

The Role of Geographical Indications in Sustainable Gastronomy Tourism and Regional Development: The Case of Eflani

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Geliş tarihi / Received: 22.02.2025

Kabul tarihi / Accepted: 01.05.2025

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the local cuisine culture of Eflani district of Karabük province and to identify potential products that can receive geographical indication registration. Qualitative method was adopted in the research; semi-structured interviews, menu analysis, literature review and participant observation techniques were used in the data collection process. In-depth information about the gastronomic heritage and traditional dishes of the region was obtained through interviews with local people, restaurant operators and chefs. While the menu analysis revealed the extent to which local flavors are represented in restaurant menus, the literature review was conducted to evaluate the place of Eflani cuisine in the context of geographical indication and sustainable gastronomy tourism. Local festivals and gastronomy events were analyzed through participant observation. The findings show that Eflani cuisine has rich and diverse traditional dishes; however, this cultural accumulation is reflected in restaurant menus in a limited way and its integration into gastronomy tourism remains weak. In addition, it has been determined that some local products are eligible for GI registration; however, there are structural deficiencies at the local level in terms of awareness, promotion and commercialization of this potential.

Keywords: *Geographical indication, local cuisine, sustainable tourism, gastronomy tourism*

Coğrafi İşaretlerin Sürdürülebilir Gastronomi Turizmi ve Bölgesel Kalkınmadaki Rolü: Eflani Örneği

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Karabük ili Eflani ilçesinin yerel mutfak kültürünü incelemek ve coğrafi işaret tescili alabilecek potansiyel ürünleri belirlemektir. Araştırmada nitel yöntem benimsenmiş; veri toplama sürecinde yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme, menü analizi, literatür taraması ve katılımcı gözlem teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Yerel halk, restoran işletmecileri ve şeflerle yapılan görüşmeler aracılığıyla bölgenin gastronomik mirası ve geleneksel yemekleri hakkında derinlemesine bilgi edinilmiştir. Menü analizi, yerel lezzetlerin restoran menülerinde ne ölçüde temsil edildiğini ortaya koyarken; literatür taraması, Eflani mutfağının coğrafi işaret ve sürdürülebilir gastronomi turizmi bağlamındaki yerini değerlendirmek amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yerel festivaller ve gastronomi etkinlikleri ise katılımcı gözlem yoluyla incelenmiştir. Bulgular, Eflani mutfağının zengin ve çeşitlilik gösteren geleneksel yemeklere sahip olduğunu; ancak bu kültürel birikimin restoran menülerine sınırlı şekilde yansıdığını ve gastronomi turizmine entegrasyonunun zayıf kaldığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca, bazı yöresel ürünlerin coğrafi işaret tesciline uygun nitelik taşıdığı; ancak bu potansiyelin farkındalığı, tanıtımı ve ticarileştirilmesi konusunda yerel düzeyde yapısal eksiklikler bulunduğu belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Coğrafi işaret, yerel mutfak, sürdürülebilir turizm, gastronomi turizmi*

Introduction

As globalization and industrial food production are accelerating worldwide, the importance given to healthy and natural nutrition has increased considerably. For this reason, the increasing interest in safe, healthy and sustainable local foods and local dishes is of great importance for the protection of both cultural and gastronomic heritage (Lang et al., 2014). When examining contemporary tourism trends, it is clear that the importance of traditions and cultural values plays an important role in shaping tourist preferences. Travelers are increasingly attracted to destinations that actively preserve and promote local heritage and cultural authenticity. This shift reflects the growing demand for experiences based on unique, place-based traditions as tourists seek to engage with the cultural identity of the regions they visit (Şanlıer et al., 2012). Regional cuisines are those that reflect the cultural characteristics of a particular region and distinguish the identity of that region from others (Long, 2004). One of the most important factors that encourage people to travel is that

they want to get to know and experience the culinary culture of that country (Aslan et al., 2014; Boztoprak et al., 2017). Similarly, Kivela and Crofts (2009) emphasized that local food is a strong motivator for tourists' intention to revisit a destination.

Local food and local products are not only one of the most valuable elements of attraction, but also a tangible reflection of a region's intangible cultural heritage. These dishes reflect both local identity and cultural values, allowing visitors to experience the uniqueness and history of the region. At the same time, it is a reason that affects the travel preference of the region and increases the satisfaction of tourists from their travel experience (Zağralı & Akbaba, 2015). In order to prevent the counterfeiting of local products and to provide economic gains to local producers, geographical indication practices have been introduced and relevant legal regulations have been implemented worldwide, especially in European countries. These practices both ensure the continuity of cultural heritage and support

regional development by protecting the authenticity of local products (Ertan, 2010; Onur & Ceylan, 2023).

Gastronomy tourism has become a significant factor in enhancing the competitive advantage of destinations. Local culinary culture is among the values that must be preserved and developed within the framework of sustainable tourism policies. In particular, geographical indication registration not only increases the recognition of local products, thereby contributing to economic development, but also serves to protect cultural heritage. This study aims to identify products eligible for geographical indication registration by examining the local culinary culture of the Eflani district. Most studies on gastronomy tourism in Turkey focus on major cities or well-known tourist areas; however, research on the culinary cultures of rural regions remains limited. Investigating destinations with strong local gastronomy potential but inadequate promotion, such as Eflani, is crucial for fostering regional development. In this context, the study addresses two primary gaps in the literature: first, the lack of academic research on Eflani's culinary culture, and second, the limited exploration of the relationship between geographical indication processes and local gastronomy tourism. By providing a comprehensive inventory of Eflani's cuisine and revealing the impact of geographical indication registration on regional tourism, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and offer a new perspective.

Conceptual Framework

Geographical indications are signs that establish a link between the geographical origin of a product and its reputation, quality or distinctive characteristics. The environmental factors involved in the production process contribute to the unique qualities of these products, as indicated by the geographical indication. From the perspective of the knowledge and reputation economy, the justification for the protection

of GIs lies in their ability to promote trust and credibility among economic stakeholders. GIs serve as a mechanism that increases transparency and strengthens the reputation of a product or service in the market by providing an accurate account of its origin (Giovannucci et al., 2010). Registration of local products is of great importance in terms of protecting these products and passing them on to future generations. Beyond the protection of products, geographical indication registration is an important element that strengthens the image of the region, increases its recognition and plays an effective role in marketing. Giving geographical indication products the name of the region where they are grown or produced provides an important advantage in the promotion and recognition of these products. Considering the image and recognition of destinations in the tourism sector, utilizing these features of geographically marked products gains even more importance in terms of increasing touristic attraction (Avşar & Eryılmaz, 2022).

Sustainable tourism is an approach that seeks to generate long-term environmental, economic, and socio-cultural benefits through the preservation of natural and cultural resources. Within this framework, such practices not only aim to enhance the well-being of local communities but also ensure that future generations can access and benefit from these resources (Yılmaz et al., 2017). In this context, local and seasonal nutrition plays a vital role in achieving sustainability in gastronomy (Süzer, 2024). Sustainable gastronomy tourism emerges as a key strategy for safeguarding local culinary traditions while contributing to economic development. Geographical indication (GI) registration is a significant component of this process, as it enhances both economic and cultural sustainability by promoting regional food products. In Turkey, the protection and promotion of GI products help support rural development, reduce regional income disparities, and generate

tangible economic gains for local producers (Moschini et al., 2008). However, some destinations, despite having products with geographical indication potential, cannot reach sufficient attraction power in terms of gastronomy tourism due to lack of promotion. This situation is due to consumers' lack of knowledge about geographically indicated products and the inadequacy of producers in marketing these products (Schneider & Ceritoğlu, 2010). Gastronomy stands out as one of the basic elements that increase the touristic attractiveness of a destination. In particular, individuals participating in cultural tourism want to experience the local culinary culture as well as the historical heritage of the region they visit. In this context, placing greater emphasis on local gastronomic elements in promotion and marketing activities is of great importance for sustainable tourism (Işın & Yalçın, 2020; Tanrıkulu & Doğandor, 2021). Turkish cuisine has significant potential for the tourism sector with its rich content and diversity. However, this heritage needs to be preserved sustainably and used effectively in tourism marketing. The promotion of traditional dishes specific to Anatolia is a critical step in terms of keeping the local culinary culture alive and passing it on to future generations (Erdem et al., 2018; Sezgin & Onur, 2017). Recording the national culinary culture enables Turkey to strengthen its gastronomic identity both domestically and abroad and contributes to the protection of cultural heritage. Otherwise, there is a risk that the unique flavors of Turkish cuisine will be appropriated by different countries under different names. This situation shows that local gastronomic values should be protected, promoted correctly and supported by sustainable tourism policies (Tanrıkulu & Doğandor, 2021).

Method

This research was conducted in Eflani district of Karabük province. The main reason for determining Eflani as a research area is that it has a

rich but insufficiently documented gastronomic heritage and that this potential has not been evaluated within the scope of sustainable gastronomy tourism. Despite having a deep-rooted culinary culture and local product diversity, Eflani does not receive the attention it deserves in terms of gastronomy tourism. The district has a structure that preserves its traditional culinary culture and transmits it from generation to generation, and stands out especially with its homemade products, local pastries and natural agricultural products. However, since these culinary values are not integrated with commercial restaurants and the tourism sector, they have limited promotion in terms of gastronomy tourism. Another reason for conducting the research in Eflani is that the region has great potential in terms of products that can receive geographical indication registration. Some traditional dishes and agricultural products specific to the district are produced and consumed by the local people, but since they are not officially registered, their potential to create economic and touristic value cannot be fully utilized. This study aims to identify products that can receive geographical indication registration and contribute to sustainable gastronomy tourism by examining the gastronomic values of Eflani through a scientific approach. Thus, the study seeks to support the economic development of the local population and to make Eflani a center of attraction in terms of gastronomy tourism. The data collection process of the research was carried out between June-November 2024.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Social and Human Sciences Research at Karabük University with the decision number 2024/09(11,12) dated 15.11.2024. Research and publication ethics were strictly followed throughout the study.

Data collection process and participant selection

In the study, restaurants operating in Eflani were determined using the purposive sampling meth-

od. This method was preferred because the aim was to select restaurants that best represent the local culinary culture of the region. Purposive sampling enabled the researchers to intentionally include businesses that are known for their traditional food practices, use of local ingredients, and long-standing presence in the community, thus providing in-depth and contextually rich data suitable for the research objectives. Three basic criteria were taken into consideration in the selection of restaurants: (i) The duration of the business and its recognition among the local people; businesses that have been operating for at least five years and are widely known for their traditional flavors were prioritized. Among the seven restaurants included in the study, the duration of operation ranged from 7 to 22 years, indicating strong local roots and a deep connection to the region's culinary traditions. (ii) Suitability for menu analysis; businesses with printed or digital menus were preferred, and the systematic conduct of the data collection process was ensured. (iii) Use of local dishes and products; the extent to which restaurants included flavors specific to Eflani in their menus was investigated. However, since there is no restaurant with a tourism operation certificate in Eflani, this criterion was not taken into consideration in the selection process. The aim of the study is to analyze the reflections of the gastronomic heritage in the region in commercial kitchens. In this context, seven restaurants that included local dishes in their menus were included in the study. In addition, 27 local participants (7 restaurant operators, 5 farmers, 8 housewives and 7 tradesmen) who were knowledgeable about local culinary culture and products with geographical indication potential were identified and semi-structured interviews were conducted during the data collection process. The participant groups were selected purposively to represent different dimensions of Eflani's local food culture. Restaurant operators were included due to their role in preparing and offering local dishes in com-

mercial settings. Farmers were selected as they produce the raw materials used in traditional cuisine. Housewives were included as they play a central role in the transmission of culinary knowledge across generations. Tradesmen were involved as they reflect local consumption habits and maintain close interaction with both producers and consumers in the district. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed with the consent of the participants.

This method allowed for a comprehensive assessment of Eflani culinary culture and its examination in terms of sustainable gastronomy tourism.

Data were obtained from three main sources:

Interviews with local residents and operators: Qualitative interviews were conducted with local chefs and community representatives who also operate as restaurant owners to explore local gastronomic knowledge in depth.

Examination of local restaurant menus: The menu contents of the restaurants operating in the region were analyzed and the presence of local gastronomic products and dishes was determined. In the analysis of restaurant menus, a systematic categorization was applied to identify and classify local gastronomic elements. The dishes were grouped under five main categories: starters and side dishes, soups, main dishes, desserts, and drinks. This classification enabled a structured comparison of menu content across different establishments. Each item on the menu was examined based on its ingredients, preparation method, and local recognition. Dishes that utilize traditional ingredients, are prepared using region-specific methods, and are identified by participants as part of Eflani's culinary heritage were coded as local dishes. This systematic approach ensured consistency and depth in evaluating the extent to which local culinary culture is represented in commercial menus.

Observation and document analysis: Local dishes served at local festivals and events were examined; at the same time, academic and historical sources on Eflani cuisine were evaluated through a literature review. Participant observation was conducted between June and November 2024 during three major events: the Eflani Turkey Festival, the Eflani Culture and Highland Festivities, and the Local Products Market. Each event was observed for approximately 2–3 hours, resulting in a total of around 9 hours of observation. A participatory approach was adopted, allowing direct interaction with produc-

ers and participants. Observations focused on food preparation, presentation, and consumer engagement, and were documented through field notes and photographs.

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the study are summarized in Table 1. This table includes the characteristics of the participants such as age, gender, occupation, educational status and their contribution to local gastronomy. The profiles of the participants support the capacity of the sample to represent the food culture of Eflani district.

Table 1

Demographic information of the participants

| Participant group | Number | Profession | Age range | Education status | Contribution to local gastronomy |
|----------------------|--------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Restaurant Operators | 7 | Restaurant Owner/Chef | 30-55 | Secondary education and above | Menu content and culinary culture |
| Local Community | 5 | Farmer | 25-65 | Primary school and above | Traditional recipes and history |
| | 8 | Housewife | | | |
| | 7 | Tradesmen | | | |

Reliability and validity of data

This study used a qualitative data collection method, specifically semi-structured interviews. The main characteristic of a qualitative case study is to examine one or more situations in depth. Qualitative data analysis is a process of interpretation and classification in order to make sense of the data and to develop explanations about what is represented in the data set (Çelik et al., 2020). The semi-structured interview form used as a data collection tool in the study was prepared by Yurt and Dinvar by utilizing the questions of their study conducted in 2024 and by examining the relevant literature by the researchers. In qualitative research, it is more appropriate to use the expressions of accuracy, competence and credibility of the results regarding the reliability and validity of the research (Başkale, 2016). Başkale (2016) defined

the triangulation technique as "the comparison of the results of two or more data collection methods (e.g., interviews and observations) or two or more data sources (e.g., individual interviews with different group members)". In this context, data source triangulation technique was used to ensure reliability and validity in the study. In order to ensure reliability and validity, data obtained from interviews, menu analyses, and observations were systematically compared through data source triangulation. The presence of local dishes identified during interviews was cross-checked with restaurant menus and festival observations. Similarly, traditional dishes emphasized by participants were examined for consistency in menu content and their visibility at local gastronomic events. This multi-source comparison allowed for the identification of overlapping patterns and strengthened the cred-

ibility of the findings by validating the data across different contexts. The information given by the participants about Eflani local dishes was compared, and the level of consistency between the data was taken into consideration. In the interview with the participants who had information about Eflani local dishes, a voice recorder was used so that the data would not be lost and would be used later when analyzing the data. The participants were informed that a voice recorder would be used and it was stated that the transcribed formats would be sent to them before the data obtained at the end of the interviews were transferred to the study.

In this way, the participants were prevented from showing shyness, pressure and uneasiness. The audio recordings were then transcribed in a computerized format. By ensuring that the participants examined the interview data, the completeness of the data, the confidence in the interview outputs and the adequacy of the analysis were transferred to the study as a result of participant approval. In the first part of the interview questions, which were renewed by taking into account the opinions of experts in the field as a result of the literature review, there are 4 descriptive questions to determine the demographic characteristics (name, surname, age, education level, occupation) of the participant managers. In the second part of the interview, in order to obtain general information about Eflani local dishes, the research includes 4 questions directed to 7 business employees operating in the Eflani district of Karabük province and 20 local people who are learned to have knowledge about the local dishes of the district. The questions directed to the participants are given below:

1. Can you share examples of local dishes from Eflani region?
2. What is the culinary culture associated with special days from past to present in Eflani district?

3. How often are local dishes preferred in Eflani?

4. Do you use local products and local dishes of Eflani in the products you cook and offer for sale in your restaurant?

The interview questions were developed based on a review of relevant literature and in consultation with field experts. In the design process, question sets used in previous studies—particularly those by Yurt and Dinvar (2024)—were examined and adapted to the research context. A preliminary draft of the questions was reviewed by two academic experts in the field of gastronomy and tourism. Minor revisions were made based on their feedback to improve clarity and relevance. In this study, a series of measures were taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected through in-depth interviews. The interview protocol was developed in consultation with field experts, ensuring that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the research objectives. To enhance data accuracy, the same questions were rephrased during the interviews and the consistency of participants' responses was observed. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were compared with the original recordings to ensure accuracy. Additionally, care was taken to create a comfortable and neutral interview environment to support participants' freedom of expression, and leading questions were avoided throughout the process.

Data analysis

The data obtained from in-depth interviews were evaluated using thematic analysis method, one of the qualitative data analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this process, first of all, the interview texts were transcribed and read and the product groups, which are the primary themes, were determined and the products were identified. In this study, a qualitative data analysis approach was adopted to categorize and

evaluate the dishes and beverages of Eflani region. In particular, the thematic analysis method was used to systematically examine the tabulated data and identify meaningful themes. In the coding process, an inductive approach was adopted based on open coding. Initially, the interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data. Meaningful segments were then identified and labeled with descriptive codes that emerged directly from the participants' expressions. These codes were not predefined but were developed iteratively throughout the analysis. The codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes that reflected key aspects of local culinary practices and potential geographical indication products. This bottom-up coding strategy allowed for the emergence of data-driven insights without imposing external theoretical constructs. The analysis process consisted of the following stages: First, the dishes and drinks of Eflani cuisine were classified according to the categories in the table: *Starters and Side Dishes, Soups, Main Dishes, Desserts and Beverages*. Each category was grouped to represent different aspects of the local culinary culture. This grouping allowed for easier analysis of the data. The data presented in the table were coded based on their content. For example: Dishes where local ingredients are used extensively (e.g., *stuffed spinach, stuffed black beetroot*) were coded as "use of natural and local ingredients". Local pastries (e.g. *gözleme, bazlama, kaygana*) were categorized as "traditional bakery products". Desserts made on special occasions (e.g. *village baklava, sarığı bursa*) were coded as "celebration and ceremony desserts". During the coding process, the ingredients, preparation methods and consumption contexts of the dishes were taken into consideration.

The menu analysis of local restaurants in Eflani region was carried out using a structured content analysis method to identify the gastronomic potential of the region and to identify

traditional dishes. Within the scope of the research, menus of 7 local restaurants operating in Eflani were obtained. The menus were obtained through written documents, observations during restaurant visits and interviews with restaurant owners. Menu contents were categorized into three main categories: traditional dishes, modern dishes, and hybrid recipes (a combination of traditional and modern cuisine). Traditional dishes were identified based on the use of local ingredients, preparation methods, and being defined as "traditional" by the locals. Menu items were categorized under the headings of pastries, soups, main dishes, desserts and beverages. Within each classification, the names, ingredients and preparation methods of the dishes were analyzed. In the research, the data obtained for the determination of local dishes served at local festivals and events organized in Eflani region were obtained through field observations and short interviews with event participants. Participant observation technique was applied to food presentations at local festivals and events. The researchers made direct observations in the festival areas and identified the types of food served and the local products offered.

Observation and document analysis

Local dishes served at local festivals and events were examined; at the same time, academic and historical sources on Eflani cuisine were evaluated through a literature review. In this study, participant observation was employed between June and November 2024 to assess the representation of local culinary culture at regional festivals and gastronomic events in Eflani. These observations focused on traditional dishes, consumer interest, and culinary practices presented during the events.

The key events where observations were conducted include:

- Eflani Hindi Festival: A major event showcasing the geographical indication-certified "Eflani Hindi Bandırması", highlighting its traditional

preparation methods and cultural significance.

- **Eflani Culture and Highland Festivities:** A broad-scale event featuring folk dances, traditional handicrafts, and local culinary presentations. During observations, data were collected from local producers regarding food preparation, consumer preferences, and presentation styles.
- **Eflani Agricultural and Local Products Market:** A platform where regional agricultural products, potential GI products, and traditional culinary ingredients were displayed and market-

ed. Observation Process and Applied Protocols

- **Observation Sites:** Food stalls, producer markets, and areas designated for culinary presentations were visited.

- **Observed Elements:** Data were collected on food preparation techniques, presentation styles, consumer engagement, and the contribution of these events to gastronomy tourism.

- **Data Recording and Analysis:** Field notes, photographs, and short video recordings were taken, and the obtained data were analyzed using the thematic analysis.

Table 2

Interview data obtained with local chefs, restaurant owners, and local people about eflani district food

| Starters and side dishes | Soups | Main dishes | Desserts | Drinks |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Kaygana (<i>Savory Pancake with Eggs and Flour</i>) | Kara Soup (<i>Dark Flour-Based Soup</i>) | Ispit Dolması (<i>Stuffed Wild Mustard Leaves</i>) | Sarığı Burma (<i>Rolled and Layered Baklava with Walnuts</i>) | Kiren Şerbeti (<i>Cornelian Cherry Sherbet</i>) |
| Tere Yağlı Bazlama (<i>Butter-Coated Traditional Flatbread</i>) | Göcü Soup (<i>Thickened Bulgur Soup with Butter</i>) | Mıhlama (<i>Cornmeal and Cheese Fondue</i>) | Uğut (<i>Traditional Wheat Molasses Dessert</i>) | Karadut Şerbeti (<i>Mulberry Sherbet</i>) |
| Gözleme (<i>Stuffed Flatbread with Cheese, Spinach, or Potatoes</i>) | Uğmaç Soup (<i>Flour-Based Soup with Butter and Milk</i>) | Kara Mancar Dolması (<i>Stuffed Black Cabbage Rolls</i>) | Miyana Halvah (<i>Traditional Halva with Flour and Butter</i>) | |
| Kanlıca Böreği (<i>Pastry with Kanlıca Mushrooms</i>) | Aşure Soup (<i>Noah's Pudding Soup Variation</i>) | Soğan Dolması (<i>Stuffed Onion</i>) | Çullama (<i>Fried Dough Dessert with Syrup</i>) | |
| Kara Lahana Sarması (<i>Stuffed Black Cabbage Rolls</i>) | Keşkek Soup (<i>Slow-Cooked Wheat and Meat Soup</i>) | Çiçek Dolması (<i>Stuffed Zucchini Flowers / Stuffed Squash Blossoms</i>) | Köy Baklavası (<i>Village-Style Baklava with Walnuts</i>) | |
| Çizleme (<i>Thin Crepe-like Pancake</i>) | Tarhana Soup (<i>Fermented Yogurt and Grain Soup</i>) | Mantar Mıhlaması (<i>Mushroom and Egg Scramble</i>) | | |
| Pörüşke (<i>Savory Pastry with Herbs or Cheese</i>) | Mısır Soup (<i>Corn-Based Soup</i>) | Mantar Buğlama (<i>Steamed Mushrooms with Butter and Spices</i>) | | |
| | | Malaka (<i>Traditional Wheat-Based Dish with Yogurt or Butter</i>) | | |
| | | Bandırma (<i>Bread Soaked in Meat Broth with Butter and Spices</i>) | | |
| | | Keşkek Pilavı (<i>Cracked Wheat and Slow-Cooked Meat Pilaf</i>) | | |

Results

In line with the interview data obtained from local chefs, restaurant owners and local people about Eflani district food, it is observed that there is a rich and local cuisine culture (Table 2).

According to the data in Table 2, the menu samples obtained from 7 restaurant businesses in Eflani district were examined and analyzed in detail. The interview data conducted to reveal the local food culture in Eflani district are shown in Table 2. These interviews were conducted with local chefs, restaurant owners and local people and an evaluation was made according to the data obtained from the interviews. The menu analysis of local restaurants

selling local food products in Eflani region is given in Table 3. The fact that local products are not included in the business menus causes the producers in the region not to benefit economically and weakens the local economy. Therefore, tourists coming to Eflani cannot experience the unique cultural and gastronomic richness of the region and this can be a significant loss in terms of tourism and district economy. Not serving local flavors causes the cultural values of the region to be insufficiently promoted. If businesses include more local products in their menus, they will both support the people of the region and provide customers with an authentic experience. The menu analysis of local restaurants selling local food products in Eflani region is given in Table 3.

Table 3

Menu analysis of local restaurants in Eflâni

| Starters and side dishes | Soups | Main dishes | Desserts | Drinks |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| Şehriyeli Pirinç Pilavı (Rice Pilaf with Vermicelli) | Mercimek Soup (Lentil Soup) | Kuru Fasulye (Stewed White Beans) | Sütlaç (Rice Pudding) | Bağlar Gazoz (Bağlar Soda) |
| Bulgur Pilavı (Bulgur Pilaf) | Ezogelin Soup (Ezogelin Lentil Soup) | Nohut Yemeği (Stewed Chickpeas) | Keşkül (Almond Milk Pudding) | Karadut Şerbeti (Mulberry Sherbet) |
| Gözleme (Traditional Stuffed Flatbread) | | Karnıyarık (Stuffed Eggplant with Minced Meat) | Şekerpare (Semolina and Syrup Dessert) | Yayık Ayran (Traditional Churned Buttermilk) |
| Börek (Savory Stuffed Pastry) | | Et Döner (Turkish Meat Döner Kebab) | Baklava (Layered Pastry with Walnuts or Pistachios and Syrup) | Şalgam Juice (Fermented Black Carrot Juice) |
| | | Lahmacun (Thin Turkish Pizza with Minced Meat and Spices) | Tulumba (Fried Syrupy Dough Dessert) | Cola |
| | | Kuru Fasulye (Stewed White Beans) | Fıstıklı Kadayıf (Shredded Dough Dessert with Pistachios) | |
| | | Nohut Yemeği (Stewed Chickpeas) | | |
| | | Karnıyarık (Stuffed Eggplant with Minced Meat) | | |
| | | Et Döner (Turkish Meat Döner Kebab) | | |
| | | Lahmacun (Thin Turkish Pizza with Minced Meat and Spices) | | |
| | | Tavuk Haşlama (Boiled Chicken Stew) | | |

In Table 4, within the scope of the literature review, we focused on the data obtained from existing articles, theses and books about Eflani local dishes, and the information obtained in this context shows an attitude in line with the

content of Table 2. This shows that efforts to understand and evaluate Eflani's traditional culinary culture are supported by the data obtained from academic sources in the literature.

Table 4

Data obtained about Eflani local dishes as a result of literature review (articles, theses, books)

| Starters and side dishes | Soups | Main dishes | Desserts | Drinks |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| Mıhlama (Cornmeal and Cheese Fondue) | Uğmaç Soup (Flour-Based Soup with Butter and Milk) | Malak Yemeği (Traditional Wheat-Based Dish with Yogurt or Butter) | Miyana Helvası (Traditional Halva with Flour and Butter) | Kiren Şerbeti (Cornelian Cherry Sherbet) |
| Gözleme (Stuffed Flatbread with Cheese, Spinach, or Potatoes) | Göcü Soup (Thickened Bulgur Soup with Butter) | Hindi Bandırma (Eflani Style Soaked Turkey Dish) | Sarığı Burma (Rolled and Layered Baklava with Walnuts) | Karadut Şerbeti (Mulberry Sherbet) |
| Pörüşke (Savory Pastry with Herbs or Cheese) | Tarhana Soup (Fermented Yogurt and Grain Soup) | Ispit Dolması (Stuffed Wild Mustard Leaves) | Çullama (Fried Dough Dessert with Syrup) | |
| | Aşure Soup (Noah's Pudding Soup Variation) | Kara Mancar Dolması (Stuffed Black Cabbage Rolls) | Uğut (Traditional Wheat Molasses Dessert) | |

Table 5

Data obtained about Eflâni local dishes at local festivals and events

| Starters and side dishes | Soups | Main dishes | Desserts | Drinks |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Kanlıca Mantarlı Börek (Pastry with Kanlıca Mushrooms) | Sütlü Keşkek Soup (Milk-Based Keşkek Soup) | Hindi Bandırma (Eflani Style Soaked Turkey Dish) | Uğut (Traditional Wheat Molasses Dessert) | Kiren Şerbeti (Cornelian Cherry Sherbet) |
| | Uğmaç Soup (Flour-Based Soup with Butter and Milk) | Garuk Mancarı (Wild Beetroot Dish) | Göceli Kabak (Cracked Wheat Pumpkin Dish) | |
| | | Kara Mancar Dolması (Stuffed Black Cabbage Rolls) | Göceli Elmalı Hoşaf (Cracked Wheat and Apple Compote) | |
| | | | Miyana Helvası (Traditional Halva with Flour and Butter) | |
| | | | Kabak Tatlısı (Pumpkin Dessert) | |
| | | | Sarığı Burma (Rolled and Layered Baklava with Walnuts) | |

Table 5 shows the data obtained about Eflani local dishes at local festivals and events. Table 5 shows that the dishes exhibited in local festivals and events are compatible with the “dishes mentioned in the literature” and “products sold in local businesses”. This situation represents the richness and diversity of the district cuisine. In addition, the overlap of the dishes mentioned in the literature with the dishes presented in the flavor festivals shows that the traditional flavors of the district cuisine play an important role in the events.

According to Table 6, it is observed that the number of registered products with geographical indication and the number of products applying for registration is not at a sufficient level in Eflani. This situation indicates that the rich culinary culture of the district is not sufficiently reflected and more effort should be made to protect and promote local products. The data in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 reveal that Eflani’s registered products with geographical indication and products in registration application are limited to only 1 product.

Table 6

Data on products of the Eflâni district that have received geographical indication registration or are in the process of registration application (Türk Patent, 2018).

| | Starters and side dishes | Soups | Main dishes | Desserts | Drinks | Fruits, vegetables and spices |
|---|--------------------------|-------|---|----------|--------|-------------------------------|
| Proprietary Products | - | - | Eflani Hindi Bandırması (Eflani Style Soaked Turkey Dish) | - | - | - |
| Products in Registration Application | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Table 7 categorizes the common dishes obtained from Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6 and shows the products that can be registered as GIs within the scope of sustainable gastronomy tourism. Under the relevant categories in the table, the dishes that can be applied for GI registration in the light of the information obtained from literatures, interviews, business menus, gastronomy festivals and GI portals are shown.

ries in the table, the dishes that can be applied for GI registration in the light of the information obtained from literatures, interviews, business menus, gastronomy festivals and GI portals are shown.

Table 7

Product data that can receive geographical indication

| Starters and side dishes | Soups | Main dishes | Desserts | Drinks |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Pörüşke (Traditional Pastry with Herbs or Cheese) | Uğmaç Soup (Flour-Based Soup with Butter and Milk) | Ispıt Dolması (Stuffed Wild Mustard Leaves) | Sarığı Burma (Rolled and Layered Baklava with Walnuts) | Kiren Şerbeti (Cornelian Cherry Sherbet) |
| | Göcü Soup (Thickened Bulgur Soup with Butter) | Kara Mancar Dolması (Stuffed Black Cabbage Rolls) | Uğut (Traditional Wheat Molasses Dessert) | |
| | | Garuk Mancarı (Wild Beetroot Dish) | Miyana Halvah (Traditional Halva with Flour and Butter) | |

These findings are consistent with the theoretical framework that emphasizes the role of geographical indications in enhancing regional identity and economic inclusion. Based on this alignment, the following section presents practical recommendations grounded in both empirical evidence and theoretical principles.

Discussion

As a result of the findings obtained from Table 2, it is observed that local products are not included in the menus of the businesses. Hazarhun and Tepeci (2018) stated that the inclusion of food and beverages specific to destinations in businesses increases their accessibility and creates an important attraction factor for them. The values and authenticities that tourists experience in destinations are decisive in their satisfaction and play an active role in their return visits and recommendations to their acquaintances. In addition, in Table 2, no local products are encountered in the menus of the establishments. Raising awareness among the local population about their own culinary richness should be considered a priority. As a result of the study conducted by Serçeoğlu (2014) and Saatçi (2019) to determine the recognition of the culinary culture of the local people, it was revealed that it is necessary to provide training on local foods and local cuisine. Esen (2022) stated that the use of local flavours as tourism products protects the local cultural heritage of countries and promotes them internationally. The findings presented in Table 3 demonstrate that the dishes showcased at flavor festivals align closely with those introduced in the literature, providing a strong representation of the district's culinary identity. This is important for the protection of the district's cultural heritage and for enhancing its touristic attractiveness. In contrast, the findings presented in Table 5 reveal that the number of registered geographical indication products and ongoing registration applications is limited to just one product. It is important to raise awareness of the people of

the region, which is rich in local cuisine and has more potential for geographical indication. Yurt (2024) emphasises that the registered products of Karabük are not sufficiently included in the menus of the enterprises. This finding supports our study.

In the studies conducted by Baycar (2022), Özer Altundağ (2018) and Özmen and Eren (2020) on Karabük region, it was pointed out that the main dishes and starters in the region are rich in diversity. It is thought that these studies will make significant contributions to regional development in the process of protecting and promoting the gastronomic culture of Karabük province. The tables created within the scope of this study will contribute to the literature and serve as a source for future research.

Interests and curiosities such as tasting food specific to a destination, experiencing the growing processes or production stages of local products, and participating in food festivals are among the travel motivations from time to time. Products whose quality is assured with geographical indication and which gain recognition by branding with the name of the region where they are grown are more demanded by consumers (Hazarhun & Tepeci, 2018; Savaşkan & Kingır, 2020). In this context, according to the findings obtained from Table 6, it is seen that the regional cuisine of Eflani destination is rich and diverse. It is important for these dishes and products to be registered with geographical indication registration in order not to be forgotten over time, to be transferred to future generations and to be an attraction factor in both cultural and gastronomy tourism.

Eflani's traditional culinary values are not only an element of cultural heritage, but also a strategic resource that can be used in the economic development of the region. The utilization of local products within the scope of gastronomy tourism can contribute to the economic empowerment of many actors from farmers to

home producers, from artisans to tourism enterprises. In this way, it becomes possible to increase local employment, strengthen producer cooperatives and diversify income in rural areas. On the other hand, cultural transmission is supported through the promotion of traditional dishes, and forgotten recipes are documented and passed on to future generations. Sharing gastronomy-based experiences with tourists increases the visibility of Eflani's cultural identity, which in turn strengthens emotional attachment to the region and destination loyalty. Therefore, gastronomy tourism offers a multidimensional development opportunity for both the economic revitalization and cultural sustainability of Eflani.

The absence of local products in restaurant menus has direct implications for the development of gastronomy tourism in the region. Tourists who seek authentic culinary experiences often expect to encounter traditional dishes as part of their travel, and the limited representation of such items in commercial menus hinders this potential. This gap weakens the connection between the region's culinary heritage and its tourism appeal, reducing the likelihood of repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth. From an economic perspective, the limited integration of traditional products into the foodservice sector restricts income opportunities for local producers. Geographical indication (GI) registration, in this context, plays a strategic role not only in preserving cultural identity but also in creating added value. By enhancing the marketability and perceived authenticity of local products, GIs can contribute to increased demand, price premiums, and rural economic revitalization. Therefore, promoting the inclusion of GI-certified products in restaurant menus is essential for linking culinary heritage with sustainable tourism and regional development outcomes.

Conclusions

This study examined the culinary heritage of Eflani and assessed its potential for geographical indication (GI) registration within the framework of sustainable gastronomy tourism. Although the region has a rich and diverse food culture, its integration into the tourism sector remains limited. The findings reveal a noticeable gap between local food production and its representation in commercial settings, particularly in restaurant and hospitality menus. While traditional dishes and locally sourced ingredients are embedded in daily practices, they are not effectively positioned as tourism assets. From a sustainability standpoint, preserving and promoting local culinary traditions serve as strategic tools for regional development, rural revitalization, and cultural continuity. GI registration offers a valuable mechanism to increase the visibility and market value of local products, supporting income generation for producers and encouraging investment in agriculture and artisanal food production. To achieve this, coordinated policy efforts are required to promote the inclusion of GI-certified products in tourism services, foster producer-business collaborations, and enhance the capacities of local stakeholders. Incorporating Eflani's culinary identity into tourism marketing—through events such as food festivals, tasting routes, and interactive gastronomic experiences—can enhance the region's appeal and visitor retention. Effective collaboration among local governments, tourism organizations, and academic institutions is necessary to develop long-term action plans that align culinary heritage with sustainable tourism objectives. The study thus provides a practical framework for leveraging local food culture as a catalyst for economic resilience and cultural sustainability. The results further underscore the need for integrated strategies that support the recognition and commercialization of traditional foods in rural areas. Encouraging GI certification, improving market

access, facilitating community-based participation, and utilizing digital media and communication tools can collectively strengthen Eflani's gastronomic visibility. When implemented systematically, these approaches have the potential to transform the district's culinary assets into a sustainable engine for regional tourism and development.

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