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Research Article

## CONTRIBUTION OF MUNICIPALITIES TO LOCAL GASTRONOMY INITIATIVES THROUGH A COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM APPROACH: THE CASE OF KÜTAHYA MUNICIPALITY

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the contribution of municipalities to local gastronomy initiatives within the framework of a community-based tourism approach, using the example of Kütahya Municipality. The research aims to reveal the effects of local governments' gastronomy-based activities on community participation, local development, and the preservation of cultural heritage. The interview technique, a qualitative research method, was used as the data collection tool. Interviews conducted with managers working at Kütahya Municipality, representatives of the gastronomy unit, members of women's cooperatives, and local gastronomy entrepreneurs were evaluated using descriptive analysis. The findings reveal that the municipality supports local gastronomy initiatives through gastronomy festivals, panels, cooperative support, and promotional activities; these practices ensure that the local community is involved in the process as producers, decision-makers, and stakeholders. Additionally, it was determined that gastronomy-based events increase the visibility of local products, generate economic benefits, and strengthen social interaction. In conclusion, the example of Kütahya Municipality demonstrates that local governments can effectively utilize gastronomy as a development tool in line with a community-based tourism approach. This study is expected to contribute to the literature on gastronomy-focused community-based tourism practices by local governments and provide guiding insights for practitioners.

**Keywords:** *Culinary tourism, community-based tourism, local governments*

### Introduction

The community-based tourism approach is founded on the active involvement of local communities in the planning, implementation, and management of tourism activities (Kösedağ, 2022). It is also recognized as an approach that aims to ensure the economic, social, and cultural benefits derived from tourism are shared more equitably among the local community (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009). With this approach, the local community is positioned not merely as a source of labor in tourism activities, but also as a decision-maker, producer, and stakeholder (Saraç and Türkay, 2019). According to this approach, tourism activities transform into productive practices that contribute to

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the preservation, recognition, and integration of local identity with the local community, thereby supporting social development (Suansri, 2003). Through this participatory model, which emerged from the understanding of preserving and developing local values, the social life characteristics, consumption habits, production activities, food and beverage culture, and all other aspects of life of the host community are incorporated into the process of managing and shaping tourism (Azaklı and Özgür, 2004). In this context, gastronomy serves as a field where local values are made tangibly visible (Eom & Han, 2019). Gastronomy activities are regarded as a sphere of interaction where local values are recognized, transformed into economic value, and provide social and cultural benefits, and are closely associated with a community-based tourism approach (Brida et al., 2011).

Gastronomy is recognized as one of the key elements reflecting a destination's cultural identity (Akdağ & Üzülmez, 2017). Local gastronomic values can be showcased through gastronomic activities (Lu & Nepal, 2019). At the same time, gastronomic elements can be transformed into economic value through such activities. To ensure that gastronomy activities are effectively carried out and achieve their objectives, local producers, entrepreneurs, and communities can also be involved in the process of these activities (Koufadakis & Manola, 2020). At this point, local governments can make decisions to support gastronomic values and the structures that bring these values to light, thereby implementing a community-based tourism approach, thanks to their planning, guidance, and support authorities (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003). Municipalities, as local government entities, can contribute to the development of local gastronomy initiatives through gastronomy-themed festivals, celebrations, events, and educational activities, as well as through support for cooperatives and promotional efforts (Sthapit et al., 2020: 19). Thanks to the contributions provided by municipalities, gastronomy-based structures, stakeholders, and the public can transform local gastronomic values into a shared space accessible to all (Diguid et al., 2015). With the growing interest in the gastronomy sector in recent years, the role of local governments in this field has also become more visible (Baker & Cameron, 2008). In particular, by supporting women's cooperatives, local producers, and small-scale gastronomy initiatives, contributions are made to local development efforts, and the fundamental principles of community-based tourism can be put into practice (Marescotti, 2003).

The aim of this study is to examine the contribution of municipalities to local gastronomy initiatives within the framework of a community-based tourism approach, using the example of Kütahya Municipality. Within the scope of the research, the municipality's activities in the field of gastronomy, the partnerships it has developed with local entrepreneurs and cooperatives, and the effects of these practices on local community participation and local development were examined using a qualitative research approach. The study aims to contribute to the literature by evaluating community-based tourism practices of local governments through their gastronomy-focused components, and to provide findings that serve as a guide for practitioners.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Community-Based Tourism Approach**

Community-based tourism can be defined as a model of practice in which social development can be achieved simultaneously with tourism activities (Moscardo, 2008). Accordingly, it is understood as an approach in which local communities are involved in the processes to ensure fair and inclusive development in terms of tourism activities, where tourism activities are controlled and managed by the community, and where community support is sought during the implementation of these activities (Dodds et al., 2018). At the same time, the community-based tourism approach is grounded in the protection of the natural and cultural resources required for the sustainability and development of tourism activities (Rocharungsat, 2008). According to the community-based tourism framework, local communities are regarded as stakeholders in ensuring the continuation of tourism activities (Johnson, 2010). Accordingly, during tourism activities implemented under the community-based tourism framework, local communities can engage directly with tourists, provide cultural exchanges to help visitors gain new experiences, and simultaneously derive economic benefits (Saayman &

Giampiccoli, 2016). From this perspective, the community-based tourism approach demonstrates that control over the planning and implementation of tourism activities can remain in the hands of the local community (Butler, 2008). Thus, the local community can shape the way tourism activities are carried out in accordance with their own cultural values (Lee et al., 2010). Furthermore, through the community-based tourism approach, the dominant structure of large investors and tour operators in the management of the tourism sector can also change (Matengu, 2001). Local communities can share in tourism revenues and, by participating directly in tourism activities, attain the status of stakeholders within the sector (Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012). The primary objective of the community-based tourism approach is to ensure community participation in tourism activities (Burgos & Mertens, 2017). This allows for a more equitable distribution of tourism revenues, actively involves local communities in the areas where tourism activities take place, and supports their role as decision-makers (Suansri, 2003: 15). At the same time, the community-based tourism approach is considered a sustainable alternative to mass tourism because it involves the local community interacting with tourists during tourism activities, ensures that these activities are conducted in a manner consistent with the needs and desires of the local community, and involves the local community in the planning stages (Shahmirzadi, 2012). Thus, it is also possible to describe this approach as a form of tourism expected to address the inequalities caused by mass tourism, as well as negative situations such as visitors' lack of contact with the local community due to remaining within all-inclusive systems and the invisibility of the local community and its culture (Dodds et al., 2018). It is also observed that community-based tourism is viewed as a field where projects supported by local governments and institutions are implemented, alongside the protection of natural resources, the shaping of tourism activities in accordance with the local community's identity, and ensuring the active participation of the local population in tourism activities (Eom & Han, 2019: 956). Accordingly, in addition to these core objectives, public institutions can offer supportive projects to local communities that include traditional handicrafts, local cultural values, and products related to gastronomy and folklore (López-Guzmán et al., 2011).

### **The Relationship Between Local Governments and a Community-Based Approach to Tourism**

Local governments are defined as public legal entities established to meet the common needs of the local community by organizing at the provincial, municipal, or village level, with general decision-making bodies elected by the residents of the relevant locality (TDK, 2025). Pursuant to Article 127 of the Constitution, local governments are defined as “public legal entities established to meet the common local needs of the people of a province, municipality, or village, whose founding principles are specified by law, and whose decision-making bodies are formed through elections by voters, as provided by law” (Turkish Republic 1982 Constitution/Art. 127). As a requirement of the principle of decentralization, these administrations operate independently of the central government but within a legal framework, aiming to provide local services in an effective and democratic manner (Manoharan & Ingrams, 2018). The primary objective of local governments is to meet all collective and individual needs in order to improve the living standards of all living beings, particularly humans (Varcan, 2013). The reasons for the existence of local governments can be explained under three headings: political, administrative, and social reasons. Political reasons arise from the need for political organizations, formed to pursue specific goals, to establish autonomous administrative structures in order to preserve and sustain their unique values (Saner et al., 2012). Administrative reasons aim to ensure the effective delivery of public services, the most efficient use of available resources, and the appropriate determination of the scope and boundaries of services (Yılmaz & Telsaç, 2021). Social reasons: The aim is to ensure that people living in areas under the control of local governments can participate in planning and service delivery processes with equal rights, to ensure democratic participation, and to enable them to benefit effectively from these services. (Keleş, 2014). It can also be argued that there are objectives such as bringing opportunities arising in areas with high economic capacity and intense commercial activity to the local population, ensuring that capacity increases based on industrialization and production are reflected in the local population, or ensuring the local population's participation in development processes (Yılmaz & Efsan, 2019: 348).

At this point, it is evident that local governments require planning processes based on community participation to sustain their operations effectively and achieve their objectives. Within the framework of a community-based tourism approach, local governments not only provide individual support to local residents but also contribute to the establishment and support of various civil society organizations (Özer & Önen, 2017). When examining the reasons why local governments support economic development or production-based structures such as cooperatives, associations, and city councils that can be established by the public, objectives such as generating economic revenue at the regional level, reducing unemployment and poverty rates, and establishing partnerships are identified (Sakınç & Bursalıoğlu, 2014). Ensuring economic growth at the local level, utilizing available regional resources, and conducting management and operational collaborations within a framework of shared objectives necessitates effective cooperation (Çetin, 2007). For this reason, local governments can support the establishment of cooperatives which function as profit-oriented, production-based businesses or the strengthening of existing cooperatives in the development of shared values and resources (Özden & Olgun, 2017). At this point, local governments can undertake initiatives such as developing the capacity and capabilities of cooperatives, providing guidance on planning and projects to be implemented, enhancing the capacity and quality of the workforce, and developing planned activities based on an analysis of the region's situation (Zengin et al., 2014, p. 107). Cooperatives, associations, and organizations supported by local governments are among the key components of a community-based tourism approach (Hussain, 2014). In particular, gastronomy-based cooperatives can contribute to the sustainable development of local gastronomy initiatives (Diguid et al., 2015). Local gastronomy products can be transformed into a tourist attraction by involving them in production, marketing, and promotion processes through cooperatives supported by local governments and based on the local community's knowledge, skills, and cultural heritage (Marescotti, 2003). In this process, the guidance, training, and planning support provided by municipalities contribute to strengthening the capacities of local gastronomy producers and help establish a link between local development and tourism activities (Zengin et al., 2014). The community-based tourism approach is grounded in the principle that local residents participate in tourism activities not merely as consumers or labor, but also as decision-makers and producers (Eagles et al., 2002). In this context, gastronomy-focused cooperatives supported by local governments can facilitate both the increase in local employment and the preservation of the region's unique culinary culture while transforming it into economic value through tourism (Vajirakachorn, 2011). Thus, it is believed that gastronomy-based planning and initiatives carried out by municipalities through cooperatives can serve as concrete examples of a community-based tourism approach.

### **Local Governments and Gastronomy Activities in the Context of Community-Based Tourism**

Local governments can plan various gastronomy events with the aim of ensuring the sustainability of gastronomy activities and transforming them into economic value at the local level, within the framework of a community-based tourism approach (Arslan, 2022). Examples of such events include gastronomy festivals, gastronomy fairs, tasting events, markets for local gastronomy products, gastronomy courses, gastronomy workshops, and gastronomy-themed symposia (Cömert and Çetin, 2017). Through these events, local governments can promote and brand regional gastronomic values (Robertson & Wardrop, 2014). Furthermore, such events contribute both to increasing visitor numbers and to transforming local products into economic value (Kivela and Crofts, 2006). In this way, local communities can actively participate in gastronomy-related activities and generate income (Bottyán, 2015). This, in turn, enables the local community to benefit from the income generated through gastronomy (Ulusoy & Tekdere, 2019). When the local community participates in community-based tourism activities either individually or through organizations such as cooperatives the region's unique gastronomic values can be showcased (Pololikashvili, 2019). The community-based tourism approach positions the local community not only as implementers but also as guides and decision-makers in gastronomy events (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2015). By actively involving the local community in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes, it ensures that the content

of gastronomy events is shaped in accordance with locally distinctive values (Kukoyi et al., 2024). Thus, gastronomy activities transform into sustainable practices designed to align with local needs, expectations, and cultural identity (Gartaula et al., 2020). This approach supports a community-based tourism philosophy by both preserving the uniqueness of gastronomic products and ensuring that the resulting economic and social benefits are shared among the local community (Sosa et al., 2021).

## **Literature Review**

An examination of studies on the community-based tourism approach reveals that, according to Russell (2000), this approach is characterized by criteria such as securing the support of the local community, preserving the local community's cultural identity and natural resources, and ensuring the active participation of the local community in tourism-related activities. The same study also emphasizes that community-based tourism can support economic and social development and ensure the preservation of regional culture. In their work examining the fundamental benefits of community-based tourism, Manyara and Jones (2007) state that this approach provides direct income for local communities, offers opportunities for socioeconomic improvement, and contributes to the sustainability of regional lifestyles. López-Guzmán et al. (2011) highlight that community-based tourism has gained global significance due to its ability to offer opportunities for interaction with local communities, introduce authentic culture to tourists, and encourage the emergence of diverse experiences. In their study, Bulut et al. (2016) note that in activities conducted under the community-based tourism framework, the participation of local residents and the preservation of cultural values have become increasingly important. Additionally, according to this study, supporting local initiatives is essential for strengthening destination marketing, transforming local products into added value, and increasing tourism revenues at the regional level. In their study, Saayman and Giampiccoli (2016) emphasize the need for a development approach based on community-based tourism principles and practices, aimed at ensuring a more equitable distribution of income in the tourism sector and prioritizing the participation of local communities. In their study, Han et al. (2019) state that a community-based tourism approach can enhance a community's economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits by increasing income levels, creating quality employment opportunities, revitalizing the local community's traditional values, supporting social empowerment, and contributing to the protection of the natural environment. When examining studies on the contribution of local governments to gastronomy activities within the framework of community-based tourism, according to the research presented by Ruiz-Ballesteros (2022), the establishment of collective initiatives involving local residents, public institutions, and investors is of great importance for the effective implementation of the community-based tourism approach. In their study, Lorio and Corsale (2013) emphasize the government's regulatory and facilitative role in gastronomy and general tourism activities within the framework of community-based tourism, its contribution to providing infrastructure, and its support for the active participation of local communities through collaboration with the private sector and universities. In the research conducted by Pramanik and Rahmanita (2023), the importance of public investment and support for the development of tourism and for local communities to derive economic, sociocultural, and environmental benefits from tourism activities is highlighted. In Sayın's (2023) study, it is emphasized that the active participation of the local community in planning, management, and decision-making processes can be facilitated through a community-based tourism approach to ensure the implementation of tourism activities. Additionally, the study found that local governments play a crucial role in sustaining community-based tourism activities due to their proximity to the local community and their functional responsibilities.

## **Method**

The aim of this study is to examine the contribution of municipalities, specifically within the framework of a community-based tourism approach, to local gastronomy initiatives. This study is qualitative in nature. In line with the study's objective, the interview technique one of the qualitative research methods was used as a data collection tool. The interview technique is considered an

important method for understanding individuals' experiences, attitudes, and behaviors regarding the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Data obtained through the interview method can provide in-depth and detailed information on the research topic (Gotham, 2011). The findings obtained within the scope of the research were examined and interpreted using the descriptive analysis method. The primary reason for choosing descriptive analysis, which is among qualitative data analysis methods, is that it allows for the systematic processing and evaluation of data and the information related to them (Karataş, 2015). In this regard, descriptive analysis makes it possible to present data obtained through observation and interviews in an organized and understandable manner (Başkale, 2016). The study population consists of managers, unit supervisors, and event field support coordinators from the Directorate of Culture, Arts, and Social Affairs at the Kütahya Municipality who organize gastronomy-based events; the president and members of the women's cooperative supported by the Kütahya Municipality; and sector stakeholders participating in gastronomy events. Within this framework, the study population includes municipal officials working in the fields of gastronomy, culture, tourism, and rural development at Kütahya Municipality, as well as entrepreneurs active in the local gastronomy sector and representatives of cooperatives operating in the gastronomy field. Since the responses to the questions used in the study began to repeat, it was concluded that the saturation point had been reached, and the study was terminated after 12 participants. Accordingly, five questions were evaluated within the scope of the study in line with its objective. Three of the research questions used in this study were adapted from Kılıç (2006)'s work titled "An Application for Evaluating Municipalities' Tourism-Related Activities." These questions were directed at municipal officials of Kütahya Municipality working in the fields of gastronomy, culture, tourism, and rural development. The questions formulated to understand the perspectives of municipal officials regarding the development of gastronomy activities within the framework of a community-based tourism approach are as follows: Have efforts been made to promote and market the region in terms of gastronomy through collaboration with tourism stakeholders? Have scientific and cultural events such as panels, conferences, and seminars been organized within the scope of gastronomy tourism? Have joint events with civil society organizations and stakeholders been supported to develop gastronomy tourism? Two of the questions used in the research were adapted from Akyıldız (2012), "Municipal Services and Citizen Satisfaction: The Case of Uşak Municipality." These questions were directed at entrepreneurs and cooperative representatives active in the local gastronomy sector. The questions obtained to identify the activities offered by entrepreneurs and cooperative representatives active in the gastronomy sector within the framework of community-based tourism are as follows: How do you evaluate the support provided by local administrations (the municipality) for local gastronomy activities? What are your views on the extent to which the municipality's practices regarding local gastronomy initiatives support community participation and local development? The data used in the study was collected through interviews conducted between January 10 and 15, 2026. The responses to the questions posed to participants during the interviews were recorded electronically. These recordings were later reviewed and transcribed into written text in a structured and systematic manner. The research aimed to highlight the contribution of municipalities, specifically within the framework of a community-based tourism approach, to local gastronomy initiatives. It is anticipated that the data obtained will serve as a guide for municipalities and other public institutions in planning, directing, and developing gastronomy activities from a tourism-based perspective. Additionally, the study's findings are expected to contribute to the sustainable evaluation of local gastronomy potential and the strengthening of community-based tourism practices.

## **Findings**

In this study, which examines the contribution of municipalities to local gastronomy initiatives through a community-based tourism approach, using the example of the Municipality of Kütahya, the demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Age	Educational Background	Status	Interview Duration
P1	56	Master's Degree	Institution Director	18 min
P2	48	Master's Degree	Assistant Director	15 min
P3	35	Doctorate	Gastronomy Unit Manager	16 min
P4	32	Master's Degree	Event Coordinator	15 min
P5	32	Bachelor's Degree	Event Field Supervisor	19 min
P6	58	Bachelor's Degree	Cooperative Founding President	16 min
P7	55	Bachelor's Degree	Cooperative Founding President	17 min
P8	44	Associate Degree	Cooperative Founding Vice President	18 min
P9	42	Primary Education	Cooperative Member	21 min
P10	48	Primary Education	Cooperative Member	22 min
P11	51	Primary Education	Food and Beverage Business Owner	15 min
P12	62	Primary Education	Food and Beverage Business Owner	19 min

An examination of Table 1 reveals that the participants are distributed across the 32–62 age range. An examination of the participants' educational backgrounds shows that 4 have a primary school education, 1 has an associate's degree, 3 have a bachelor's degree, 3 have a master's degree, and 1 has a doctoral degree. An examination of the participants' statuses reveals that 5 of them hold managerial, supervisory, or coordinating roles within their organizations, while 4 serve as founding or regular members within cooperatives. Additionally, 2 participants are business owners in the food and beverage sector, which is among the industry stakeholders. The responses provided during the interviews conducted as part of this study are as follows:

Has the municipality collaborated with tourism stakeholders to carry out initiatives aimed at promoting and marketing the region's culinary offerings?

*P1: Our municipality considers collaboration with tourism stakeholders to be a strategic priority for the promotion and marketing of the region's culinary heritage. In this context, coordinated efforts have been carried out through the Gastronomy Unit established within the Municipality's Department of Culture, Arts, and Social Affairs, involving local restaurant operators, producer cooperatives, civil society organizations, universities, and travel agencies. As part of these efforts, gastronomy festivals aimed at increasing the visibility of local culinary elements have been organized, highlighting geographically indicated products and regional delicacies. Through the "Kütahya Local Delicacies and Handicrafts" project, which lasted six months on Germiyan Street home to historically significant mansions in Kütahya Province promotional, sales, and marketing activities for Kütahya's local gastronomic products and handicrafts were carried out. The participants included in this project were selected from disadvantaged groups specifically, individuals who earn their livelihood by producing local foods and handicrafts. The aim was to support the local economy and local producers.*

*P3: The Kütahya Municipality has supported women's cooperatives and ensured their active participation among stakeholders in the tourism and gastronomy sectors. As part of these efforts, women's cooperatives were encouraged to participate in various projects by providing them with guidance services related to their production processes. Through the projects implemented, contributions were made to cover the equipment and material costs needed by the cooperatives, with the aim of increasing their production capacity.*

*P4: As part of culinary tourism, panels titled "Kütahya's Geographically Indicated Dishes and the Importance of Geographical Indications" and "Kütahya's Geographically Indicated Meat Dishes" were organized; these panels provided information on the protection and promotion of geographically indicated products and their contribution to local development. The organized panels provided an opportunity to address the academic, cultural, and tourist dimensions of Kütahya's gastronomic heritage. Thus, they contributed to strengthening the role of gastronomy in the destination branding process.*

Has the municipality organized any scientific or cultural events such as panels, conferences, seminars, etc. part of its culinary tourism initiatives?

*P1: As part of culinary tourism initiatives, the Directorate of Culture, Arts, and Social Affairs, operating under the Kütahya Municipality, organized two separate panels: the “Kütahya Panel: Culinary Tourism from Tradition to the Future” and the “Phrygian Cuisine: Flavor and Culture in Anatolian Civilizations Panel.” We were invited to and attended both events. As industry professionals, being invited to the municipality’s gastronomy events and gaining new insights there provided us with the opportunity to meet new people, gain new ideas, and learn about gastronomy from different perspectives. We had the chance to meet famous chefs in person at the events.*

*P2: As part of these efforts, training programs were organized to ensure that products produced by women’s cooperatives focused on gastronomy are manufactured under hygienic conditions that meet food safety standards. Throughout this process, our municipality closely monitored key stages such as the development of standardized recipes, the analysis of product ingredients, and the integration of products into the barcode system to support the institutional and commercial sustainability of the cooperatives. Additionally, digital and printed promotional materials were prepared to ensure that the region’s culinary identity is integrated into destination marketing through a holistic approach. On another front, a restaurant named “Gastro Kütahya,” operated under municipal supervision, has opened its doors, serving Kütahya’s traditional dishes prepared in their authentic form. Through this restaurant, the promotion and marketing of Kütahya’s traditional dishes and geographically indicated foods have been facilitated.*

*P3: Yes, as part of this initiative, academics, local producers, representatives from the gastronomy sector, and other relevant stakeholders were invited to share their knowledge and experiences. The aim of these events was to raise awareness of the concept of gastronomic tourism among the local community and to reach diverse target audiences interested in the gastronomy sector.*

Has the municipality supported joint events with civil society organizations and stakeholders aimed at developing culinary tourism?

*P1: All organized culinary events feature culinary-focused associations, cooperatives, and relevant institutions. This helps strengthen collaboration and interaction among local stakeholders and encourages the sharing of knowledge, experience, and best practices. Additionally, products made by women’s cooperatives have been offered for sale at the festivals we organize, thereby enabling their participation in these events.*

*P2: We are sending invitations to businesses and associations in the sector with the aim of fostering collaboration, ensuring faster coordination, and increasing participation in events organized to revitalize culinary tourism. By diversifying participation, the products featured and activities held at promotional events can become more appealing.*

*P4: Transportation and lodging were provided to women’s cooperatives operating in the gastronomy sector and supported by our municipality, enabling their participation in events held in neighboring provinces. In this way, the municipality’s participation in various events was facilitated through these cooperatives.*

When the responses to the question “How do you evaluate the support provided by local governments (municipalities) for local culinary activities?” are examined;

*P6: As a cooperative, we are able to produce goods, but we really need festivals and events to reach more consumers. The crowds at events like festivals allow many people to notice us at the same time. This becomes a motivating factor for us. It increases our desire to research more and more diverse products. Additionally, we make more sales at these events than we do during regular times, which helps strengthen us economically.*

*P8: The culinary events organized by the municipality are yielding positive results for us. When participants in these events shop with us, we also have the opportunity to explain and promote our products. This helps generate more demand, leads to new partnerships, and, since there are requests for different products, allows us to come up with new ideas.*

*P10: Gastronomy events actually provide us with an opportunity to learn and share. Thanks to these events organized by the municipality, we not only get a close look at what other producers are doing, but we also gain new ideas that will help us expand our product range.*

What are your views on the extent to which the municipality's initiatives supporting local gastronomy promote community participation and local development?

*P9: I believe that local culinary initiatives contribute not only to economic development but also to social development. Recently, all the initiatives in the field of gastronomy have been attracting significant interest among the local community. I have observed people coming from different regions to participate in these events. These gatherings foster an environment of interaction and cultural exchange between the local community and participants from other areas. Additionally, by introducing local products and traditional culinary culture to a wider audience, interest in the local products we produce is growing, which in turn is boosting our sales.*

*P11: I believe that the gastronomy-focused initiatives carried out by the municipality have helped cooperatives and entrepreneurs gain greater recognition and visibility. As a result, local products are highlighted, sales are generated, and communication is established between producers and consumers.*

*P12: I believe that the culinary events organized provide local residents with the opportunity to discover and embrace their own cultural values. These activities, which take place with the participation of local residents, both strengthen social interaction and create a sustainable framework that supports local development.*

## **Results, Discussion, and Recommendations**

In this study, which examines the contribution of municipalities to local gastronomy initiatives within the framework of a community-based tourism approach, using the example of the Municipality of Kütahya, it is observed that activities are not merely addressed through a promotion- or event-focused approach, but rather a holistic approach is adopted in which the local population is involved in the process as producers, decision-makers, and implementers. Accordingly, the gastronomy festivals, panels, informational activities regarding geographically indicated products, and support for women's cooperatives included in Kütahya Municipality's activities align with the fundamental principles of community-based tourism: participation, support for local production, preservation of cultural values, and equitable distribution of income. This situation confirms the literature's emphasis on the role of community-based tourism practices in supporting local development (Manyara and Jones, 2007). The findings also reveal that the promotion and marketing of local culinary products have been strengthened thanks to the partnerships the municipality has established with tourism stakeholders. Initiatives such as the "Kütahya Local Delicacies and Handicrafts" project held on Germiyan Street and the Gastro Kütahya restaurant have made it possible to bring local gastronomic values together with visitors through tangible venues. Such initiatives align with the role of gastronomy in destination branding, as emphasized by López-Guzmán et al. (2011) and Hall and Mitchell (2000). Additionally, the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in these processes strengthens the social justice and inclusivity dimensions of community-based tourism. An analysis of the views gathered during the research indicates that the municipality's organization of gastronomy-based scientific and cultural events has increased local residents' awareness of gastronomy tourism. Addressing topics such as the importance of geographically indicated products, the preservation of gastronomic heritage, and contributions to local development through gastronomy-based panels and seminars enables the evaluation of gastronomy activities not only within an economic framework but also within cultural and academic contexts. This finding aligns with the views expressed by Pramanik

and Rahmanita (2023) regarding the role of public institutions in knowledge production and facilitation. An analysis of the views of cooperative representatives and local entrepreneurs reveals that the support provided by the municipality increases the visibility of local gastronomy initiatives, strengthens producers' motivation, and generates economic benefits. Establishing direct interaction between producers and consumers through festivals and events supports the interaction between local residents and tourists envisioned by community-based tourism and helps make gastronomy activities sustainable. This situation supports the view, emphasized by Bulut et al. (2016) and Digid et al. (2015), that economic and social development can be achieved through the support of local initiatives.

According to the findings of this study, it is evident that Kütahya Municipality has assumed a significant supportive and guiding role in local gastronomy initiatives in line with a community-based tourism approach. It is clear that the municipality views its gastronomy activities not merely as promotional events, but as part of broader objectives related to local development, the preservation of cultural heritage, and social participation. This approach enables the evaluation of local gastronomic elements within the framework of sustainable tourism policies. The gastronomy festivals, thematic events, and promotional activities organized by Kütahya Municipality contribute to local promotion by increasing the visibility of regional flavors. Through these events, local gastronomy products are transformed into economically valuable tourist products, and gastronomy becomes a strategic element in strengthening the city's tourism identity. It has been determined that the support provided by the municipality to women's cooperatives contributes to the economic empowerment and increased visibility of local producers by improving production processes, enhancing product standards, and expanding access to marketing channels. Furthermore, it has been observed that gastronomy-based events encourage the local community's active participation in tourism activities and create an environment for direct interaction between producers and consumers. This situation not only enables the local community to benefit directly from tourism revenues but also enhances social interaction and cultural exchange. The fact that the local community participates in this process not only as labor but also as producers and stakeholders ensures that they assume a decisive role in gastronomy activities within the framework of community-based tourism. It was concluded that the panels, conferences, and informational meetings organized as part of the research have increased the local community's knowledge and awareness regarding gastronomic tourism. It is believed that these events, which focus particularly on the importance of geographically indicated products, the preservation of gastronomic heritage, and its relationship with local development, contribute to the academic and sectoral development of gastronomy. Additionally, the support provided by the municipality to local gastronomy entrepreneurs and cooperative representatives has been found to boost motivation, lay the groundwork for new partnerships, and diversify production.

In conclusion, the example of Kütahya Municipality demonstrates that local governments can establish a strong link between local development, cultural preservation, and social interaction by planning gastronomy activities in line with a community-based tourism approach. The research findings indicate that municipalities' development of supportive policies for local gastronomy initiatives serves as an effective tool for implementing sustainable tourism practices. It has been determined that the support provided in this context strengthens local development, contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage, and encourages the active participation of the local community in tourism activities. It is believed that the results obtained serve as a guide for other local governments, particularly municipalities, and will contribute to future studies aimed at evaluating local gastronomic potential.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations have been developed to ensure that the community-based tourism approach can be implemented more effectively and sustainably through local gastronomy activities.

- It is recommended that local residents, cooperatives, and sector stakeholders be more actively involved in the decision-making processes during the planning and implementation of local

gastronomy activities. In this context, it is anticipated that establishing gastronomy-focused working groups within municipalities could strengthen a participatory management approach.

- It is believed that technical and educational support provided in areas such as developing cooperative production infrastructure, product standardization, branding, and marketing could enhance the competitiveness of local initiatives.
- It is recommended that gastronomy-based festivals and events not be limited to specific periods of the year but be supported by events spread throughout the year and diversified with different themes.
- It is recommended that local gastronomy products be addressed in an integrated manner with elements of cultural heritage and that gastronomy activities be planned in conjunction with history, handicrafts, folklore, and local lifestyle practices.

This study examines the contribution of municipalities to local gastronomy initiatives within the framework of a community-based tourism approach, using the example of the Municipality of Kütahya, Republic of Turkey. In future studies, conducting comparative research by examining different cities and municipalities could help identify similarities and differences in local governments' gastronomy-based tourism policies. It is anticipated that such comparative studies will facilitate the identification of best practices and the development of model proposals.

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