



## Gastronomy tourism as a tool for sustainable destination marketing

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### ABSTRACT

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The concept of sustainability is increasingly gaining importance today, and it has led to the popularity of sustainable tourism and sustainable gastronomy concepts in destination marketing. The aim of the research is to determine the role of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing in Northern Cyprus. The research is important in terms of taking the views of travel agencies on the role of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing in Northern Cyprus. The research was conducted with the case analysis method, which is one of the qualitative research methods. In the data collection process, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used. Travel agencies, which have an important role in destination marketing, constitute the study group of this research. Within the scope of the research, 28 travel agencies were interviewed. According to the results of the research, it was determined that gastronomy tourism in Northern Cyprus is not effectively emphasized in destination marketing, and accordingly, tourists coming to the island do not experience the gastronomy richness of the island. Therefore, the study emphasizes that local gastronomy can serve as a strategic tool contributing to economic development, destination branding, and sustainable tourism growth. In this context, the findings of the study both provide strategic suggestions for the promotion of gastronomy tourism at the local level and contribute to the literature to fill the gaps in this field.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study is one of the few that have investigated the perspectives of travel agencies on the role of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing in Northern Cyprus. It provides unique insights into how local culinary culture can be strategically integrated to foster sustainable tourism and enhance destination competitiveness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector has grown rapidly worldwide, influencing many factors lately, such as cultural interaction, economic development, and environmental impacts (Adhane, 2025). Great growth also poses a high risk of damaging the environment, as well as causing culture shocks and negative impacts on local communities (Baloch et al., 2023). The concept of sustainable tourism is less positive and more poetic in its contribution toward maintaining the health of our environment, culture, and economy. Sustainable tourism can support all those elements by maintaining their harmony together with the well-being of society, supporting the local economy at the same time (Edgell, 2019; Sorcaru, 2019).

The majority of participants stated that gastronomy tourism is not sufficiently highlighted in the island's destination marketing and that promotional activities in this field remain inadequate. The current marketing

strategies do not sufficiently emphasize the contribution of gastronomy tourism to destination marketing. Therefore, more promotional and advertising efforts are needed to increase the visibility and impact of gastronomy tourism. There are significant gaps in the existing literature regarding the effects of gastronomy tourism on destination marketing. Currently, we have not adequately addressed the impact of gastronomy tourism on destination marketing. However, destination marketing can be used as a strategic tool in integrating gastronomy tourism with sustainability goals. The purpose of this research is to examine the role of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing within the context of sustainable tourism. This study aims to reveal how gastronomy tourism contributes to destination marketing. The research aims to evaluate the impacts of gastronomy tourism on destination image, local economy, and cultural heritage, and to identify the effects of these elements on marketing strategies. In this context, the research sub-objectives are as follows.

1. The role of gastronomy tourism in Cyprus's sustainable tourism strategies.
2. Local culinary culture, strategic advantages of Cyprus in destination marketing, and local economic opportunities.
3. The contributions of gastronomy tourism to the preservation of Cyprus's cultural heritage.
4. Challenges encountered in gastronomy tourism marketing.
5. Recommendations for gastronomy tourism destination marketing.

The significance of this research lies in examining the impact of Cyprus's multicultural structure on gastronomy tourism and revealing how the island's rich culinary heritage affects its tourism potential. The research aims to develop strategic recommendations for sustainable gastronomy tourism by evaluating both the advantages and the logistical, promotional, and administrative challenges of geographical and cultural diversity. Thus, it aims to contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of Cyprus in tourism through its unique culinary culture.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gastronomy tourism involves travel where tourists discover and enjoy the unique foods of various cultures at a destination, allowing them to appreciate the differences in culinary traditions and dishes. In other words, visiting a destination's food producers, food festivals, markets, events, and special areas means learning about that destination's culinary culture. The primary motivation for today's tourist destinations is the region's gastronomy (Çevik & Saçılık, 2011; Filiposki, Metodijeski, Taskov, & Mitreva, 2017).

Gastronomy contributes significantly to the promotion of sustainable travel destinations. By promoting sustainable practices and supporting local businesses, culinary tourism helps the tourism sector develop a distinctive destination brand. Gastronomy tourism can improve the living conditions of local people, preserve cultural values, and support sustainable growth. Promoting sustainable travel destinations requires a comprehensive strategy that incorporates regional resources, traditions, sustainability messaging, and advanced technology. By leveraging these elements, regions can successfully promote sustainable culinary experiences and contribute to the preservation of local cultures and ecosystems. Using culinary culture as a branding tool can create a unique image for a region.

Academic literature and the tourism industry are increasingly focusing on destination marketing. To thoroughly understand this concept, it is important to first define the terms "destination" and "marketing." A destination can be defined as a region chosen for travel or a specific area where tourists want to visit (Kozak, 2001). Marketing, on the other hand, is described as a process undertaken to meet individuals' needs and desires (Gedik, 2021). Within this framework, destination marketing involves developing strategies to identify and satisfy the desires of tourists who wish to travel to a specific destination (Sharma, 2013).

Destination marketing now incorporates gastronomy tourism as a crucial tool for promoting a region. A region's rich cuisine is a key factor in enhancing its competitive advantage (Çolakoğlu & Sarıışık, 2023). Local cuisine is a strong draw for tourists to a region. A world-renowned culinary culture or local flavor enhances the region's appeal and attracts tourists. Gastronomy tourism not only highlights a destination's cultural characteristics but also helps

promote local products. This process strengthens the local economy and fosters tourism development (Baran & Batman, 2022).

Furthermore, gastronomy tourism can utilize creative marketing strategies to highlight a destination's uniqueness; events such as food festivals, culinary tours, and culinary events contribute significantly to the promotion of a region. Such events are important both for preserving the cultural heritage of the local community and for increasing the region's international recognition (Gün & Gün, 2022). Gastronomy tourism stands out as a strategic factor that can enhance a destination's brand value and competitiveness in the global market (Mankan, 2020; Şahin & Ünver, 2020; Yaşar & Tekeler, 2023).

### *2.1. The Relationship Between Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Gastronomy and Destination Marketing*

Sustainability in gastronomy aims to protect cultural heritage while supporting local producers and encouraging environmentally friendly production and consumption habits (Çetinkaya, 2019). This strategy, combined with destination marketing strategies, can increase the region's tourism attractiveness and offer tourists unique and sustainable experiences (Aydın, 2021). Organizing culinary tours and promoting local cuisine can effectively meet tourist preferences and contribute to the local economy (Yılmaz, 2023). Sustainable gastronomy not only enhances a destination's cultural identity but also ensures the sustainability of tourist attractions and increases the long-term effectiveness of destination marketing strategies (Gürsoy, 2022). Integrating gastronomy into marketing strategies can enhance a destination's sustainability and competitiveness by emphasizing environmental responsibility and cultural values.

Sustainable gastronomy, sustainable tourism, and destination marketing should complement and support each other to ensure tourism sustainability. Preserving and promoting local cuisine can increase a destination's tourist appeal while also reducing the negative impacts of tourism. Such actions not only increase tourist loyalty but also contribute to the economic development of local communities. Thus, the relationship between sustainable gastronomy, sustainable tourism, and destination marketing serves as an important model for the future of tourism and contributes to the sector's sustainability (Aydın, 2021; Yılmaz, 2023).

### *2.2. The Role of Travel Agencies in Sustainable Tourism and Destination Marketing*

Travel agencies can help with sustainable development in places by working with local governments and communities. These partnerships are very important for making and carrying out policies for sustainable tourism. Travel agencies can work with local governments to create programs that help destinations reach their sustainable tourism goals and then market these programs to tourists. These kinds of partnerships make places safer for people and the environment, and they also help the economy grow (Altın, 2023).

Focusing on sustainable tourism can help destination marketing by making travel agency services more diverse and better. Travel agencies can design personalized travel options for tourists and offer tailored packages that include sustainable tourism excursions and activities (Bahar & Kozak, 2020). These new services help tourism stay strong by making more people want to visit the destination.

In conclusion, travel agencies are very important for helping tourists learn about sustainable tourism, helping destinations reach their sustainability goals, and developing marketing plans for destinations. Travel agencies assist the tourism industry by encouraging sustainability in the environment, society, and economy. Therefore, travel agencies play a crucial role in the future of tourism by promoting sustainable tourism and destinations.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study was conducted using the qualitative research method within the framework of the phenomenological scientific model. The purpose of the phenomenological research model is to uncover individuals' experiences, thoughts, and their associated meanings.

This study employed a semi-structured interview technique, a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is defined as a study that utilizes any of the qualitative data collection methods, such as observation, interviews, and document analysis, and then applies qualitative techniques to reveal perceptions and phenomena within their natural and contemporary contexts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). It is based on qualities that are difficult to express verbally or through observation, and on the interpretation or analysis of these qualities (Glesne, 2014). Qualitative research is, in essence, the process of generating new concepts and theories to measure the characteristics of social life (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

#### 3.2. Research Group

The study group was selected from 28 Group A and Temporary Group A (GA) agencies located in the Nicosia, Kyrenia, Famagusta, Lefke, Iskele, and Güzelyurt regions of Northern Cyprus. Research participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. To obtain in-depth opinions, interviews were conducted with nine tourism agencies from the Nicosia region, ten from Kyrenia, four from Famagusta, one from Lefke, two from Iskele, and two from Güzelyurt. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants' identities were kept confidential. Before the study, the participants were informed of the research purpose, that the data would be used only for scientific purposes, and their consent was obtained. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of travel agency employees participating in the study.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of travel agency employees participating in the study.

|                               | n  | f(%)  |
|-------------------------------|----|-------|
| <b>Gender</b>                 |    |       |
| Female                        | 16 | %57.1 |
| Male                          | 12 | %42.9 |
| <b>Age</b>                    |    |       |
| 23-28 age                     | 6  | %21.4 |
| 28-33 age                     | 6  | %21.4 |
| 33 years of age and above     | 16 | %57.1 |
| <b>Professional seniority</b> |    |       |
| 1 year or less                | 1  | %3.6  |
| 1-2 years                     | 4  | %14.3 |
| 2 years and above             | 23 | %82.1 |

A total of 28 participants took part in the study. An examination of the demographic and professional characteristics of the participants revealed that 57.1% were female (n=16) and 42.9% were male (n=12). The age distribution showed that 21.4% of the participants were between 23 and 28 years old, 21.4% were between 28 and 33 years old, and 57.1% were 33 years or older. Therefore, more than half of the sample consisted of individuals aged 33 or older. Regarding professional experience, 3.6% of the participants had one year or less of experience, 14.3% had 1-2 years, and 82.1% had two or more years of professional experience. This indicates that the majority of the participants were experienced professionals in their fields.

#### 3.3. Data Collection

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool. Data was collected from participants through 15- to 20-minute face-to-face interviews using Google Forms. The data obtained

from answering the questions will be analyzed using the content analysis method. The data obtained is categorized and organized into themes and displayed as frequencies in tables.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the prepared research questions were presented to two academics with expertise in the field for their opinions. The questions were updated based on the experts' opinions, and a pilot interview was conducted with two agency employees to determine whether they served the purpose of the research. Based on the results of the pilot interview, the form was finalized and implemented.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

In this study, content analysis was used to analyze the data. Content analysis is an approach that aims to identify the key concepts in the data and the relationships between these concepts. The fundamental process of the method involves collecting similar data within specific themes, systematically classifying them, and interpreting them meaningfully (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Research data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. Because participants provided multiple answers to some questions and left others unanswered, the number of opinions expressed during the coding process may differ from the number of participants. Therefore, the number of categories and subcategories reported in the analysis results may be above or below the participant population.

The data analysis process consisted of four stages:

1. Coding the data.
2. Creating the themes.
3. Organizing the data according to codes and themes.
4. Interpreting the findings.

Data were supported by direct participant statements, and responses were incorporated into the text through quotations when necessary. Based on the data obtained during the content analysis process, themes and subthemes were created, and participant opinions were systematically presented through these themes.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Definition of Gastronomy Tourism

The participants were asked, "How would you define gastronomy tourism?" Their answers to the question are as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Participants' opinions on the definition of gastronomy tourism.

| Theme                     | Participant's view |       |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-------|
|                           | n                  | %     |
| Promoting cultural foods  | 13                 | %46.4 |
| Type of Tourism           | 10                 | %35.7 |
| Food and beverage tourism | 4                  | %14.2 |
| Reason for travel         | 1                  | %3.5  |
| Total view                | 28                 | %100  |

Participant responses were grouped under four themes: promoting cultural foods (n=13), tourism type (n=10), food and beverage tourism (n=4), and the reason for travel (n=1). Participant opinions were as follows.

*"This is a type of tourism in which people travel from one place to another to taste food and beverage cultures, especially desserts and other products." TA7*

*"It can be defined as an alternative form of tourism undertaken to introduce and taste the unique food and beverages of each country or region to the world, contributing to national and regional tourism." TA8*

*"Gastronomy tourism is defined as a form of tourism that increases travelers' motivation and significantly encourages them to go on holidays." TA12*

*"It is an effective form of tourism for sharing the culinary habits of different cultures and discovering new tastes." TA13*  
*"Introducing cultural foods to tourists from different cultures." TA20*

#### 4.2. The Role of Gastronomy Tourism in Cyprus's Sustainable Tourism Strategies

Participants' responses to the question, "What is the role of gastronomy tourism in Cyprus's sustainable tourism strategies?" are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Participants' views on the role of gastronomy tourism in Cyprus's sustainable tourism strategies.

| Theme                  | Participant's view |       |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------|
|                        | n                  | %     |
| Needs to be introduced | 10                 | %35.7 |
| Highly effective       | 7                  | %25   |
| Not effective          | 6                  | %21.4 |
| Local foods            | 5                  | %17.8 |
| Total view             | 28                 | %100  |

Participant responses were grouped into four themes. These responses were: "Needs to be promoted" (n=10), "Rather important" (n=7), "Not very important" (n=6), and "Regional foods" (n=5). Participants' opinions were as follows.

*"It plays a significant role. Trying the local flavors of the visited country and sampling different foods and beverages further increases travel motivation. Cyprus is rich in this respect and has its own delicious cuisine." TA4*

*"Professional use of gastronomy tourism through scientific and cultural collaboration will be an effective tourism model in promoting Cypriot culinary culture, especially to special interest groups visiting the country or travelers interested in gastronomy." TA13*

*"I believe that the unique flavors of Cyprus are prominent and are neither advertised nor presented at all. While there's a prevailing belief that they are unimportant, they can be transformed into a resource that shouldn't be ignored and thus boost tourism." TA23*

*"If the island's rich culinary culture gains a strong structure that supports sustainable tourism, it could play a role by accelerating the process through promotions. However, I don't believe it can influence the market unless gastronomy reaches a significant level in its current state." TA 28*

*"I believe that if our island's unique flavors are promoted more and used in tourism, it could be an advantage in terms of long-term sustainability." TA20*

#### 4.3. The Role of Gastronomy Tourism in Destination Marketing

Participants' responses to the question, "Is Gastronomy Tourism Prominent in Destination Marketing?" are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Participants' views on the role of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing.

| Theme      | Participant's view |       |
|------------|--------------------|-------|
|            | n                  | %     |
| Yes        | 22                 | %78.6 |
| No         | 6                  | %21.4 |
| Total View | 28                 | %100  |

Participant responses were grouped under two themes: yes (n22) and no (n6).

#### 4.4. The Impact of Cyprus's Gastronomy Tourism Potential on Tourist Destination Choices

Participants' responses to the question, "Does Cyprus's gastronomy tourism potential affect tourists' destination choices?" are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Participants' opinions on the impact of Cyprus's gastronomy tourism potential on tourists' destination choices.

| Theme      | Participant's view |       |
|------------|--------------------|-------|
|            | n                  | %     |
| Yes        | 16                 | %57.1 |
| No         | 12                 | %42.9 |
| Total View | 28                 | %100  |

Participant responses were grouped under two themes: yes (n16) and no (n12).

#### 4.5. Strategic Advantages of Local Culinary Culture in Cyprus's Destination Marketing

Participants' responses to the question, "What strategic advantages does local culinary culture offer in Cyprus's destination marketing?" are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Participants' views on the strategic advantages of local culinary culture in Cyprus's destination marketing.

| Theme        | Participant's view |       |
|--------------|--------------------|-------|
|              | n                  | %     |
| Cultural     | 19                 | %67.8 |
| Economic     | 4                  | %14.2 |
| No advantage | 3                  | %10.7 |
| Curiosity    | 2                  | %7.1  |
| Total View   | 28                 | %100  |

Participant responses were grouped under four themes: cultural (n=19), economic (n=4), no advantage (n=3), and curiosity (n=2). Participant opinions are as follows.

*"Many Cypriot local delicacies pique tourists' curiosity. It is possible to attract more tourists to Cyprus through marketing and promotional advertising that includes these."* TA4

*"The Cypriot cuisine, with its unique and unique flavors, can be prioritized as a top priority for services."* TA23

*"Standardization of food products can increase interest in Cypriot culinary culture in different markets through effective promotional activities, creating an advantage in promotions."* TA13

*"The local culinary culture of Cyprus, with its unique richness and flavor, provides significant advantages to destination marketing. Those who taste the food can return to the destination and add continuity to the destination marketing."* TA2

*"It does not offer much of an advantage."* TA9

#### 4.6. Opportunity Provided for the Local Economy and Local Businesses

Participants' responses to the question, "What kind of opportunities does gastronomy tourism provide for the local economy and local businesses in Cyprus?" are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Participants' views on the opportunity provided for the local economy and local businesses.

| Theme                      | Participant's view |       |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-------|
|                            | n                  | %     |
| Economic                   | 14                 | %50   |
| Cultural                   | 8                  | %28.5 |
| Not provide an opportunity | 6                  | %21.4 |
| Total View                 | 28                 | %100  |



Participant responses were grouped under three themes: economic (n=14), cultural (n=8), and lack of opportunities (n=6). Participant opinions are as follows.

*"It is a type of tourism that can play a significant role in economic development."* SA2

*"It does not provide opportunities for local businesses in the TRNC. I believe that if there were more restaurants and cafés selling our local products, it would boost the economy."* TA3

*"Local culinary culture is not well-known to tourists visiting Cyprus. Kebab is only served in tourist places like Büyükhane. As is well known, kebab is not a local dish of Cyprus, with the exception of Şeftali kebab. Therefore, it does not provide much of an opportunity."* TA6

*"It provides a high opportunity for the economy to return."* TA25

*"Tourism in the TRNC is already one of the most important economic drivers. Promoting local cuisine, in particular, provides significant economic income for restaurants and local product providers."* TA15

#### 4.7. The Contribution of Gastronomy Tourism to the Preservation of Cyprus's Cultural Heritage

Participants' responses to the question, "What are the contributions of Gastronomy Tourism to the preservation of Cyprus's cultural heritage?" are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Participants' Opinions on the Contribution of Gastronomy Tourism to the Preservation of Cyprus's Cultural Heritage.

| Theme               | Participant's view |       |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------|
|                     | n                  | %     |
| Economic            | 17                 | %60.7 |
| Does not contribute | 11                 | %39.3 |
| Total View          | 28                 | %100  |

Participant responses were grouped under two themes: "Economic" (n=17) and "Does not provide opportunities" (n=11). Participant opinions are as follows.

*"I don't think it contributes much to the preservation of cultural architecture."* TA6

*"Because tourists can frequently visit the island to taste and learn about the country's cuisine, it can also contribute economically to the preservation of cultural heritage, ensuring its preservation and safeguarding it for future generations."* TA10

*"I don't think it contributes."* TA16

*"I believe gastronomy tourism doesn't contribute to cultural heritage."* TA28

*"It doesn't contribute much today because there isn't much promotion of gastronomy tourism to tourists."* TA27

#### 4.8. Challenges in the Marketing of Gastronomy Tourism

Participants' responses to the question, "Are there any challenges in the marketing of gastronomy tourism? Could you explain?" are shown in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Participants' opinions on the challenges in the marketing of gastronomy tourism.

| Theme                       | Participant's view |       |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------|
|                             | n                  | %     |
| Inadequate marketing        | 12                 | %42.8 |
| Inadequate promotion        | 11                 | %39.2 |
| Inadequate advertising      | 3                  | %10.7 |
| Wrong venue selection       | 1                  | %3.5  |
| Unfair Pricing for Tourists | 1                  | %3.5  |
| Total view                  | 28                 | %100  |



Participant responses were grouped under five themes. These responses were inadequate marketing (n=12), inadequate promotion (n=11), inadequate advertising (n=3), incorrect venue selection (n=1), and unfairly expensive prices for tourists (n=1). Participants' opinions were as follows.

*"Lack of necessary investments in marketing and promotion." TA4*

*"Gastronomy tourism is not sufficiently promoted to tourists." TA6*

*"There are, but the most important issue is the lack of sufficient advertising and promotion. When tourists arrive, there are no restaurants open at night serving local dishes. Because there are no restaurants where they can taste these dishes, people are not fully familiar with them when they visit the TRNC." TA7*

*"Problems experienced in the marketing of gastronomy tourism: lack of sufficient advertising and information. The information provided is not published in the right places." TA20*

*"Yes, but with the local population gradually disappearing from the island, it is a major problem that everyone acts as if they are accurately representing Cypriot culture. They think tourists are being served traditional dishes, but because they are not making them themselves, they are being misrepresented, as they are preparing them according to their own whims." TA11*

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It was determined that promotions of gastronomy tourism, including those by travel agencies from abroad, are generally inadequate. Furthermore, the study revealed insufficient efforts and improvements to safeguard cultural heritage and adopt sustainable tourism practices.

Participants' views on the definition of gastronomy tourism are based on the understanding that the purpose of travel is to taste food, explore local cuisine, and promote cultural foods. Similarly, a study by Yusuf (2016) defines gastronomy tourism as cultural interaction through food and beverages. This definition aligns with the participants' views.

In the study, the majority of participants stated that there is a lack of effort to promote gastronomy tourism in Northern Cyprus and that, as a result, the country's gastronomy culture is not being adequately promoted. Participants also noted that gastronomy tourism plays an important role in promoting Cypriot cuisine, but emphasized that this potential has not been adequately utilized. These findings are consistent with research findings in the literature. Okumuş, Okumuş, and McKercher (2007) concluded that Turkey should utilize its culinary culture more. Although the geographical location and the countries studied differ, the participants' reported results appear to be similar.

Participants' views on the role of gastronomy tourism in destination marketing are also consistent with the findings of existing studies in the literature. As in the study by Kivela and Crotts (2006) it was stated that gastronomy tourism contributes to destination marketing. However, participants also highlighted the insufficient visibility of Northern Cyprus's current marketing strategies. Due to Northern Cyprus's logistical and local characteristics, the lack of country-specific studies in the literature is believed to create a gap in this area. This demonstrates the originality of this study.

Silkes, Cai, and Lehto (2013) stated that food festivals are effective in destination marketing and have the potential to attract tourists. Therefore, we can assert that gastronomy tourism significantly influences tourists' destination preferences. This conclusion supports the findings of the study. Participants stated that gastronomy tourism is an influential factor in tourists' destination choices. However, they also highlighted that the island nature of Northern Cyprus limits this impact.

Töre, Sandıkçı, and Çelik (2017) emphasized the importance of factors such as environment, culture, and history in the formation of gastronomy identity. However, the study's participants stated that Northern Cyprus's local cuisine is key to its culinary identity. Geographical differences and the multicultural structure of Northern Cyprus are believed to be responsible for the discrepancy in the findings between the two studies.

Studies have determined that gastronomy tourism promotes economic and sociocultural development. (Şahin & Ünver, 2015). Research findings indicate that gastronomy tourism offers opportunities for the local economy and businesses; however, these opportunities are not fully utilized due to inadequate promotion of local culinary culture. Although the results align with existing literature, they highlight ongoing advertising challenges in Northern Cyprus. Travel agencies are considered to play a significant role in promoting local gastronomy and enhancing tourism development.

Participants stated that cultural heritage lacks direct protection, but gastronomy tourism's promotion of local culinary culture offers an indirect benefit. Çam and Çilginoğlu (2021) reveal that the promotion of local cuisine through gastronomy tourism indirectly contributes to cultural heritage. This observation is consistent with the participants' findings that cultural heritage is not directly protected, but local culinary culture is supported through gastronomy tourism.

Participants identified marketing and promotion deficiencies as the greatest obstacles to the development of gastronomy tourism. Gövce, Özdoğan, and Şimşek (2018) stated that gastronomy tourism plays a significant role in destination marketing, but due to insufficient marketing activities, very few destinations achieve success. This source, while highlighting the inadequacy of marketing strategies, focuses on marketing deficiencies in line with the participants' findings.

The study describes the overall status, potential, and actual contribution of gastronomy tourism in Northern Cyprus. There is a consensus among participants regarding the central importance of local cuisine, both as a local resource and a tourist experience. Theoretically, we recognize the potential of gastronomy to strengthen destination brands and influence tourist preferences. However, its significance is not reflected in the implementation of concrete marketing tools or promotional strategies.

The most striking finding in the research is that destination marketing has not sufficiently captured the international recognition it deserves for the uniqueness and depth of local culinary culture. It has been highlighted that there is a significant lack of support from travel agencies for culinary tourism products. As with marketing, there is also a gap in the proper protection of cultural heritage and the implementation of sustainable development. While promoting local cuisine is considered an indirect method for preserving and supporting cultural heritage, no systematic or direct approach has been adopted to protect it or foster the widespread adoption of sustainable tourism practices. This underperformance hinders the long-term economic and socio-cultural benefits of culinary tourism. The study demonstrates that Northern Cyprus faces a fundamental challenge in developing a viable marketing and communication strategy to internationalize its culinary culture. Potential benefits appear to depend on developing promotional activities in this direction through a comprehensive approach that prioritizes sustainability as part of the tourism development model.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was conducted using a qualitative method. It is believed that choosing a quantitative method for future studies will be advantageous due to the ease of data collection and the ability to cover a broader population.

Qualitative research can be conducted to gather the opinions of undergraduates and graduates on sustainable gastronomy and tourism.

Analyzing the similarities and differences between the roles of gastronomy tourism in rural and urban areas will enable more effective tourism strategy planning in these two regions. In this regard, further studies on the roles of gastronomy tourism in rural and urban areas are recommended.

Surveys measuring tourists' reasons for choosing gastronomy destinations and their expectations from these destinations will provide important data for the development of gastronomy tourism; therefore, further research on this topic is recommended.

An assessment of the impact of gastronomy tourism and local community participation on social life and cultural identity can be conducted, as well as research to understand local communities' perspectives on tourism and their attitudes toward the preservation of cultural heritage.

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**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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