (Aydoğdu et al., 2016).

Travel agencies that organise gastronomy tourism tours are businesses that identify the places where gastronomy tourists can go, include in their itineraries the gastronomic experiences they want to have during their trips, and provide a quality tour service with the information and experiences that the tourist needs by combining food and beverage activities with other activities. Gastronomy tours, on the other hand, are *"professionally conducted tours, individually, as a group or through a travel agency, to one or more destinations within the framework of gastronomy tourism to experience different dimensions of gastronomy"* (Sezer, 2017: 48). Various food and beverages are set as themes around the world and gastronomy tour routes are created. Products such as wine, beer, cheese, olives and olive oil are among the most popular products. The most common of these are wine tourism routes (Timothy & Boyd, 2015). Apart from these tour routes, rice fields, bakeries where traditional bread is made, dried meat producers, traditional vinegar producers, foie gras producers, fish farms, snail farms, pasta factories, tea factories, fruit and vegetable production centres, places where traditional chocolate making is shown, places where salt making is shown are preferred by tourists within the scope of gastronomy tourism (Croce & Perri, 2010). In Turkey, wine, vineyard and olive tour routes have been identified. In addition, studies on cheese-related routes are also being developed within the scope of gastronomy tourism (Durlu Özkaya, Özkaya, Tunalioglu, Bayar & Tunalioglu, 2018).

The activities organised within the scope of gastronomy tourism can vary in group and individual tours. While package tours offer more standardized content for time and economic reasons, individual tours can be more privileged and specialised. However, with the increasing interest in gastronomy tourism, it can be observed that tours have also expanded their functions. Gastronomic tours initially focused on wine and cheese tastings in European countries such as the Netherlands, France and Italy. In recent years, other gastronomic experiences have been offered in addition to tastings at various destinations around the world (Hornig & Chen-Tsang, 2012). In Turkey, Çanakkale and Tekirdağ in the Marmara Region, İzmir, Muğla and Denizli in the Aegean Region, Mersin, Adana and Hatay in the Mediterranean Region, Gaziantep in the South East Anatolia Region and Nevşehir in the Central Anatolia Region appear to stand out in the field of gastronomy tourism. In general, the gastronomic experiences offered in these cities include wine and vintage tours, region-specific products and local dishes (Hatipoğlu, 2014).

Gastronomy tourism experiences are activities that aim to understand the culinary culture of a destination. Observing the production, processing, preparation and sale of traditional foods and beverages at local markets, harvesting products such as grapes and olives at festivals, participating in festivals, attending cooking courses, visiting gastronomy museums, attending gastronomy congresses, fairs and competitions, watching chefs' presentations and shows, gastronomic experiences at workshops and tastings at all events are considered as destination attractions and travel motivations of gastronomic tourists (Ryu & Jang, 2006; Tekeli & Kırıcı Tekeli, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Problem and Questions

Qualitative research methods were used in this research, which focuses on the development of Nevşehir, an important tourism destination with regard to destination marketing, in terms of gastronomy tourism. In order to highlight the significance of Nevşehir in terms of gastronomy tourism, geographically indicated and non-geographically indicated products were identified and an attempt was made to uncover the local culinary culture specific to Nevşehir. The aim is to create a gastronomy route by picking up the subject-specific thoughts of the employees of travel agencies. In this context, an attempt was made to identify local restaurants in Nevşehir, places where local products are sold and places where local products are harvested. In addition, the opinions of travel agencies' employees on home-cooking tours, food-beverage themed festivals and cooking courses were sought in order to organise gastronomic events. Thus, an attempt was made to create awareness among the employees of travel agencies that gastronomy tourism-oriented tour programmes can be prepared. In this context, the question "What should be done by travel agencies in order to increase the awareness and recognition of Nevşehir in terms of gastronomy tourism?" was identified as the main problem

of the research. The research questions were created in accordance with the problem of the research. The research questions are listed below.

1. What are the gastronomic products of Nevşehir that are geographically indicated and likely to qualify for geographical indication?
2. What kind of itinerary would be appropriate to create an itinerary based on gastronomy tourism in Nevşehir?
3. What do you think of the home-cooking tours organised in Nevşehir?
4. What kind of a food and beverage themed festival would you consider appropriate in Nevşehir in the future?
5. What do you think of the cooking courses organised in Nevşehir?
6. What should be done to raise Nevşehir' profile in terms of gastronomy tourism?
7. What should be done to promote Nevşehir as a gastronomy city?

As a result of the literature review, seven research questions were posed. The questions are completely new and were inspired by studies focusing on destination marketing and gastronomy tourism (Alyakut, 2021; Cankül & Demir, 2018; Güzel Şahin & Ünver, 2015; Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Based on the first five questions, the main themes, sub-themes and codes for the research were identified. A number of analyses were conducted for the identified themes. Participants' opinions on the last two questions were not analysed and were included in the final section of the study. The research conducted in the light of this information is designed as an exploratory study.

3.2. Research Pattern

The research pattern shows how to proceed with the research. In the research, interviews were conducted with employees of travel agencies in order to determine the development of gastronomy tourism in Nevşehir. Research questions were posed to the employees of the travel agencies and they were asked to answer the relevant questions by drawing on their experiences. Therefore, phenomenology was adopted as the research design. Phenomenology, is about finding out the opinions of the employees of travel agencies about the phenomenon. The phenomenon in this research is gastronomy tourism, which seems possible in Nevşehir. In fact, the opinions of the employees of travel agencies about gastronomy tourism were directly evaluated and descriptive phenomenology was used.

3.3. Identification of Participants

In the study, the development of gastronomy tourism was discussed in terms of destination marketing. One of the most significant tourism stakeholders in the implementation of destination marketing activities is the employees of the travel agencies. Travel agencies can undertake pricing, promotion and distribution of tourism products. Therefore, in terms of gastronomy tourism, travel agencies can organise gastronomy-themed tours or events, they can carry out promotional activities of these tours and sell them to tourists at the price they set. In light of this information, travel agencies in Nevşehir were selected in order to expose the development of gastronomy tourism. In selecting the travel agencies, the criterion sampling method was preferred, which is one of the purposive sampling methods. The most important criterion for the selection of travel agencies was the variety of tours organised by the agencies. Indeed, it is assumed that travel agencies that organise a wide variety of tours will be selected and that they will evaluate new and different tours (such as gastronomy-themed tours, etc.) more positively. In this context, a total of 15 people were interviewed for the study. In qualitative research, the amount of data obtained from participants and the saturation point are extremely important (Creswell, 2018; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). After interviewing 15 people, it was determined that the data obtained was sufficient and the data began to repeat and the interviews were terminated.

3.4. Data Collection Tools

Data collection tool widely used in research where phenomenology design is adopted is interview, and in this study the semi-structured interview technique was used. Ethics committee permission was obtained from

Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University before starting the interview with the employees of travel agency. Following receipt of the ethics committee report, interviews were conducted with the employees of travel agencies between 09/05/2022 and 30/05/2022. The interviews were conducted directly at the travel agencies and care was taken to ensure that employees voluntarily participated in the research. A dictaphone was used during the interviews and brief notes were taken. The interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. After each interview, the voice recordings were listened to and the data decoded.

3.5. Selection of Data Analysis Strategy and Processing of Data

The data obtained during the interviews were subjected to content analysis. Thus, the data were read and analysed in detail. Maxqda 20 qualitative data analysis software was used to analyse the data. The use of the programme allowed for a detailed examination of the data and visual presentation. Descriptive analyses were carried out using the analysis programme. The creation of the code system, the document portrait, the code-subcode-section model, and the word cloud are among the descriptive analyses carried out as part of the research. Data processing is a process associated with coding. An open and closed code system was used at this stage. In other words, it is ensured that the codes are determined on the basis of both deductive and inductive methods. Therefore, data from the literature and the field were used. As a matter of fact, the statements of the participants were evaluated in line with the information obtained from the literature, and the main theme, sub-theme and codes were determined by the researchers. Then, the determined themes and codes were examined by academicians who are experts in their fields and took their final form in line with their opinions.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are very important criteria in qualitative research and are closely related to the credibility of the research. The fact that the results obtained in the research are true shows that the research is valid. In order to increase validity, more than one participant was included in the study, care was taken to keep the interviews with the participants long, detailed data was collected, correlations were found between the data collected, participants' opinions were included in the study and many descriptive analyses were conducted with the programme. In addition, care was taken to present the research method and results in detail. One of the evidences of the reliability of the study is the fact that similar data was obtained from interviews with different participants. It was found that the meanings extracted from the data were quite consistent with each other. This indicates the consistency of the results and the reliability of the research. In addition, in order to increase the reliability of the research, care was taken to ensure that the data was fully recorded and analysed jointly by the authors. All this proves that the research complies with the principles of credibility, transferability, consistency and verifiability, i.e., it is valid and reliable (Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2018; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

4. FINDINGS

In this research, which was conducted for the development of gastronomy tourism from a destination marketing perspective, interviews were conducted with the employees of travel agencies and some findings were obtained. Care was taken to present the findings in a systematic way. To this end, the data obtained with the contributions of the employees of travel agencies was decoded and analysed using the Maxqda programme. First of all, the demographic data of the employees of travel agencies and the descriptive information on the travel agencies where the employees are employed are presented in tables. In presenting the demographic information and interpreting the analyses, the employees of travel agencies, i.e. the participants, were referred to as P1, P2, P3 ... P15, in accordance with the ethical principles. Then, the code system showing the main theme, sub-theme and code numbers is included. After the code system was explained, the participants' opinions on gastronomy tourism were subjected to a descriptive analysis. In this context, a document portrait, a code-subcode-section model and a word cloud were created and the participants' opinions on gastronomy tourism were examined in detail. Table 1 contains the demographic data of the employees of travel agencies.

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Employees of Travel Agencies

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Level of Education	Tourism Education Information	Languages	Length of Employment in the Industry	Intention to Include Gastronomy Tour
K1	Male	44	Married	High School	No	English	25 years	Yes
K2	Male	38	Married	High School	No	English	20 years	Yes
K3	Male	35	Married	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	English	10 years	Yes
K4	Female	36	Married	Master's Degree	Yes	English Spanish	8 years	Yes
K5	Male	51	Married	Associate Degree	Yes	English	35 years	Yes
K6	Male	36	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	English	16 years	Yes
K7	Female	34	Married	Bachelor's Degree	No	English German	8 years	Indecisive
K8	Male	42	Married	High School	No	English	17 years	No
K9	Male	56	Married	High School	No	English	35 years	Yes
K10	Male	40	Married	Associate Degree	Yes	English	21 years	Yes
K11	Male	35	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	English	9 years	Yes
K12	Male	30	Married	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	English	8 years	Yes
K13	Male	45	Married	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	English Spanish Portuguese	22 years	Yes
K14	Female	37	Single	Master's Degree	Yes	English	7 years	Yes
K15	Male	33	Married	Associate Degree	Yes	English Spanish	11 years	Yes

It was noted that 12 of the participants included in the study were male and 3 were female. The age range of the participants was from 30 to 56 years. It was also established that the majority of the participants who were married (Married=12, Single=3) had at least a high school degree (High School=4, Associate Degree=3, Bachelor's Degree=6, Master's Degree=2). The vast majority of participants had tourism education (Yes=10, No=5) and reported having a good command of at least one foreign language. The length of time participants worked in the sector varied from 7 to 35 years. Finally, participants were asked for their views on gastronomy tours and the majority of participants indicated a positive attitude towards the inclusion of gastronomy tours in their itineraries (Yes=13, Undecided=1, No=1). After the demographic information about the participants is presented, Table 2 includes identifying information for the travel agencies where the staff are employed.

Table 2. Descriptive Information on Travel Agencies Where Staff Are Employed

Participant	Agency Type	Agency's Activity Period	Types of Tours	Places of Tours
K1	Group A	11 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Erciyes Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri
K2	Group A	14 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Soğanlı Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri, Konya, Denizli, İstanbul
K3	Group A	5 years	Regional Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Konya, Antalya, Denizli, İstanbul
K4	Group A	4 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Konya, Antalya, Denizli, İstanbul
K5	Group A	22 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri, Konya, Antalya, Denizli, Adana, Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, İstanbul
K6	Group A	4 years	Regional Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Mardin, İstanbul
K7	Group A	3 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Soğanlı Tour, Jeep Safari Tour, ATV Tour, Horseback Riding Tours	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri
K8	Group A	7 years	Regional Tour, Erciyes Tour	Nevşehir, Kayseri
K9	Group A	20 years	Regional Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Kayseri, Konya, Antalya, Denizli, İstanbul
K10	Group A	12 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray
K11	Group A	3 years	Regional Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Konya, Denizli, İstanbul
K12	Group A	3 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Soğanlı Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri, Konya, Antalya, Denizli, İstanbul
K13	Group A	25 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Soğanlı Tour, Anatolia Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri, Konya, Antalya, Denizli, Aydın, İzmir, İstanbul
K14	Group A	2 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Soğanlı Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri
K15	Group A	3 years	Regional Tour, Ihlara Tour, Soğanlı Tour	Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri

It is noted that all the participants involved in the study work in a group A travel agency. It is also noted that the travel agencies have been operating for 2 to 25 years. The tours organised by the travel agencies are similar, and the Region tour, Ihlara tour, Soğanlı tour, Erciyes tour and Anatolia tour are the most frequently organised tours. The places where the tours are conducted are Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri, Konya, Antalya, Denizli, Aydın, İzmir, İstanbul, Adana, Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Mardin and Adıyaman. Following the information about the participants and the travel agencies they work with, the code system was given in Figure 1 and explanations were made for the themes.

Code System	110
▼ Gastronomic Products	0
Geographically Indicated	18
Non Geographically Indicated	17
▼ Gastronomic Routes	0
Local Restaurants	17
Local Product Sales Points	9
Harvest Places of Local Products	6
▼ Gastronomic Events	0
Home-cooking Tours	14
Food and Beverage Themed Festivals	15
Cooking Courses	14

Figure 1. Code System for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism

The main themes and sub-themes can be seen in the code system for the development of gastronomy tourism. Main themes and sub-themes were created from the code system part of the Maxqda program. Then, coding was done on the decipher file included in the program. As a result of the analysis; 3 main themes and 8 sub-themes were determined. Gastronomic products, gastronomic routes and gastronomic events are the main themes identified. *Gastronomic products* consist of geographically indicated and non-geographically indicated sub-themes, *gastronomic routes* consist of local restaurants, local product sales points and harvest places of local products sub-themes, and *gastronomic events* consist of home-cooking tours, food-beverage themed festivals and cooking courses sub-themes. The total number of codes for the themes was found as 110.

The geographical indication sub-theme under the main theme of gastronomic products refers to the traditional products of Nevşehir registered by the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office. These products are listed as Derinkuyu white beans, Kaymaklı dry cream, Kaymaklı bread, Nevşehir pumpkin seeds, Nevşehir bagel and Nevşehir Tray Kebab (Geographical Indications Portal, 2022). The sub-theme that is not geographically indicated, on the other hand, refers to products that are specific to Nevşehir cuisine but have not yet been registered. Grapes, stuffed cherry leaves, stuffed quinces, Nevşehir tava etc. fall into the category of products non-geographically indicated.

Local restaurants under the main theme of gastronomy routes refer to restaurants that offer local flavours unique to Nevşehir and that can provide a quality service to tourists. Another sub-theme, local product sales points, refers to places where local products such as pumpkin seeds, grapes, wine, etc. can be tasted and purchased by tourists. The sub-theme of harvest places of local products refers to the vineyards, gardens, fields, etc. where products grown in Nevşehir such as grapes, zucchini etc. are visited by tourists and the harvesting of the products is done by tourists.

Home-cooking tours, which are under the main theme of gastronomic activities, refer to the production and tasting of local delicacies with tourists in a home environment accompanied by local people. Another sub-theme, food and beverage themed festivals, refers to national and international events involving products such as grapes, wine, zucchini, etc. The last sub-theme, cooking courses, is a multiday training where tourists can learn about local flavours such as tray kebab, dried white beans in pottery, stuffed quinces, etc. Necessary explanations were given for the themes in the code system, and a portrait of the document for the development of gastronomy tourism is shown in Figure 2.

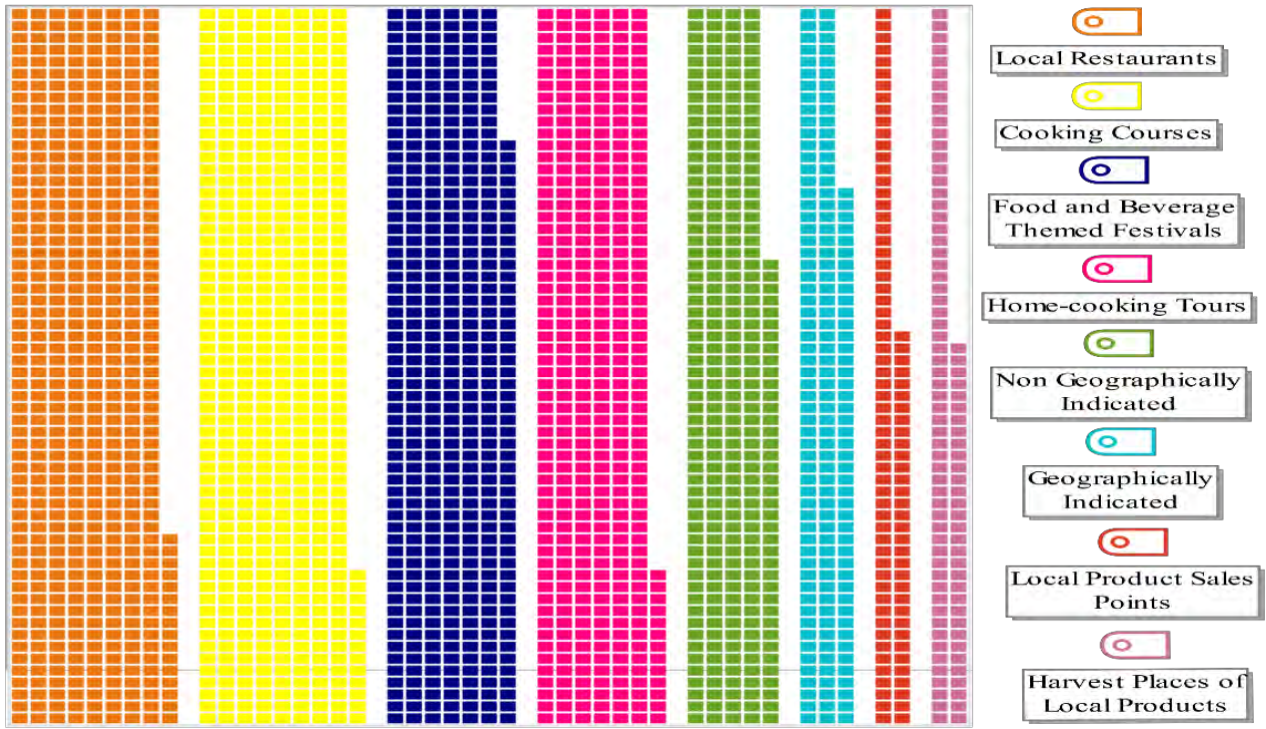


Figure 2. Document Portrait for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism

For the document portrait prepared for the development of gastronomic tourism, the document portrait option under the visual tools tab of the Maxqda program was used. The length of the sub-themes mentioned by the participants is shown in the document portrait prepared for the development of gastronomy tourism. In other words, each sub-theme is visualised with a different colour, and the square boxes indicate the length of the sub-themes. The more a sub-theme is mentioned, the higher the number of square boxes. In Figure 2, the sub-themes are sorted from left to right and visualised from the most mentioned sub-theme to the least mentioned sub-theme. Therefore, the sub-theme that the participants talked about the longest was the sub-theme of local restaurants. Participants emphasised that local restaurants are very important when determining the itinerary. Based on local delicacies, they talked at length about the local restaurants in each district of Nevşehir. While the local restaurants were mentioned for such a long time, the sub-theme that the participants mentioned the shortest was the sub-theme of harvest places of local products. Participants mainly talked about vineyards and stated that vineyards should be included in the tour programme. As a matter of fact, with the document portrait, the lengths of the sub-themes mentioned by the participants were determined, and Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5 were created by using the MAXMaps option under the visual tools tab of the Maxqda program. With the code-subcode-section model shown in the figures, the participants' statements regarding the themes were revealed.

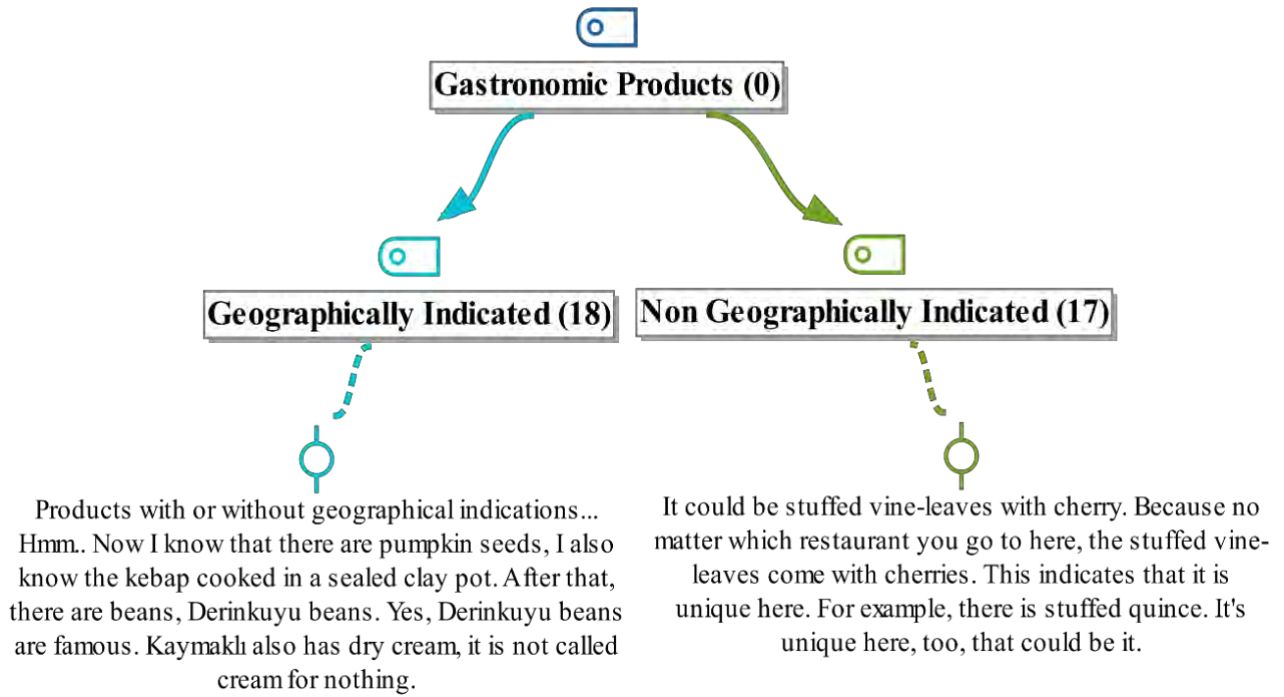


Figure 3. Code-Subcode-Divisions Model for the Main Theme of Gastronomic Products

With the code-subcode-section model for the main theme of gastronomic products, the main theme and sub-themes are discussed and the frequency of coding of the sub-themes and the expressions of the participants can be seen in the model. The geographically indicated sub-theme under the main theme of gastronomic products was coded 18 times, and the non-geographically indicated sub-theme was coded 17 times. It was identified that the main theme of gastronomic products, which was coded 35 times in total, was the most frequently coded main theme. The participants' statements on the main theme of gastronomic products are as follows:

"There is testi kebab. The most famous testi kebab is already available. There is also a Nevşehir bagel made with chickpea yeast. Do you know it? That's what came to my mind" (P2). "Among the products that are not geographically indicated, I regret to say that grapes, stuffed cherry leaves, stuffed quinces, aside dessert, köftür, molasses, dried fruit roll-up and Nevşehir potatoes can be counted. Grapes are the most significant agricultural product of this place. I cannot imagine how a geographical indication for grapes cannot be taken. Ask the locals, everyone necessarily has a vineyard house, a garden. Local people harvest grapes there. Moreover, there is a vintage festival held in the region every year. So it is a little weird, and I think a study should be started for this. The same goes for potatoes. Even in the advertisements, Nevşehir potato fields and potato warehouses are featured, but unfortunately they cannot be counted among the geographically indicated products. Honestly, it's a very sad situation" (P12).

The statements show that the participants are quite well-informed about the local products unique to Nevşehir. Each participant provided information about geographically indicated and non-geographically indicated products. The majority of the participants find the number of geographically indicated products specific to Nevşehir insufficient and state that more gastronomic products should be registered.

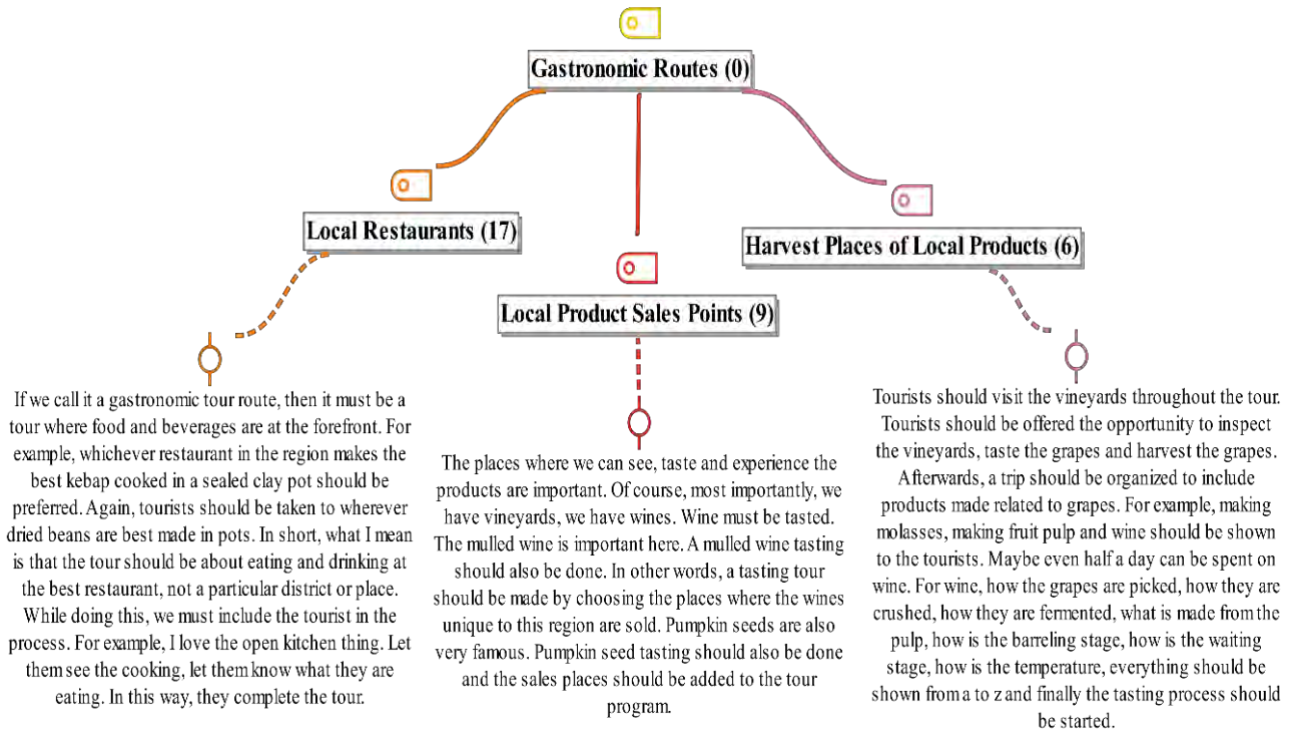


Figure 4. Code-Subcode-Divisions Model for the Main Theme of Gastronomy Routes

Through the code-subcode-section model for the main theme of gastronomy routes, the frequency of coding of the sub-themes and the statements of the participants are included. The sub-theme of local restaurants under the main theme of gastronomy routes was coded 17 times, the sub-theme of local product sales points was coded 9 times, and the sub-theme of harvest places of local products was coded 6 times. It was found that the main theme of gastronomy routes, which was coded 32 times in total, was the least coded main theme. The participants' statements on the main theme of gastronomy routes are as follows:

"The gastronomic itinerary should include certain restaurants and certain dishes. For this, there must be contracted restaurants. Suppose a restaurant offers a breakfast prepared only with local products. We will take the tourist there for breakfast. Afterwards, there will be a wine tasting at lunch such as mulled wine, white wine, red wine, and maybe grape juice. After these tastings, a regional tour should continue to learn about the culture. In the evening, arrangements are made with a restaurant or hotel. You know that the hotels already have their restaurants open, and also cook local dishes. The Museum Hotel or the Argos in Cappadocia Hotel are pretty good. If you make arrangements in advance, the tourists will eat the local dishes" (P10). "For a tour route, the places to be visited and seen must be first determined. What do you need for gastronomy tours? You need places to eat. But that alone is not enough. Places where you can see, taste and experience local products, that is, sales places, are also important" (P11). "We have vineyards. The important thing is to include those vineyards in the tour programmes so that tourists can visit, see and explore them. Let me give you an example. There is Kocabağlar here. It is known that the wine they produce is already recognised throughout the country. Therefore, it is possible to walk from this vineyard and allow tourists to prune vineyards and cultivate them. It should not only be vineyards. Other vineyards, gardens, and fields can also be included in the tours" (P3).

Regarding the gastronomic route, participants stressed the significance of giving preference to restaurants that offer local delicacies. It was also pointed out that tourists should be guided to local sales points where they can taste local products such as pumpkin seeds, grapes, wine, etc. In addition, participants stated that it is necessary to include places such as vineyards, gardens and fields where crops such as pumpkin, grapes, strawberries, etc. are harvested in the tour programs.

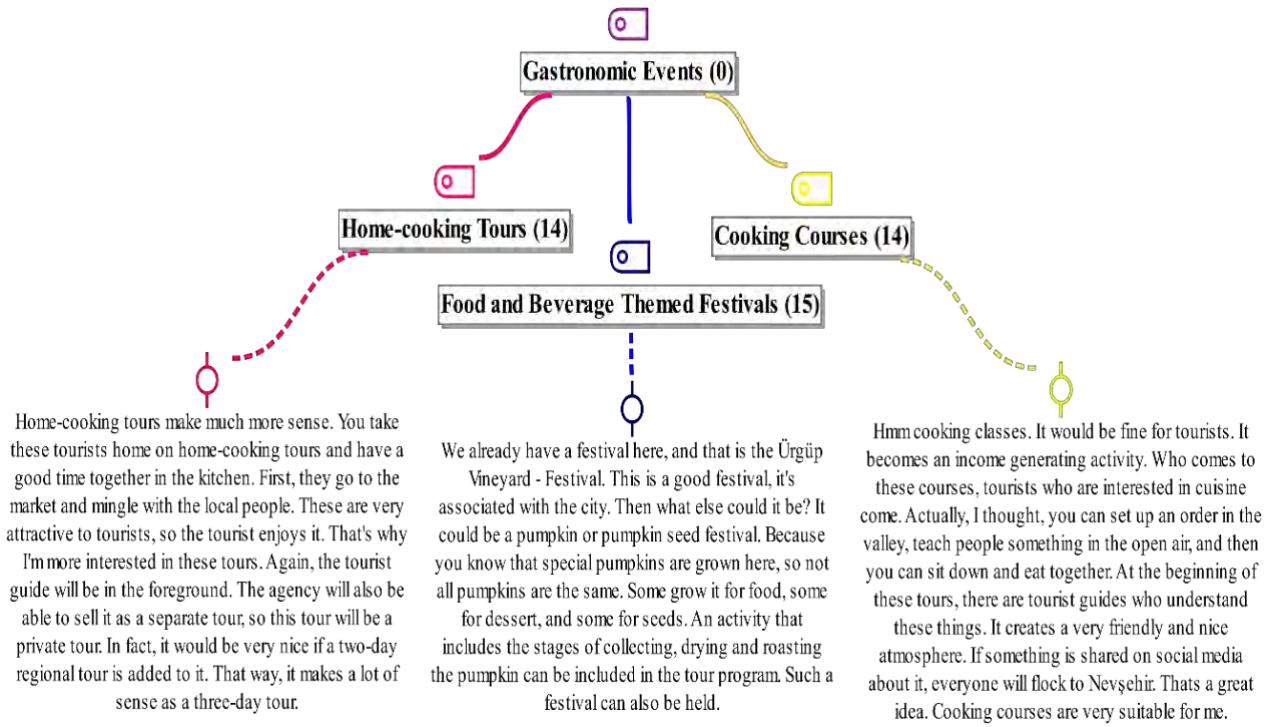


Figure 5. Code-Subcode-Divisions Model for the Main Theme of Gastronomic Events

The main theme and sub-themes were discussed using the code-subcode-section model for the main theme of gastronomic events. The model includes the frequency of coding of the sub-themes and the participants' statements. Under the main theme of gastronomic events, the sub-theme of home-cooking tours was coded 14 times, the sub-theme of festivals with the theme of food and beverage was coded 15 times, and the sub-theme of cooking courses was coded 14 times. It was found that the main theme of gastronomic events, which was coded 33 times in total, was the second most coded main theme. The participants' statements on the main theme of gastronomic events are as follows:

"Home-cooking tours are available but not very common. We have a guide friend. He is probably a master at cooking. He has found such a source of income this way, and he has done well, because there are now too many guides in the region. They come from different places and guide here. This friend of ours has found such a way for himself and has been successful. I congratulate him. The idea is very good, the implementation is also good, and if there are tourists, it is even better" (P8). "One of the festivals that should be organised in Nevşehir should be the wine festival. Quality wines are produced and sold in Nevşehir. There is wine tourism, you know. People travel miles for this, so they come here too. There is already a vineyard, and it would be nice if a wine festival were organised as a continuation of that. What else can be done? Unfortunately, we cannot diversify if there are limited agricultural products. I cannot think of anything else, but wine is something that has always been on my mind for years, so I said it right away" (P15). "I would include this type of activity in my tour. As a result, tourists will have to stay overnight for a few days for the course. This can be a solution to the number of overnight stays, which is the biggest problem in the region. The gastronomic tourist can buy a tour in the form of a course to learn how to cook the dishes here. This can be in the form of sightseeing during the day, and cooking and learning in the evening. Thus, the tourist can fully experience the culture and food of this place. After all, the tours here are always cultural tours, so the food is also included in this cultural tour. In this way, tourists also learn about the culinary culture" (P13).

The majority of participants expressed positive opinions about home-cooking tours. On the other hand, there were more negative opinions about cooking courses, as the participants reported that cooking courses would be quite laborious and time-consuming. They stated that food and beverage themed festivals would not be possible due to the limited agricultural products. Nevertheless, many participants felt that the best possible festival in Nevşehir could be wine-themed. The participants' views are included in the code-subcode-section model. Figure 6 shows the word cloud.

agencies are businesses responsible for promoting the gastronomic attractions of destinations, organizing and selling tours that embody these elements of attraction (İlban, 2017). For this reason, the employees of travel agencies in Nevşehir were preferred in the research.

Nevşehir, which is rich in natural beauties, is part of the Anatolian food culture in terms of local cuisine. The fact that it hosts many civilizations and the cultural accumulation that the civilisations have left behind has contributed to the enrichment of Nevşehir's culinary culture (Nevşehir İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2022). Nevşehir's cuisine is considered significant because it has traces of Turkish cuisine as well as containing the accumulations of prehistoric cultures, societies and different religions (Güldemir & Işık, 2011). Therefore, it is believed that combining the natural and cultural beauties of Nevşehir with the local culinary culture will give new impetus to the tourism movements in the region, as Hu & Ritchie (1993) emphasize that food is one of the crucial reasons for destination preference. For this reason, Nevşehir cuisine was discussed in the study and the development of gastronomy tourism in the relevant destination was evaluated within the scope of destination marketing.

As part of the research, the employees of travel agencies were asked some questions about registered and unregistered local products, gastronomic routes, gastronomic events and promotional issues in Nevşehir. Thus, the interviews tried to determine the feasibility and potential of gastronomy tourism in Nevşehir. In addition, the employees' suggestions were asked in order for Nevşehir to become a gastronomy city. The employees of travel agencies provided very detailed information on the research questions and the main themes, sub-themes and codes were determined as part of the research. Gastronomic products, gastronomic routes and gastronomic events are the identified themes. It was found that geographically indicated and non-geographically indicated products fell under the main theme of gastronomic products; regional restaurants, local product sales points and harvest places of local products fell under the main theme of gastronomy routes, and finally, home-cooking tours, food and beverage themed festivals and cooking courses sub-themes fell under the main theme of gastronomic events. The most frequently coded main theme in the research was established as gastronomic products, gastronomic events and gastronomy routes, respectively. On the other hand, the sub-theme that the participants mentioned the longest was the local restaurants, while the sub-theme they mentioned the shortest was the harvest places of local products. The most frequently recurring words were determined by the participants as food, Nevşehir, tourist, festival, gastronomy, tours, products, wine, courses and activity. The fact that the research is related to gastronomy tourism has caused these words to be repeated too often by questioning some factors that can be effective for both travel agencies and destination marketing.

In the relevant literature review, studies on the use of gastronomy tourism as a tool in destination marketing are frequently encountered (Güzel Şahin & Ünver, 2015; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Uçan & Girgin, 2020). The studies on the role of travel agencies organising gastronomic tours in gastronomy tourism are also included in the relevant literature (Cankül & Demir, 2018; Horng & Chen-Tsang, 2012; Sezer, 2017; Yücel Güngör et al., 2021). This study aimed to identify the gastronomy tourism potential of Nevşehir by using the mediating role of travel agencies in destination marketing, and thus differed it from other studies. In addition, the use of qualitative research methods in this study, obtaining some data by using the experiences of the participants, analysing the obtained data using Maxqda, a qualitative analysis programme, and conducting content analysis and descriptive analyses using the programme prove the originality of the study in terms of literature and method.

5.1. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

In this study, the geographically indicated products of Nevşehir were mentioned and other products that could receive geographical indications were pointed out along with the reasons for them. It is considered that the evaluation of gastronomic products with regard to travel agencies, which is an essential stakeholder of destination marketing, contributes to theory and practice. Interviews with travel agencies' employees revealed that tours conducted in Nevşehir generally involve cultural tours. As an alternative to these tours, the development of gastronomy tours, the creation of gastronomy tour routes and in this context, the raising of awareness of travel agencies' employees about gastronomy tourism, which is an alternative tourism that can be carried out in Nevşehir for twelve months, is considered both a theoretical and practical contribution. In particular, in the creation of gastronomy tour routes, the identification of the excursion areas (local restaurants,

local product sales points and harvest places of local products) that should be included in the tour programme is considered as a contribution to the practice. The theoretical and practical contributions also include the opinions of travel agencies' employees on home-cooking tours, festivals and cooking courses organised in the destinations.

5.2. *Suggestions for Future Research*

As a result of the data obtained from the literature review and interviews, the suggestions developed for Nevşehir to increase its recognition in terms of gastronomy tourism and for Nevşehir to become a gastronomy city are given below.

Proposals developed to raise recognition of Nevşehir in terms of gastronomy tourism;

- Geographically indicated products should be highlighted.
- Local foods and beverages should be promoted on social media (Instagram, Tiktok, etc.).
- Local flavours should be promoted and marketed through influencers.
- Posters and brochures on Nevşehir cuisine should be prepared.
- Food-beverage themed photography or short film competitions should be organised.
- Food-beverage themed commercials, series, movies, documentaries should be shot or a TV program should be shot on local dishes.
- In order to become a city of gastronomy, an application must be submitted to UNESCO's Creative Cities Network.

Proposals developed for Nevşehir to be known as a gastronomy city;

- The food and beverage sector should be revived.
- Cooperation between businesses should be ensured for the production of local dishes.
- The number of registered products should be increased.
- Agriculture should be developed and product diversity should be ensured.
- By establishing cooperation between travel agencies and agricultural product manufacturers, tourists should be provided with gastronomic experiences.
- Gastronomy-oriented cultural tours should be organised to visit places such as vineyards, gardens, fields, etc.
- It should be ensured that the gastronomic tours created by travel agencies are accompanied by tourist guides who are experts in this field.
- Food and beverage themed festivals, festivities or fairs should be organised.
- Activities should be conducted at harvest time.
- Cooking competitions should be held.
- Local products should be offered at Turkish nights.
- The culinary museum should be opened.

In addition to cultural and balloon tourism in Nevşehir, it is believed that the development of gastronomy tourism will increase the number of visitors to the destination and contribute to more revenue for tourism stakeholders. At this point, the proposals will ensure the development of Nevşehir in terms of alternative tourism and reveal its potential for gastronomy tourism. For this reason, it is recommended that the offered recommendations should be taken into consideration not only by the employees of travel agencies but also by all tourism stakeholders. Furthermore, it is believed that conducting studies on gastronomy tourism in Nevşehir by considering other tourism stakeholders will provide theoretical and practical contributions.

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