

COMPREHENDING GASTRONOMY FESTIVALS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON ALANYA TROPICAL FRUIT FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the motivations for organizing gastronomy festivals, their management, the strategic approaches followed, and their role in tourism. The selected research area is Alanya in Turkey, which has recently emphasized gastronomy in its tourism-based activities, including through a tropical fruit festival. For this qualitative case study, data were collected using document analysis, a focus group, and face-to-face interviews. First, documents were obtained to understand Alanya's festival history. A focus group meeting was then organized to prepare a semi-structured interview form. Finally, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the people responsible for the organization of Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival. The data were subjected to content analysis. The findings indicated that the festival is organized in Alanya for social, cultural, economic, and political reasons while festival management includes design, planning, operation, and evaluation processes. Resource-based strategies and emerging strategies are important while the festival plays encouraging, supportive, and complementary roles in the region's tourism. These findings have several theoretical and practical implications.

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INTRODUCTION

Gastronomic tourism is a valuable sector that offers visitors diverse experiences, whether simply by eating at a restaurant, shopping in markets selling local food products, or visiting a gastronomy-themed museum (Seyitoğlu & Alphan, 2021; Smith & Xiao, 2008). In recent years, gastronomy festivals have also become a significant site for tourism experiences (López-Guzmán et al., 2017).

These festivals, which mainly focus on a specific gastronomic product, are expected to benefit both organizers and participants (Chang & Yuan, 2011; Horng & Tsai, 2012). For example, they can enable tourists to have unique travel experiences while helping destinations in their branding, promotion, and marketing (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Henderson, 2009; Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012).

The contributions of gastronomic festivals to the tourist experience and destination stakeholders have also attracted academic attention. For example, studies of tourists in relation to gastronomy festivals have addressed a range of issues: tourists' motivations for attending (Chui, 2018; Markovic et al., 2015; Saayman et al., 2012); their quality perceptions of festivals (Axelsen & Swan, 2010; Bruwer, 2014; Chang & Yuan, 2011; Marais, 2009; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; O'Regan et al., 2019; Smith & Costello, 2009; Taylor & Shanka, 2002; Yuan & Jang, 2008), satisfaction levels (Chang, 2014; Dimitrovski, 2016; Hubbard et al., 2012); participant typologies (Bayındır & Çalışkan, 2022); and the effects of festivals on destination revisit intentions (Bekar et al., 2017; Doğrul et al., 2015; López-Guzmán et al., 2017). By approaching gastronomy festivals from a tourist perspective, these studies have made a valuable contribution to the field.

Studies of destinations in relation to gastronomy festivals mostly approach this phenomenon from marketing perspective by focusing on the effects of festivals on destination branding (Crompton et al., 2001; Lee & Arcodia, 2011) and destination image (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2014). While considering both tourists and destinations, these studies focus on the outcomes of festivals. That is, they sometimes draw inferences from tourist perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions, and sometimes from destination branding and image. Their main purpose is to evaluate the outcomes of festivals or to understand how festivals contribute to the success of tourism destinations.

In contrast, there are few holistic studies of festival management, and these do not focus on gastronomy festivals but address a specific aspect of

management instead. Accordingly, the present study aims to address the deficiencies in the literature in three ways. First, it focuses on the causes of gastronomy festivals rather than the results in order to reveal the dynamics underlying gastronomy festivals. Second, it analyzes gastronomy festival management holistically, from start to finish. Third, it seeks concrete evidence regarding the role of gastronomy festivals in tourism from the findings of recent theoretical research into integrating gastronomy and tourism. It thereby aims to provide a holistic understanding of gastronomy festivals in terms of motivations, management processes, and strategies, and determine these festivals' role in tourism.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Festivals in Tourism and Prominent Issues in Festival Management

Festivals are defined as touristic products that have become a strong touristic attraction element that can offer a competitive advantage to destinations due to the increasing interest and curiosity of tourists regarding alternative tourism types (Bakırcı et al., 2017; Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Kömürcü et al., 2014; Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Özkan et al., 2015). These events, which can significantly influence tourists' destination preferences, can revitalize the local economy by increasing tourism revenue and increase employment (Baptista Alves et al., 2010; Crompton et al., 2001).

These developments have made festival management a popular topic in the literature from various perspectives. Although not specifically focused on gastronomy festivals, the relevant literature emphasizes certain aspects of festival management. For example, from their study of municipalities' festival management practices, Tinga and Arcipe (2021) suggest that there are four stages: planning, organization, leadership and control.

The planning phase generally starts with the topic that will form the basis of the festival. Research in this context (Andersson & Getz, 2008; Carlsen et al., 2010) concludes that resources are one of the most important elements in planning, although other issues can be relevant, such as identifying the potential audience (Negrusa & Murareanu, 2020), determining when to hold the festival (Carlsen et al., 2010; Getz, 2002), and location planning (Simon et al., 2017). Another important issue at this stage is financing, primarily how to meet the financial cost of organizing the festival (Getz, 2002) and cost management practices (Andersson & Getz,

2008; Presenza & Iocca, 2012; Simon et al., 2017). The organization phase focuses on three important points for managing festivals: volunteerism (Getz & Frisby, 1988), stakeholder management (Andersson & Getz, 2008; Getz, 2002; Miller et al., 2021; Simon et al., 2017; Tepeci et al., 2022) and visitor management (Negrusa & Murareanu, 2020). In addition, it focuses on the question of how to market the festival (Andersson & Getz, 2008). Festival management also requires making the complex decision about who should lead the event. One view is that municipalities should take the lead, given their greater financial and human resources (Tinga & Arcipe, 2021; Yin et al., 2024). Finally, festivals are evaluated during the control stage based on specific parameters, such as the festival's effects on local people (Agbabiaka, 2016), administrative inadequacies (Carlsen et al., 2010), and security (Miller et al., 2021). As the research outlined above shows, each of these stages in festival management, planning, organization, leadership, and control, have a different focus. For example, Getz and Frisby, (1988) emphasize volunteerism in festival management, Presenza and Iocca, (2012) emphasize relations with stakeholders, while Yin et al. (2024) emphasizes leadership.

A few studies have evaluated festival management in terms of festival success based on various conceptualizations. For example, Adongo and Kim (2018), evaluated the sustainability of local festivals in terms of the relationships between stakeholders, finding that festival sustainability is significantly related to giving the appropriate priority to each stakeholder. Tepeci et al. (2022) evaluated the shortcomings, benefits, and contributions of Turkey's long-running Mesir Paste Festival. They concluded that the festival did not provide significant social, cultural, or economic benefits. They identified four main shortcomings: inability to reflect the local culture, insufficient cooperation between stakeholders, insufficient promotion, and insufficient participants.

Although these studies provide a basis for managing festivals, there is still uncertainty regarding the management of gastronomy festivals specifically. This is reflected both in the tourism literature on festival management and also in studies investigating specific strategies regarding the relationship between gastronomy and tourism.

Noteworthy Strategies in the Relationship between Gastronomy and Tourism

The literature on gastronomic initiatives in tourism suggests that most gastronomic initiatives should be developed in line with specific strategies,

which are often conceptualized in terms of specific destinations and gastronomic products. For instance, Hjalager (2002) argues that the development of gastronomic tourism products can take place in four different strategic phases, with each one differentiating the products from their counterparts and thus of strategic importance. The four main strategies are protecting the local, establishing production standards, integrating gastronomic products with other tourism products, and adding new products to existing gastronomic values. Harrington and Ottenbacher (2010) claim that issues like the destination's gastronomic identity, tourist motivation and behavior, and implementation problems are important when integrating gastronomy and tourism.

Other researchers explain these strategies in terms of three main approaches drawn from strategic management literature. The resource-based approach focuses on new gastronomic tourism products, the emerging approach focuses on developing them, while the deliberate approach concerns positioning products in the market (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2018; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020).

The resource-based approach argues that the natural resources used to create the destination's gastronomic products should be identified with the specific destination. With the help of entrepreneurs, unplanned actions can enable an institutional strategy to emerge, which can then become a deliberate strategy. According to Aydın (2020), four main variables characterize the strategic relationship between gastronomy and tourism: diversity of gastronomic products, stakeholder management, leadership, and changes in tourist demand. Drawing on Mintzberg, Aydın (2020) argues that emerging strategies in gastronomy tourism may develop differently from planned ones.

Some of above studies focus only on the gastronomic product itself (Hjalager, 2002) whereas others adopt a holistic framework to examine the gastronomic product's destination context (Aydın, 2020; Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010). Other studies draw on different disciplines to conceptualize strategies regarding the relationship between gastronomy and tourism (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2018; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). However, previous studies of festival management, gastronomy, and tourism have various deficiencies. The following section analyzes research on gastronomy festivals according to their contextual approaches to better explain this gap.

Studies of Gastronomy Festivals

Studies of gastronomy festivals have focused either on tourists (demand side) or destinations (supply side). The former group evaluates gastronomy festivals in terms of tourists' motivations, perceptions and behavioral intentions, and the participants' characteristics.

Regarding motivation, tourists attend gastronomy festivals for various reasons, such as excitement, getting away from daily routines (Chang & Yuan, 2011; Draper et al., 2016; Saayman et al., 2012), experiencing the food and beverages offered at the festival (Dodd et al., 2006; Park et al., 2008; Yuan et al., 2004), and socializing and learning (Isaykina, 2001; Weiler et al., 2004).

Regarding participating tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions regarding a festival, studies have investigated various types of festival in different countries, focusing on the effects of factors like food and beverage quality, festival stands, and festival activities. The findings suggest that festival characteristics can have positive effects on the participants' satisfaction and behavioral intention (Chang, 2014; Choo & Park, 2017; Dimitrovski, 2016; Hubbard et al., 2012).

Finally, other tourist-focused studies have sought to understand gastronomy festival participants by categorizing them. The categorization criteria include age group (Axelsen & Swan, 2010; Dodd et al., 2006), interest in gastronomy (López-Guzmán et al., 2017), and spending levels (Kim et al., 2014; Saayman et al., 2012).

In contrast, destination-oriented researchers address the relationship between gastronomy festivals and destinations from a supply-side perspective as an important auxiliary destination branding tool (Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore, 2016; Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014). The findings suggest that gastronomy festivals can shape destination image positively (Bekar et al., 2017) and strengthen the destination's gastronomic identity and culinary heritage (Kim et al., 2014). Destination branding can also be accelerated by political and economic support (Getz et al., 2015). However, successful destination branding through festivals requires that the destination maintains stability and maintains a certain threshold level of festival participants (Lee & Arcodia, 2011).

Gastronomic festivals have become globally important. In Germany, for instance, gastronomy festivals are the second most popular festival type after music festivals (Davies 2024). Portugal's cherry festival makes a

significant economic contribution to the associated destinations by increasing hotel occupancy rates by 45% and restaurant revenues by 55% (Baptista Alves et al., 2010). Similarly, the Alaçatı Herb Festival in Turkey provides various socioeconomic benefits, such as enabling local people and tourists to mingle, and increasing shopping opportunities (Ön Esen & Yılmaz, 2016).

As this literature review demonstrates, gastronomy festivals are an important research area that has been analyzed from different perspectives. In particular, analyzing gastronomy festivals from both the demand and supply perspectives is very valuable in terms of revealing the characteristics and perceptions of participating tourists and the socio-economic contributions of festivals to the destination. However, there are also areas that these studies do not focus on, particularly a holistic analysis of managing gastronomy festivals. These studies also tend to focus on the results rather than the causes of festivals. Finally, studies of strategies to integrate gastronomy and tourism tend to explain them generally and mostly conceptually in terms of destinations rather than a gastronomic product like festivals. Accordingly, the present study aims to address these gaps in previous research by investigating the causes rather than the results of gastronomy festivals, examine festival management processes holistically, and identify the role of festivals in tourism by providing empirical evidence of the prominent strategies for integrating gastronomy and tourism.

METHODOLOGY

Study Setting: Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival, Turkey

Alanya, the selected research area, is an important touristic destination in Antalya Province, Turkey, known for its natural and historical features (Seydioğulları, 2010). Until the 1950s, Alanya was a small fishing town in an agricultural region producing bananas and citrus fruits. Since the 1980s, it has become a destination for mass sun, sea, and sand tourism. Currently, it receives approximately 7 million tourists annually, with tourism being the region's most important economic sector (ALTSO, 2022; Saruhan, 2019).

While Alanya's natural beauty is the main motivation for tourists (Doğan et al., 2010), it has also become known for many annual events, including the International Children's Festival, Alanya International Culture and Art Festival, International Jazz Days, Triathlon European Cup, International Stone Sculpture Symposium, and International New Year

Bazaar (Alanya Municipality, 2023). Alanya is also developing gastronomy tourism (Nebioğlu, 2021). Initiatives include geographical indications and patents (TPE, 2023) for regional gastronomic products, a web-based culinary heritage application to highlight local products and introduce them to tourists, internationally organized cooking competitions, and the Culinary Culture House to introduce local dishes (Nebioğlu & Ak, 2023). Alanya is also a very rich place in terms of tropical fruit production. So far, more than forty kinds of tropical fruits such as avocado, mango, and dragon fruit, have been grown in Alanya, where the Tropical Fruit Festival has been organized since 2022 (Alanya Municipality, 2023). Thus, Alanya is an appropriate research area both because it positions gastronomy as a part of its tourism strategy and because it has hosted events for many years.

Research Questions and Data Collection Tools

The research questions were formulated using two approaches. First, document analysis was conducted with articles, papers, books, and websites about Alanya regarding gastronomy, tourism, and festivals to identify aspects of Alanya that could form the basis of a gastronomy festival. For this, 8 printed documents were identified published between 1989 and 2020: 6 books and 2 research articles. These documents provide general information about Alanya's culinary culture. On the other hand, 35 online documents accessed from the websites of local governments and news organizations provide more up-to-date information about Alanya's gastronomy. These documents mainly mention Alanya's local foods, especially tropical products, as well as cooking competitions, cooking courses, gastronomy promotion activities, culinary heritage, and food museum projects organized in Alanya. The analysis indicates that Alanya is a destination with identifiable local characteristics, many gastronomic products, and intensive tourism activities; it is also highly experienced in terms of activities.

The relevant literature was reviewed to draft the research questions, given that the main aim of the study was to understand the management process of Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival. This was addressed to four main research areas: tourist motivations, management process, Alanya's gastronomy strategy approaches, and the festival's role in tourism. The main categories and sub-categories related to these four areas were determined from the literature (Table 1). A focus group interview was then conducted to confirm Alanya's suitability as a research site and to clarify the research questions.

Table 1. *Categories and Sub-categories in Developing Interview Questions*

| Categories | Sub-categories in developing interview questions | Sources |
|--|---|---|
| Motivations | Tourist motivations (excitement, getting away from daily routines, food experience, socializing and learning) Destination perspective (auxiliary tool of destination branding, positive destination image, strengthening destination's gastronomic identity and culinary heritage) | Chang & Yuan (2011), Draper et al. (2016), Saayman et al. (2012), Dodd et al. (2006), Park et al. (2008), Isaykina (2001), Weiler et al. (2004), Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore (2016), Blichfeldt & Halkier (2014), Kim et al. (2014) |
| Management Process | Planning, organization, leadership, control, resources, potential audience, settlement planning, time interval, finance, cost management, stakeholder management, visitor management | Tinga & Arcipe (2021), Andersson & Getz (2008), Carlsen et al. (2010), Negrusa & Murareanu (2020), Simon et al. (2017), Miller et al. (2021), Yin et al. (2024) |
| Destinations' Gastronomy Tourism Strategy | Resource-based strategies, emerging strategies, deliberate strategies | Özdemir & Seyitoğlu (2018), Aydın (2020), Seyitoğlu & Ivanov (2020) |
| Role in Tourism | Auxiliary tool of destination branding, economic support to destinations, positive destination image | Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore (2016), Blichfeldt & Halkier (2014), Baptista Alves et al. (2010), Ön Esen & Yılmaz (2016) |

Prior to the focus group interview, which aimed to create an environment for discussion, open-ended questions were prepared to understand the interviewees' thoughts on creating and implementing Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival. The participants were experts of various ages, professions, and work experience (Table 2). The focus group interview, which lasted 74 minutes, was recorded and transcribed into a 7,399-word text.

Table 2. *Information on Focus Group Interview Participants*

| Participant Code | Age (years) | Education Level | Profession |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| FGP1 | 36 | Doctoral | Academician |
| FGP2 | 35 | High School | Executive Chef |
| FGP3 | 53 | High School | Marketing Manager |
| FGP4 | 43 | Bachelor's | Organization Manager |
| FGP5 | 55 | Bachelor's | Festival Coordinator |
| FGP6 | 44 | Doctoral | Academician |
| FGP7 | 43 | Doctoral | Academician |
| FGP8 | 36 | Master's | Tour Guide |

The document analysis and focus group interviews revealed that Alanya has started to integrate its local gastronomic products with tourism activities, and that Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival plays an important role in this process. After the focus group interview, the study addressed four research questions: What are the reasons for organizing a tropical fruit

festival in Alanya? What stages should be followed to organize the festival? What type(s) of strategies should the festival adopt? What is the festival's role in Alanya's tourism sector? To generate rich and deep answers to these research questions, a qualitative case study research method was preferred.

Table 3. *Socio-Demographic Information of Interview Participants*

| Participant Code | Age (years) | Education Level | Profession | Total Work Experience (years) | Length of Residence in the Region (years) |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| P1 | 33 | Bachelor's | Food Engineer | 10 | 33 |
| P2 | 37 | Doctoral | Academician | 11 | 25 |
| P3 | 52 | Bachelor's | Manager-Organizer | 30 | 52 |
| P4 | 60 | Bachelor's | Veterinary- Organizer | 45 | 60 |
| P5 | 41 | Bachelor's | Hotel Operator | 10 | 35 |
| P6 | 66 | Master's | Agricultural Engineer | 35 | 66 |
| P7 | 43 | Bachelor's | Operator-Organizer | 12 | 32 |
| P8 | 54 | Bachelor's | Agricultural Engineer | 29 | 54 |
| P9 | 48 | Bachelor's | Food Engineer | 26 | 26 |
| P10 | 49 | High School | Operator-Organizer | 30 | 49 |
| P11 | 41 | Bachelor's | Advertiser | 26 | 26 |
| P12 | 46 | Master's | Architect | 14 | 46 |

The individual face-to-face interviews were conducted after preparing an open-ended questionnaire. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select participants with knowledge about Alanya's culinary culture and interested in event tourism. In qualitative research the study group size can vary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Here, theoretical sampling was used to determine the sample size. That is, no further interviews were conducted once the participants' statements became repetitive (Robinson, 2014). In the present study, this occurred with 12 participants. Table 3 presents the socio-demographic information about the participants. Their ages ranged between 33 and 66 years old; their total work experience ranged between 10 and 45 years; and their length of residency in Alanya region varied from 25 to 66 years, indicating that they were well acquainted with Alanya in many respects. Finally, most worked in relevant positions, for example as organizers and coordinators in Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival.

The interviewees were first contacted and provided with detailed information about the interview's subject, place, and time. At the interview, voluntary participation forms were presented to each interviewee and permission obtained to voice record the interview to make data collection more efficient. The data from the interviews, conducted over a month, produced a 39,375-word transcript.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The data from the document review, focus group discussions, and interviews were subjected to content analysis using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. Following Creswell and Poth (2018), the data were coded, the codes were classified, and themes were created and interpreted.

An important concept in qualitative research is credibility, which defines the reliability and validity of the research. Because qualitative research includes holistic and multidimensional data, credibility requires consideration of various elements, including the extent to which the sampled people represent the population (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To achieve this, we interviewed people with shared experiences from living in Alanya and involvement in regional event tourism activities. Shenton (2004) suggests that rich descriptions can increase credibility. In the present study, direct quotations were included for this purpose. Accurate coding processes also affect credibility, which can be ensured by having least two coders (Hall & Valentin, 2005). Finally, credibility can be increased by developing code schemes after separate coding, discussions while applying code schemes to the text and determining categories, and searching for a consensus (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the document analysis, focus group discussions, and individual interviews to answer the research questions.

Reasons for Organizing the Tropical Fruit Festival in Alanya

The participants suggested many different reasons for the festival (Table 4), which could be categorized into four groups: social, cultural, economic, and political.

According to the participants, the main reason for this festival is social need. This festival is an event that *“fulfils people’s social needs”* (P3) and *“heralds the start of the tourism season and is thought of as hello to summer”* (P12). At the same time, *“being a part of the activity is seen as a situation that motivates people”* (P2).

The participants also considered the festival to be a powerful tool for remembering and keeping alive cultural values that are an integral part of

societies. For example, *“foods that have become the tradition of the region or have the potential to become a tradition will come to the fore.”* (P2).

Table 4. *Reasons for Organizing the Tropical Fruit Festival in Alanya*

| Reasons | Brief Descriptions |
|------------------|--|
| Social | Providing social morale and motivation |
| Cultural | Reminding, promoting, and transferring the region's cultural values to future generations |
| Economic | Supporting traders by commercially revitalizing the region Supporting regional tourism activities through festivals Using local products as a tool for branding and registering them with the region Helping local producers find markets more easily |
| Political | Competition between local governments, political ideologies, and local governments' desire to provide public services Creating a positive city image and urban awareness |

Economic reasons are also important: *“For Alanya, tourism means money ... As such, I think that the more culture, art and social activities increase in the region, the higher the awareness of a city will rise. The more festivals increase, the more beneficial it is for us. The Tropical Fruit Festival is a tool for this”* (P2). Economically, festivals also encourage *“more tourists to come, to be a source of promotion”* (P10). It also helps in branding and registration of local products: *“while organizing the festival, you get the registration of some local products such as avocado. These products then turn into brands. Because of this, we benefit from festivals”* (P4). Similarly, thanks to this festival, *“producers are brought to the forefront, and it helps them to find a market.”* (P5) *“Especially encouraging the use of local products in this festival supports gastronomy tourism in terms of the sustainability of local products”* (P1).

Finally, festivals also emerge for political reasons: *“Festivals are defined as a task performed to strengthen the perception that the local government attaches importance to the cultural values of the city, a trunk show of local governments”* (P9). In addition, *“this festival is also organized by Alanya Municipality to contribute to a positive image of Alanya and to create urban awareness”* (P2).

Management of Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival and Key Issues

Management of the festival also fell into the four stages outlined earlier: design, planning, organization, and evaluation. Table 5 presents each stage and the main issues.

According to the participants, at the design stage, the first issue is selection of gastronomic products, Participant P1 explained: *“First of all, it*

is necessary to determine what the gastronomic product will be. Should it be a local product or a product that gains local character? We decided this by consulting many places and taking ideas.” That is, an idea should be proposed first before being transformed into a theme.

Table 5. *Management Stages and Key Issues in Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival*

| Stage | Stage Description | Key Issues |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Design | Determining the idea, theme, and concept | Selection of gastronomic product(s) Festival nomenclature Festival timing and duration Location and venue selection Identification of activities |
| Planning | Formation of organizing committee, definition of goals and objectives, identification of strategies, interviews with stakeholders, financing, target group, etc. | Leadership Committee Stakeholder and stakeholder relations Financing Identifying target audience |
| Operation | Development of business / event plans, identification of sponsorships / invitees / target audience, promotion, and publicity activities | Advertising and promotion Space and personnel management |
| Evaluation | Reporting of activity, collection of visitor surveys, evaluation of festival | Situation assessment |

Product selection involves several criteria: popularity, suitability for the local cuisine, coincidence of harvesting with festival timing, potential brand value, and value added to the festival and the region. In Alanya’s case, for example, *“Avocado can be the main product of a gastronomy festival as it is a very popular product for almost all world cuisines in recent years”* (P1). For agricultural products, *“the harvest period and festival dates should be compatible”* (P1), and *“it should reflect the culture of the region and especially products with geographical indication, rarely grown in the country and difficult to imitate”* (P9).

Another noteworthy issue is naming festivals. According to the participants, the name should arouse curiosity while being broad enough to cover several products: *“There are forty kinds of herbs in the Aegean, but they don’t say let’s highlight one of them. It’s just an herb festival”* (P9). *“When naming it, it is necessary to determine the concept in a way to diversify and enrich it every year”* (P12). Accordingly, Alanya Tropical Festival develops a different main theme every year, such as avocado or mango.

Regarding timing, as explained above, *“it should be planned at an appropriate time with the harvest period and should also have a feature that will extend the season by covering a time period outside the high tourism season”* (P1).

The festival is organized in September and October, close to the end of the busy tourist season.

The selected festival date range, timing, and duration should coincide with potential visitors' spare time: *"No one will come for a one-day festival; it should be planned for at least two days. In this way, they can attract participants from different cities"* (P10). In addition, *"this festival is planned to extend the season, especially outside the high tourism season; the harvest time of tropical fruits is taken into account in the planning"* (P9).

There are several key considerations regarding location and venue: *"being in a central place"* (P1), *"covered in winter"* (P3) but *"in an open area in summer"* (P7), *"depending on the time period to be arranged, and being a central place with the capacity to accommodate crowded groups of people"* (P12). Accordingly, Alanya's festival area is in the old town center, which is very popular and easily accessible to everyone.

The design stages also involve choosing the festival activities. *"This entails the identification of various gastronomy-related events, such as cooking competitions, various workshops (jewelry making, woodworking, painting, photography), and diverse workshops focusing on local products like aromatic oils and plants, banana fiber utilization, and citrus jam production. Additionally, conferences, talks, children's activities, farmer producer meetings, and exhibitions should be incorporated to offer a comprehensive range of topics and experiences"* (P9).

The planning stage focuses on effectively executing the festival. In particular, the leader should be *"a competent individual with expertise in a field related to food"* (P7) and *"a solid understanding of local gastronomy"* (P12). Moreover, *"it is imperative that these events be organized under the auspices of official entities"* (P1). This is because *"local governments (municipalities) bear substantial responsibility for a wide array of sectors, ranging from tourism to agriculture"* (P4). Accordingly, Alanya's festival is carried out under the leadership of Alanya Municipality.

Local governments should establish specialized committees for organizing festivals effectively, with *"wide-ranging representation and participation"* (P3). The committees should also regulate relationships with stakeholders. Participant P9 defines the main stakeholders of the festival as *"Alanya Municipality, Alanya Chamber of Commerce and Industry, district governorship, tourism promotion foundations, tourism and cookery associations, producer associations, tradesmen's chambers"*.

A significant concern is financing, which plays a critical role in ensuring festival sustainability: *"The realization of any festival venture, be it related to gastronomy, tourism, or the arts, heavily relies on securing adequate financing"* (P8). According to Participant P1, this is done by the municipality in Alanya's case: *"Our festival is a festival where financing is provided by a single institution, but apart from financial issues, we receive accommodation support especially in cooperation with ALTID (Alanya Touristic Hoteliers Association)"*.

Another issue is the target audience, which the interviewees considered to be primarily residents: *"Our festival primarily targeted the entire population of Alanya and the surrounding areas"* (P12). However, according to P8, *"This festival should start from national and go towards the international arena. Since there are also resident foreigners in Alanya, we appeal to both segments"*.

The operational stage implements the decisions and procedures defined during the planning stage. Advertising and promotional activities take precedence, commencing prior to the festival and continuing throughout. Recently, advertising and promotion are highly significant, particularly regarding the efficacy of social media promotions: *"Advertising and promotion, particularly through social media, serve as vital tools for festivals to effectively engage with the appropriate participants. In this respect, social media influencers are very effective, and we cooperate with them in this regard"* (P7).

Another important component is management of space and personnel, particularly meticulous organization of stands and efficient coordination of support personnel: *"We must exercise utmost caution in ensuring uninterrupted management of our vital requirements and securing the necessary support personnel (such as security personnel, technical service staff, etc.), encompassing elements such as determining the quantity and location of stands, as well as the provision of electricity"* (P6).

In the evaluation stage, also known as the post-festival process, the organizers assess the festival. This requires careful examination of festival attendee feedback to identify the event's strengths and weaknesses: *"Positive and negative aspects of the festival are identified, and appropriate measures are implemented to rectify any shortcomings"* (P12). Finally, *"the observations and insights gathered in this evaluation report are then compiled into a written document"* (P1).

Strategies Followed in the Festival and the Roles of the Festival in Tourism

The participants' responses implied certain strategic management theories, with the resource-based strategy appearing to be the most important in planning a gastronomy festival. As Participant P2 put it, *"There are no products that do not grow in this region ... Endemic plants can also grow ... A gastronomy festival should be supplied by the region's local and difficult to imitate products."* A number of participants suggested that the focus of gastronomy festivals should be determined by identifying food products with a specific connection to the locality. These responses suggest that Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival draws on a resource-based strategic approach.

Because the festival is fairly new, the emerging strategy was also implied in the interviews. For example, Participant P3 said, *"When we embarked on this endeavor, we did not deliberately focus on the specific details of how the event should be organized. Rather, we hosted this event to invigorate the local community and celebrate tourism. It is worth noting that we have gradually enhanced our professionalism each year, surpassing our achievements from the previous year."*

Table 6. *Strategies Followed in the Festival and the Roles of the Festival in Tourism*

| Strategy and Roles | Subcategories | Short Descriptions |
|--|---------------------|--|
| Strategies Implemented in the Festival | Resource-Based | Achieving competitive advantage through difficult-to-imitate products |
| | Strategy | |
| | Emerging Strategy | Strategies that emerge spontaneously during the activity |
| The Significance of the Festival in Tourism | Encouraging Roles | Encouraging tourists to travel to the destination, Offering tourists new areas for gastronomic experiences |
| | Supportive Roles | Contributing to destination promotion and marketing |
| | Complementary Roles | Extending the tourism season |

The research findings also indicate that the festival plays distinct roles within tourism, including encouraging, supporting, and complementing other activities. The encouraging role pertains to motivating tourists to embark on specific journeys. As participant P1 noted, *"I closely follow gastronomy festivals. When I have a desired destination in mind, I coordinate my annual vacation accordingly. I firmly believe that such festivals occur only once and cannot be replicated. This serves as a significant motivation for my travel plans. I think this will be similar for Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival in the future."* Similar motives were shared by many other participants.

Especially for tourists who are curious about different flavors, Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival provides an interesting event. As Participant P5 noted, *“tropical fruits are an area that attracts tourists and offers them new gastronomic experiences”*.

The supportive role includes activities that contribute to promoting and marketing the destination: *“Tourists from various corners of the globe, as well as within Turkey, converge on these festivals. Consequently, it presents an ideal opportunity to showcase historical culinary delights to visitors. In addition, both chefs and other culinary professionals can further develop their craft. Ultimately, it serves as a means to promote the region itself”* (P3).

Finally, complementary roles involve extending the tourism season: *“For instance, if the necessary infrastructure is established, organizing this festival during the off-season could effectively prolong the tourism season. Therefore, it would be prudent to explore such possibilities”* (P12). Similarly, Participant P5 said, *“I think that the Tropical Fruit Festival will help to extend the tourism season a little longer by stimulating domestic tourism movements”*.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study identified the underlying reasons for holding Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival, the stages of festival management, the implementation of strategic approaches within the festival, and the role of the festival in promoting tourism with the help of a case study. Figure 1 shows the interplay between the formation and management of gastronomy festivals, and the strategies they are built on. The following section discusses the theoretical and gastronomic implications of these relationships.

Theoretical Implications

The findings from this study indicate that Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival is driven by four groups of motivations: social, cultural, economic, and political. Social and cultural motivations are of particular relevance to tourists. Research shows that tourists participate in festivals for diverse reasons, such as engaging in social gatherings or gaining insights. This experiential aspect is an integral component of tourism (Quan & Wang, 2004) whereby tourists seek to enrich their experiences through various motivations, including socializing and acquiring knowledge (Fields, 2002). From the sociocultural perspective, the Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival aims to boost morale and motivate local people while protecting local values. In

addition, because this festival is quite new, it targets local people rather than tourists. Economic factors are also prominent in organizing festivals, for example as a way to revitalize the local economy (Tepeci et al., 2022). Likewise, Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival, as a festival sponsored by Alanya Municipality, makes an economic contribution by supporting local trade, adding value to tourism activities, and helping to brand local products. Destinations can leverage gastronomy in their tourism sector to foster local economic growth, gain a competitive advantage through unique and difficult-to-replicate gastronomic products, and thereby contribute to the destination's sustainability (Hall & Mitchell, 2003; López-Guzmán & Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012; Sims, 2009). Festivals may also be organized for political reasons. However, whereas Getz et al. (2015) argue that political and economic backing are important for festival branding, we found that Alanya's local government organizes festivals for the local populace to fulfill a previous promise. That is, satisfying the local community is prioritized over branding efforts.

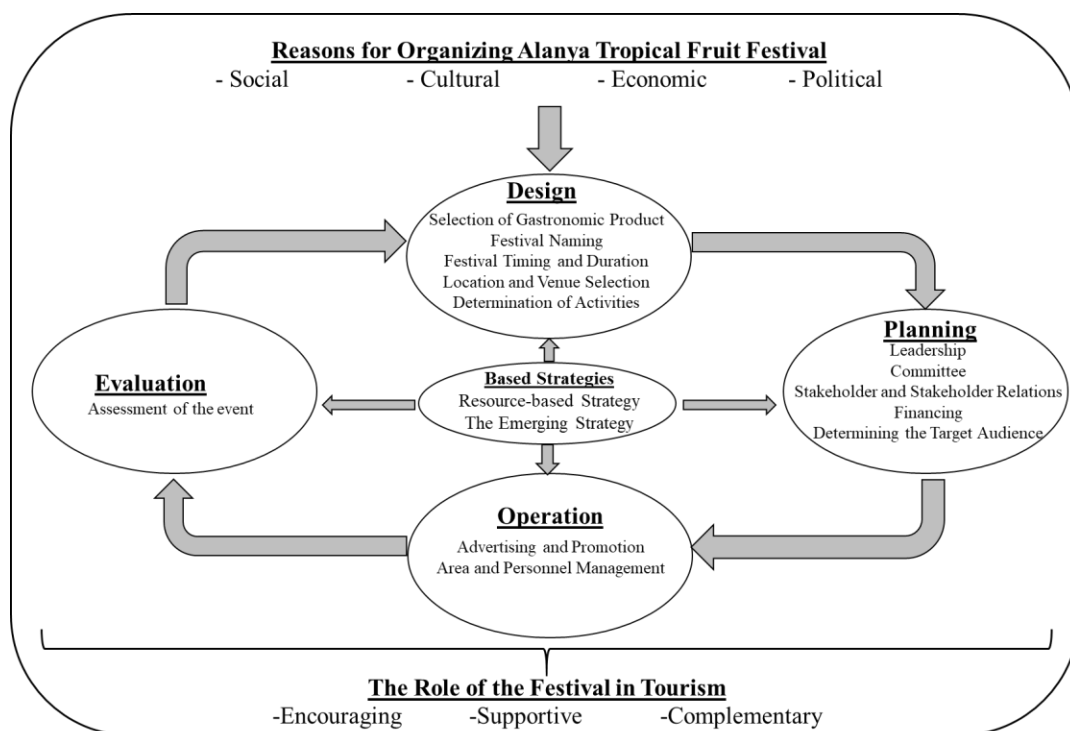


Figure 1. A Holistic View of Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival

Two strategies attract particular attention regarding the emergence of Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival. Unsurprisingly, the leading strategy is resource based. Given that Alanya is Turkey's main tropical fruit producer, it makes strategic use of products like avocado and banana in its festival because they have gained a local character and geographical mark. In addition, they are very suitable for resource-based strategies as they are not

very likely to be imitated. This parallels previous findings (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2018; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020).

Second, emerging strategies are also prominent, which have sometimes emerged spontaneously because Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival is fairly new. As some participants noted, the festival organizers did not plan every detail in advance. This aligns with Aydın's (2020) finding that some strategies for integrating gastronomy and tourism may emerge spontaneously. The relationship between gastronomy and tourism in Cappadocia demonstrates that there may be emerging strategies in which stakeholders are not very involved. Our findings suggest that this also applies to Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival.

Management of gastronomy festivals can be divided into four key stages: design, planning, operation, and evaluation. A crucial factor in the design phase is selection of gastronomic products that are locally sourced or have acquired a local identity. The chosen product must reflect the region's character and be difficult to replicate. Previous research has highlighted how such products can represent a destination (Harrington, 2005). In Alanya, tropical fruits are important because they have a distinct local identity and cannot be cultivated elsewhere in Turkey. Subsequent management decisions, such as festival nomenclature, timing, duration, location, and event, depend on the chosen product.

The planning stage involves key elements, such as leadership, committee formation, stakeholder relationships, financing, and target audience selection. Festival organizations in Turkey are mostly led by state institutions, as is the case for Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival. The festival has an organizing committee and many stakeholders. In line with the present findings, previous studies of festival management have reported that inter-stakeholder relations and giving due importance to each stakeholder are important issues (Adongo & Kim, 2018). Regarding financing, Alanya's festival is supported by the municipality. Municipalities support such events to strengthen the local economy (Tepeci et al., 2022). Regarding the operational phase for Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival, two issues stand out: advertising and promotion, and location and personnel management. The former is mostly achieved through local promotions, while social media tools are also used to increase national recognition. Regarding the latter issue, participants suggested that the festival management needed to be more effective. Tepeci et al. (2022) also found that location and personnel management are important issues for festivals.

All stages of the festival's management process are resource-based and driven by the emerging strategy. In the first stage, the festival is based on a product like tropical fruits that is difficult to imitate nationwide. This product is then nurtured by a stronger institution like Alanya Municipality in terms of financial and human resources compared to private institutions. Here, product, financing, and human resources can be associated with the resource-based approach. In addition, the study detected an emerging strategy in all the festival's management processes. In short, the festival's management processes derive from both planned and spontaneous strategies.

The evaluation stage involves an analysis of the festival's entire lifecycle, from planning to implementation. According to Getz and Frisby (1988), there are two main areas: organizational and environmental. Our findings indicate that Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival is evaluated organizationally, but the event's environmental impacts are not much considered.

Based on the present findings, festivals can have three roles in tourism: encouragement, support, and complementarity. First, they can be catalysts, encouraging tourists to visit a specific destination, as reported by numerous studies (Bekar et al., 2017; Doğrul et al., 2015; López-Guzmán et al., 2017). Second, they can positively contribute to a destination's promotional and marketing efforts, as also found for gastronomy festivals in Portugal (Baptista Alves et al., 2010) and Turkey (Ön Esen & Yılmaz, 2016). Third, a well-planned gastronomy festival can extend the destination's tourism season. The present findings indicate that Alanya Tropical Fruit Festival fulfils all three functions in its contribution to tourism.

Practical Implications

The present case study's findings have practical implications as well in providing guidance to practitioners regarding the reasons for the emergence of gastronomy festivals, the strategies to be implemented to organize them, festival management processes, and the role of festivals in tourism.

Alanya's crucial gastronomic assets are tropical products like avocado, papaya, and banana, which cannot be easily cultivated elsewhere in Turkey. Previous studies of Alanya's culinary characteristics have also demonstrated the importance of tropical fruits in its gastronomy tourism

efforts (Karsak, 2020; Nebioğlu, 2021; Soner, 2013). Practitioners should therefore investigate geographical indication, developing new food recipes, and organizing scientific meetings on this subject to further fuse these products with local culture. These planned efforts can be seen as a reflection of resource-based strategies.

The present findings suggest that new, even unexpected, emerging strategies can appear alongside the resource-based approach at any stage. As Mintzberg et al. (1998) argue, strategies implemented intentionally can later become emerging strategies, which in turn can again become intentional.

Finally, gastronomy festivals should be regarded as alternative tourism resources for tourist destinations. From the perspective of practitioners, they not only increase tourist motivation but also contribute to promoting and marketing the destination while extending its tourism season.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite providing significant insights into the emergence of gastronomy festivals, their management processes, applied strategies, and contribution to tourism, the present study has certain limitations. First, it only explores one gastronomy festival in a tourist destination, so future studies should investigate diverse locations. Second, a qualitative approach was adopted, specifically interpreting semi-structured interview data. Consequently, future studies should also incorporate quantitative research designs.

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