

Evaluation of Michelin green star restaurants in Türkiye: sustainability and creativity in the case of Neolokal

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Michelin green star,
Refined cuisine,
Sustainable practices,
Creativity restaurants,
Neolokal.

The main purpose of the research is to identify chefs, services, business characteristics and the sustainable, unique and creative elements of Michelin Green Star restaurants in Türkiye. Using an exploratory research model, the data for this study were obtained from multiple sources. Neolokal, a restaurant from Türkiye that was added to the Michelin Green Star list in 2023, was selected as the case study due to the expectation that more information would be available. Texts, visuals, and video appeared between January 15, 2024, and May 11, 2024 on the website of the restaurant were analysed. Based on the information reviewed, the following headings were revealed: Neolokal, Maksut Aşkar, Neolokal's sustainability approach, menu information and wine selection, the working team and guest relations, spatial features, and creative projects. These topics were created considering their frequency in the data and objectives of the study. The findings revealed that Neolokal was unique in terms of its business characteristics, and exemplified the chef's creativity, and stood out for its remarkable sustainable practices. Furthermore, it was anticipated that this study, which examined a Michelin Green Star restaurant, would serve as a guide for stakeholders in the industry.

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1. Introduction


Today, restaurants change the products and services they offer with increasing competition, and the different experiences created by restaurants led to the classification of food and beverage establishments. The Michelin Guide offers the most recognised rating system for restaurant listings, enabling good quality catering to be found. Interest in the Guide is reflected in its approximately 5.5 million subscribers, its Instagram account with nearly three million followers, and an additional 400 million views (Michelin, 2024). The world-renowned Michelin Guide registered 3555 restaurants in the Michelin Star category and 541 restaurants in the Green Star category in 2024 on 3 continents (Michelin Guide, 2024a). This guide took its name from two brothers (André and Édouard Michelin) who produced tyres in France at the beginning of the 20th century, and its starting point was basically to encourage travellers to increase tyre purchases. Initially, the guide prepared by the brothers for travellers included useful information such as tyre-related information, maps, places to have dinner and accommodation locations. Later, this guide, which started to be sold for a fee, added various criteria to the section on restaurants due to increasing interest, and started to reward secret visits, restaurant

inspectors, and various star categories (Michelin Guide, 2024b).

The Michelin Guide rating system consists of a maximum of 3 stars (1 star: "High quality cooking, worth a stop!"; 2 stars: "Excellent cooking, worth a detour!"; 3 stars: "Exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey!") (Michelin Guide, 2019). On the other hand, The Michelin Guide has come to the fore in various categories awards with Bib Gourmand for "Serving high quality food at a reasonable price" since 1955 and Plate Michelin for "Simply a good meal" since 2016; Michelin Green Stars, symbolising sustainability since 2020 (Michelin Guide, 2024c; Michelin, 2021). And they added special awards (Sommelier Award, Service Award, Young Chef Award) for the first time in 2023 (Michelin Guide, 2023a). Michelin star evaluations are based on five main criteria: the quality of the ingredients used by the restaurants, the chefs' mastery of cooking techniques, the personality of the chef, the harmony of flavors and the consistency between the inspectors' visits (Michelin Guide, 2019; Ho, 2021). The Michelin Guide Green Star selection draws attention to waste, food loss and sustainability and it creates an important driving force for sustainable gastronomy.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that about one-third of the food produced in global data is lost or wasted, which

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Table 1. Michelin Starred Restaurants in Türkiye

	Location	Year	Restaurant	Chef	Star	Green Star
1	İstanbul	2023	Türk Fatih Tutak	Fatih Tutak	**	
2	İstanbul	2023	Mikla	Mehmet Gürs	*	
3	İstanbul	2023	Araka	Zeynep Pınar Taşdemir	*	
4	İstanbul	2023	Neolokal	Maksut Aşkar	*	*
5	İstanbul	2023	Nicole	Serkan Aksoy	*	
6	İstanbul	2024	Arkestra	Cenk Debensason	*	
7	İstanbul	2024	Sankai by Nagaya	Yoshizumi Nagaya	*	
8	İstanbul	2024	Circle by Vertical	İbrahim Tunç		*
9	İzmir	2024	OD Urla	Osman Sezener	*	*
10	İzmir	2024	Teruar Urla	Osman Serdaroğlu	*	
11	İzmir	2024	Vino Locale	Ozan ve Seray Kumbasar	*	*
12	İzmir	2024	Hiç Lokanta	Ekin Can Kün		*
13	Bodrum	2024	Kitchen	Osman Sezener	*	
14	Bodrum	2024	Maçakızı	Aret Sahakyan	*	

Source: Created by the researcher with the information on the official website of Michelin Guide

corresponds to approximately 1.3 billion tonnes per year (FAO, 2017). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the need to reduce food loss and waste, and that building sustainable food systems will be possible through change at both international and individual levels (IFCO Systems, 2023).

Michelin Guide has set a green star category in order to encourage environmental protection awareness in the restaurant sector and to be a pioneer and guide in sustainable systems. When determining the green star, attention is paid to issues such as the restaurant's and chef's interest in sustainable gastronomy, its reflection on the customer experience through the products and ingredients used (seasonality, locality, production quality), the combination of the menu, the chef's ability to create awareness in the customer for sustainability in the menu, and the management of business resources (Michelin, 2021; YouTube channel of the Michelin Guide, 2024). Today, 541 restaurants have been awarded the Michelin Green Star, which was first granted in 2020 and is increasing every year.

2. Michelin Starred Restaurants in Türkiye

Anatolian culinary culture has a structure that is both open to change and development and able to preserve its unique basic qualities during thousands of years of development (Üner, 2024). Üner (2024) associated the inclusion of some regions from Türkiye in the Michelin Guide list with the "New Anatolian Cuisine" in his study. He stated that the concept of "New Anatolian Cuisine" was put forward as a manifesto in 2012 and was successfully implemented by innovative and pioneering chefs. The regions included in the Michelin Guide do not always cover entire countries, and sometimes cities can also be considered as a region. The guide included Istanbul as the 38th destination, and 53 restaurants were evaluated in 2022 (Michelin Guide, 2022; Üner, 2024). As a result of this evaluation, 5 restaurants, including 1 two-star, 4 one-star and 1 green star, were included in the list in the 2023 selection. In the 2024 selection, Izmir and Bodrum were included in the guide as regions, and 11 new restaurants, 2 in Bodrum, 3 in Izmir and 2 in Istanbul, were included in the selection with 1 star.

In the 2024 selection, 4 new green stars were awarded. In total, 14 restaurants from Türkiye have been included in the Michelin Guide list. These restaurants are listed in Table 1 (Michelin Guide, 2022, 2023a).

As a result of the Michelin Guide evaluations, 26 restaurants were included in the *Bib Gourmand* and 111 restaurants were included in the recommended list. In 2024, Michelin Guide defined three special awards for the first time, giving the *Sommelier Award* to Seray Kumbasar, the *Service Award* to Tuğra Restaurant team, and finally the *Young Chef* award to Ulaş Durmaz (Michelin Guide, 2024d).

This success at the international level brings many possible advantages and opportunities not only for the restaurants in the guide, but also for the sectoral components in Istanbul and even in Türkiye. These advantages and opportunities are important economically and commercially, and culturally (Üner, 2024). Maksut Aşkar, the chef and owner of the first restaurant in Türkiye to be awarded the Michelin Green Star, stated in a programme that there were no clear criteria for receiving the Michelin Green Star, and therefore it was not possible to predict exactly why they were awarded it. Again, Chef M. Aşkar stated that only by looking at other restaurants that received Michelin Green Star, it was possible to make an idea about the reasons for which they were selected (YouTube channel of Sürdürülebilirimsi Hayat, 2023). It is important to analyse the restaurants that received a green star in terms of their characteristics in order to be a guide for the candidate restaurants. In addition to predict the Michelin Green Star criteria, which is an extremely prestigious award, it is thought that this study will contribute to the literature and sector stakeholders in order to set an example in terms of sustainable and creative practices for restaurants.

3. Methodology

The aim of the study is to evaluate the chefs of Michelin Green Star restaurants in Türkiye in terms of the services they provide, business characteristics, creativity, and sustainability practices. Qualitative research method was used in the study. Using exploratory research model, the data used in the research were obtained from multiple

sources. Five restaurants (Neolokal, Circle by Vertical, OD Urla, Vino Locale, VINO Locale, Hiç Lokanta) in the Michelin Green Star Restaurants list from Türkiye were selected as the study group, and Neolokal was analysed as a case study since it was included in the list in 2023 and more information could be obtained. Texts, visuals and video contents appeared between January 15, 2024 and May 11, 2024 on the website of the restaurant were analysed. Neolokal restaurant, which was selected as the sample business for the case study, was evaluated in terms of chef knowledge, location, cuisine type, unique supply chain, menu information, service and presentation, customer-employee relations, design, decor and atmosphere, as well as creativity and sustainability. The data of the research was generated by typing "Neolokal" in Google search engine and evaluating all the pages that appeared. In the "Neolokal" search, 14 pages and 132 results were found, newspaper news, magazine interviews, online information brochures, as well as 11 YouTube and 4 podcast contents were analysed. Repetitive information was removed from 132 results. Accordingly, the researcher made evaluations under the headings of Neolokal, Maksut Aşkar, Neolokal's sustainability approach, menu information and wine selection, working team and guest relations, spatial features, creative projects. These headings were created considering them frequently in the data and the study objectives.

4. Findings

Within the scope of the research, evaluations about Neolokal Restaurant, which received a Green Star in 2023, were assessed within the framework of business characteristics, creative projects and sustainable practices.

Neolokal and Chef Maksut Aşkar

Neolokal Restaurant received 1 Michelin star and 1 green star in 2023, and in the same year, it received a 4 hat rating (4 Toques) from Gault and Millau, another important authority in restaurant evaluations (Gault & Millau, 2023; Michelin Guide 2023b). It is also ranked 91st among The World's Best 50 Restaurants (The World's 50 Best Restaurants, 2024a). Neolokal is located in Salt Galata, a historic building in Karaköy, Istanbul (Salt Online, 2024). Maksut Aşkar, the chef and co-founder of Neolokal, was born in 1976 in Hatay/İskenderun. After completing his high school and university education in the field of tourism and hotel management, the chef received various trainings in the field of culinary and transitioned from restaurant management to culinary chef. Before establishing Neolokal, he worked as a restaurant manager, restaurant chef and bar manager, as well as a culinary broadcasting and consultant to many important brands (Milliyet, 2023). A pioneer with his innovative initiatives, Chef has given gastronomy trainings in various educational institutions and participated in mixed art exhibitions with his gastronomic works as a flavour designer (Auro İstanbul, 2021). Lastly, the chef was the manager and chef of Sekiz

Istanbul restaurant and founded Neolokal in 2014 (Kısık Ateş, 2022; Auro İstanbul, 2021). The name Neolokal means "new local, the new face of local, and the culinary where our traditions find expression" (Kısık Ateş TV, 2023). The name of the restaurant emerged when the chef decided to use completely local products in his previous restaurant and determined "neolocal cuisine" as the motto of the restaurant. Thus, the neolocal culinary experience offered by the chef in the previous restaurant became the name of the new restaurant (Kısık Ateş TV, 2020; YouTube channel of MSA İstanbul, 2022). Neolokal Restaurant defines itself as a refined and new cuisine that emerges by combining local cuisine with modern techniques and an innovative perspective, and creates menus to remind recipes that are about to disappear (Neolokal, 2024a). On the other hand, in many of his statements, the chef describes the cuisine he created as "mother's cuisine" and frequently mentions that his first culinary teacher and inspiration was his mother and grandmother (Geleceğe Hazırlar Podcast, 2023).

Neolokal's Sustainability Approach

Chef Maksut Aşkar contributes to sustainability by focusing on seasonality and the cycle of the soil in the products he uses to create unforgettable experiences at Neolokal. Moreover, he sees this experience as a way to tell his story about creating a better tomorrow by integrating traditions from the past into today's world and the future (YouTube channel of Michelin Guide, 2023; Michelin Guide, 2023b).

Regarding the sustainable practices applied in Neolokal, Chef M.Aşkar (2023) states that they try not to produce waste and, control the waste by means of several techniques such as composting. He adds that they have a restaurant business ethic which change the perspective on sustainability, such as taking orders in advance and knowing what ingredients to be needed that day, tanning in portions that a person can eat, determining the menu according to seasonality. Moreover, they persist on finding good, clean and fair agricultural producers, and ensuring their value and continuity with the materials used (YouTube channel of Sürdürülebilirimsi Hayat, 2024).

Neolokal, which focuses not only on the sustainability of nature but also on the sustainability of traditions, states that the way to understand traditions is to know the cycle of nature, and for this, it is necessary to be in touch with the soil, to cooperate with local producers, and to learn ancestral methods. M. Aşkar, the chef of Neolokal, states that one of the situations that fuelled the understanding of sustainability was Slow Food's Noah's Ambar Project. Thinking that the idea within the scope of the project could be replicated in Türkiye, the chef took steps to reach those who practice good, clean and fair agriculture and even create incentives (Esmiyor Podcast, 2022; Geleceğe Hazırlar Podcast, 2023).

Neolokal aims not only to sustain traditions but also to ensure that these traditions are accepted in the future, and this can be achieved by sharing the stories of traditional recipes with people. The restaurant takes care to use endangered products and each dish served comes with an explanatory note (Esmiyor Podcast, 2022; Incili Gastronomi Rehberi, 2024). It offers an interpretation of Turkish heritage products in local and global classics, and the ingredients used in the dishes come from a sustainable farm in Gümüşdere, near Istanbul. In addition, the chef of the restaurant believes that his research should be 'open source' and shares his recipes online (The World's 50 Best Restaurants, 2024b; Ayrıl, 2014). In addition, it has a small garden of 12 square metres within the venue area, where approximately 20 different seasonal products are available (Kiraz, 2020).

Neolokal's Menu Information and Wine Selection

When Neolokal's tasting menus are examined, it becomes evident that there are vegetarian tasting menus, gluten-free, lactose-free, nut-free tasting menus in addition to the classic tasting menu (Neolokal, 2024b). On the other hand, the restaurant builds its menu on seasonality and determines which fish can be accessed when the fish season arrives and creates a menu. And it often develops short-term menus in order to use a valuable product even for a short time (Kısık Ateş TV, 2019). In addition, it which stands out with the use of local and organic ingredients from various regions of Türkiye, offers its guests the opportunity to experience traditional tastes and discover innovative flavours (Gault&Millau, 2024).

Neolokal, which sees its menus as a means of communication, welcomes its guests with notes on where and how the products used in the dishes served with the menu come from and with which techniques they are produced (Esmiyor podcast, 2022; Incili Gastronomi Rehberi, 2024), as well as a manifesto explaining their perspective on sustainability in general (Neolokal, 2024a). Neolokal's menu includes more than 200 local wines, half of which are produced from local grape varieties (Michelin Guide, 2023c). M. Aşkar (2022) said in an interview: "*We only serve local wines. Since our intention to preserve tradition is also in wine, we give our guests an 'Anatolian Grapes' booklet describing the grapes grown in Türkiye'*" (Akbiyık, 2022). In addition, Foxy, a wine bar founded by Chef M. Aşkar in partnership with wine expert Levon Bağış, has the status of a wine bar with the most local grape varieties and natural wines in Türkiye. According to the chef's statement, he established the bar in order to preserve wine traditions (YouTube channel of MSA İstanbul, 2022; Öney Tan, 2019; Sak Seyhun, 2019). It is known that the chef acts with the concern of both locality and sustainability with all elements from soil to plate.

Neolokal's Team Members and Guest Relations

Regarding how the kitchen team is selected in Neolokal, Chef M. Aşkar stated that the restaurant team is like a

family and the new employees are selected by the team and the importance of team unity is emphasised (Kısık Ateş TV, 2019). Stating that traditions should be adapted to today's conditions and be sustainable in order to exist in the future (Incili Gastronomi Rehberi, 2024), the chef frequently mentions the importance of being a "good role model" (Okşak, 2022; Akbiyık, 2022; Uzunali, 2023). Chef M.Aşkar, states in an interview that one of the keys to success of the business is the communication with the guests. He emphasizes that "the best customer is the one who complains" and that the customers who do not give feedback are the customers who do not give the business the opportunity to improve itself. He also states that in Neolokal, they work to understand what the guests feel while they are still in the business and communicate with them correctly (Okşak, 2022). In this respect, the data revealed that a meticulous way of communication on guest relations is preferred in the business management approach and the work team was informed about this objective.

Spatial Characteristics of Neolokal

Neolokal is located in Salt Galata, which was built in 1892 in Karaköy, Istanbul and today functions as a cultural and research centre as well as a museum (Salt Online, 2024). Designed by Alexandre Vallauray as the Ottoman Bank, this building was opened to the public in 2011 under the name "Salt Galata" (Kara & İşleyen, 2018). In addition, the sight of the Golden Horn and the Historical Peninsula, one of the important silhouettes of Istanbul, can also be viewed from this place (Salt Online, 2024). While the north facade of Salt Galata, Bankalar Street side, bears the traces of the neoclassical and neo-renaissance period, the south facade, Golden Horn side, was inspired by oriental architecture. These different facades, which make the building unique, are thought to represent east and west like Istanbul (Kara & İşleyen, 2018). It can be said that Neolokal is located at place that combines the modern and tradition, just as if accompanying the philosophy of the restaurant. So much so that the restaurant defines its basic philosophy as "combining local cuisine with modern techniques and an innovative perspective to create a refined cuisine" (Neolokal, 2024a).

The reflection of Neolokal's location, which can be considered as one of its unique features, on the food is expressed as "an appointment on the terrace of an art gallery with plates resembling a work of art" (İlkan, 2019). On the other hand, the music played in the restaurant is chosen in accordance with the theme of locality and is adorned with Turkish songs (Özer, 2021). Moreover, it was determined that the spatial elements of Neolokal were expressed in different ways in the promotion of the restaurant, especially the "cityscape" feature was emphasised:

"In a monumental space, guests of the restaurant can watch the incredible night skyline of the old city through floor-to-ceiling windows" (Istanbul Tour Studio, 2024).

"The restaurant's location in Salt Galata makes your experience even more memorable. The large windows and marvellous terrace offer a spectacular view of Istanbul's rooftops and majestic mosques. The Neolokal is a truly special place" (Michelin Guide, 2023b).

"Similar to the Gallery, which not only serves as a museum but also as conference space, research and library, the restaurant, with a nice view over the old area of Sultanahmet, lives with a minimalist decoration, with iron, warm lights and wood, making the place more cozy. The open kitchen on the inferior floor transports us to a theatre room, where a young team strictly follows the details of a dish under the lively command of a leader. There are those who find peace and quiet in that space as they stay there during the entire service, seated in the audience while they work" (Flavors and Senses, 2015).

"Part of Salt Galata cultural complex, the restaurant also serves up jaw-dropping views of the Golden Horn through its floor-to-ceiling windows" (The World's 50 Best Restaurants, 2024b).

Neolokal's Creative Projects

Given that Neolokal creatively incorporates traditional recipes into its cuisine with an innovative approach, it can be said that it goes through a creative process, both in terms of presentation and recipe development. In an interview with Chef M. Aşkar (Aygaz Dünyası Magazine, 2017), when asked about the sources of inspiration in this process, he classic dishes (Kadınbudu, Sardine, Imam Bayıldı, Hummus and Celery Böreği) were transformed into NFTs and offered for sale with an opening price of 0.5 EHT (approximately \$ 1600). Purchasers had both a kind of digital certificate of these plates and a unique experience by making these plates with M. Aşkar (Gastronomi Magazine, 2021; Food in Life, 2021).

Edible Art Exhibitions and Flavour Artist: In both an interview and a video content, Chef M. Aşkar stated that he was interested in design while studying tourism, and that he also made various designs and drawings. By combining this passion with his work, the chef first took part in group exhibitions and then solo exhibitions. The chef first took part in an exhibition in Luxembourg in 2005 as a flavour artist, and then continued to exhibit the gastronomic products he designed in various group exhibitions and solo exhibitions. In 2011, he held his first pop-up themed solo exhibition in Istanbul Akmerkez. The chef expressed this passion by saying "every plate is also a design element" and continued his creative designs after Neolokal was established. Finally, in 2018, he participated as an artist in an exhibition at La Panacée in Montpellier with the participation of 25 chefs and 20 artists, again questioning flavour (Art Dog Istanbul, 2023; Aura Istanbul, 2023; Hürriyet, 2011).

Original by Nature: Chef M. Aşkar announced this project on the official Instagram account of the establishment: "Inspired by respect for nature, we created a special menu approaching "zero waste" with the theme "Original by

Nature". The roots of our inspiration lie in giving back to nature by protecting what we take from nature without spoiling it" and explained this project with a video content. Basically, the project was to recycle the leftover material used for each plate by using it for another plate. In this way, the restaurant demonstrated that many products can be transformed in a cycle without making more than 90% waste (Instagram of Neolokal, 2020). Not only the prepared products but also the orders of the products came in recyclable and usable packages (Ergen, 2021). Neolokal, which was prepared within the scope of a sustainable project and stood out with the least waste among fine dining restaurants, included celery pastry with 96.5% recycling, bluefish with mussels with 93.56% recycling and frigo, which was completely zero waste. The Original by Nature menu prepared by Maksut Aşkar produced only 2.32% waste (PlumeMag, 2021).

Köken.Ist: This project, which was designed to create a gastronomic network, was also considered as an important information network in terms of branding and communication as it contained information about the owner of the product produced and the product supplier. Chef M. Aşkar expressed this project as follows:

"... We also need to highlight the producers that we can directly supply the product.....Köken-related product can be designed by Neolokal or by another chef. The important thing here is that we want it to be a brand that brings people together. What we want to do is this: let's say you buy a product of Köken. There is a code behind this product. Here, we will share information about the manufacturer of the product and the supplier of the material. We will even open the way of communication with them" (Özkarar, 2021).

Pop-up Events at Neolokal: Neolokal hosts world-renowned chefs in its kitchen with themes such as "live-feel-taste Anatolia", "pop-up dinners", "restaurant age celebrations" and created a menu from the dishes inspired by the guest chefs and provided effective communication both nationally and internationally. The menus created as a result of these events can be experienced through a limited number of tickets sold through online sales points.

A Nature Odyssey: It can be said that this work is an experimental short film of Neolokal. Chef M. Aşkar presented what he wanted to tell in this short film and the food they created on various gastronomy experience platforms (Foodexp Event, 2024). Jacek Szymański, the director of the short film, said: "The world is nothing but a circle. If you look at vegetables and fruits, you will see how many of them are round when they are cut", and he states that circular symbols were frequently used in the short film (Celeg, 2023). On the other hand, he emphasises the creative processes of chefs by saying "Just as my aim is to create a story in the form of a short film, chefs create a story on the plate" (Indie Table Productions, 2023). Celeg (2023) describes the short film as "This experimental short film promises a sensory journey like no other, where art and culinary art intertwine to redefine the boundaries of visual storytelling. And I must say that this promise is more than fulfilled".

Cooking up a Tribute: The Turkish Way Documentary: Joan, Josep, and Jordi Roca, the three brothers who owned the Spanish restaurant El Celler de Can Roca, consistently has ranked among the best restaurants in the world, with three Michelin stars and one Green star, created a documentary exploring Turkish gastronomy. Titled *The Turkish Way*, the documentary emerged from the Roca brothers' gastronomic tour of Türkiye. Directed by Luis González, it premiered at the 65th Berlin Film Festival. The documentary consists of three chapters, each narrated by one of the Roca brothers: Joan Roca explores Istanbul, Izmir, and Tire, tracing Turkish kebabs, vegetables, and spices; Josep Roca discovers Bozcaada in the second chapter; and Jordi Roca visits Southeastern Anatolia in the third chapter. M. Aşkar participated in the documentary and collaborated with the chefs in the Neolokal kitchen. (Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, 2017; Dinçer, 2015; TÜRSAB Magazine, 2017).

5. Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

Within the scope of the research, Neolokal restaurant, which is one of the restaurants that awarded the Michelin Green Star, was analysed in terms of business characteristics, sustainability practices and creative projects through the information in online media. The culinary philosophy of Neolokal should not be considered independent from the personality traits and professional experiences of Chef Maksut Aşkar. As a matter of fact, the rating systems of fine dining restaurants also take into account the chef's point of view (Temizkan & Aktepe, 2023). Related research suggests that chefs sometimes shape the cuisine of a region and create the culinary manifestos of that region (Byrkjeflot et al., 2013; Mangiapane, 2017; Ooi, 2004). On the other hand, the culinary perspective of chefs is at the center of many fields such as advertising, politics, national representation, and tourism promotion (Fusté-Forné, 2020). In their study examining the success factors of international award-winning Turkish chefs, Eren and Güldemir (2017) argued that the philosophical views of the chefs that determine the restaurant concepts lead to success by triggering creativity and innovative perspective. In addition, the perspective of chefs can affect not only the cuisines they create but also the cuisines of the country and even of the world. For this reason, it is important to reveal the personality traits of chefs in both gastronomy studies and restaurant business studies. It can be said that Maksut Aşkar, the chef of Neolokal, is an important chef not only for Neolokal but also for the representation of the cuisine of the country with his culinary experiences, his predisposition to art, his responsibility to protect the local, his sensitivity towards sustainable systems. Moreover, his pursuit of the food in his childhood memory and his efforts to pass it on to the future contributes to widen this representation beyond the time. Most importantly, making his kitchen a school for both himself and his team with a network that manages to

touch other cultures, Chef Maksut Aşkar stands out prominently in this field.

Unique Business Features

When Neolokal was analyzed in terms of its menu, wine selection, guest relations and spatial features, the results revealed that it enriched with many elements unique to the business. Moreover, Neolokal, which has a green star, prefers a sustainable management with all these elements.

Although *the menu* is basically defined as the range of products offered by a food and beverage establishment, its function has expanded today. Today, the menu has become a multifunctional instrument, an essential element of restaurant marketing strategy and perhaps identity (Him & Chark, 2023). On the other hand, it has been well-established that the menu is a communication instrument between the restaurant and the guests. It plays a critical role in the formation of first impressions (Nebioğlu, 2020). Neolokal uses menu cards as a good communication instrument. They express what the main mission of Neolokal cuisine is through menu cards, in other words, they announce their own identity through menu cards. The restaurant, which creates the menu content within the framework of the product that expresses locality and innovation, also shows the theme in the menu of the business. Although some studies (Kim & Lee, 2020; Hou, Yang & Sun, 2017) indicating that physical features of menu cards such as colour, font, and background colour affect consumer perceptions, a very simple menu card is preferred in Neolokal. This can be explained by the fact that Neolokal has an haute cuisine approach and prefers sustainable elements in its menu cards.

In recent years, with the increase in sensitivity towards the environment, differentiation has been observed in restaurant menus. Especially when the promotional videos of the restaurants included in the Michelin Guide Green Star selection are examined, the most prominent themes are *Sojiki Nakahigashi* (shaped on the theme of herbivorous cuisine), *La Villa Pinewood*, (offers innovative plant-based cuisine), *ONA*, (offers only vegan products), *La Fenière*, (offers gluten-free cuisine), *L'Enclume* and *Dan Cox* (has farm-to-table theme), and *Thierry Schwartz*, (offers natural wines) (YouTube channel of the Michelin Guide, 2024). Neolokal was also featured in the promotional videos, with the theme of "*grasping sustainability in a big city*" (YouTube channel of the Michelin Guide, 2023). Neolokal's menu includes gluten-free and vegetarian tasting menus, and the restaurant encourages the use of local products such as Üveyik wheat. Neolokal, is notable for its sustainable menu elements, and is especially distinguished by its exceptional wine selection. Today, not only food but also food accompaniments are gaining importance. Neolokal uses local and natural wines in accordance with the culinary philosophy it wants to put forward. In addition, consumption control can be ensured in the use of materials by taking orders and preparing the foods on the menu before the guests arrive at the restaurant.

Employee and guest relations are undoubtedly among the most important success factors. Eren and Güldemir (2017) determined that the appropriate personnel was a significant factor affecting chefs' success. In their study, Yarış and Arıcı (2023) found that Neolokal Restaurant had positive customer reviews. Moreover, while the food quality ranked first in the frequently repeated themes, and the service theme ranked second. Wilder, Collier and Bernes (2014) state in their study that the ability of employees to adapt to the service offered is a result of the management's function of setting expectations and allocating resources, and that service providers should train their employees on guest relations. In addition, Kang and Hyun (2012), who made an application on luxury restaurants on how guest and employee relationship styles should be, identified effective communication styles for customer-oriented service employees and revealed that five types of communication styles (attentive, friendly, impression leaving, open, and relaxed) had a positive impact on businesses. Considering the Neolokal's relationship with employees, word "family" is often emphasized, the choice of employees is left to the employees. Although they work with highly adaptable staff, the Chef emphasize guest relationship management. Furthermore, Chef stated that they worked for a year to allocate this relationship correctly. In this respect, it is clear that Neolokal attaches importance to employee and guest relations.

The spatial characteristics of restaurants affect the eating and drinking experiences. Wilder et al. (2014) state that customers no longer favour a "one-size-fits-all" service experience. Literature suggests, that spatial features such as atmosphere, décor, design, artwork, lighting, table layout, ambiance, air quality, and music affect eating and drinking experiences (Bitner, 1992; Hansen, Jensen, & Gustafsson, 2005; Katsigris & Thomas, 2005; İşçi, Tüver, & Güzel, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2018; Şahin, Çolakoğlu ve Özdoğan, 2021; Taar, 2014; Yarış & Arıcı, 2023). In terms of spatial characteristics, Neolokal has a special location. The location of the restaurant contributes a lot to its uniqueness and distinctiveness in terms of spatial characteristics. Located on the terrace floor of a historical building Salt Galata, which hosts an art gallery and research institution, the restaurant offers a unique view of Istanbul with its floor-to-ceiling windows. This building at the heart of an intersection of old and new accompanies the mission of the restaurant. In addition, it is also important that the music genre preferred in the establishment also coincides with its theme.

Creative Culinary Experience

The *culinary experience* is unique and special (Vargas-Sanchez & López-Guzmán, 2022). Culinary arts, where aesthetics and performance are presented together, bring along the chefs to display the food they produce in the best way (Ekincek & Günay, 2023). The creation of a new dish is expressed as the most intense moment of existence where aesthetics can emerge (Madeira, Palrão, Mendes, &

Ottenbacher, 2022). The aesthetic form of the dishes produced by chefs enables them to be called culinary artists. Presenza et al. (2017) describe refined cuisine (heute cuisine) chefs as "extraordinary chefs" because they develop new ideas and/or combinations of existing ingredients, apply new processes/techniques and constantly experiment. Horng and Lee (2010) tried to reveal the characteristics of creative chefs by focusing on the personality traits found in culinary artists. According to the study (Horng & Lee, 2010), creative chefs are described as creative, curious, sensitive, passionate, self-confident, open to a wide range of interests, have a great appetite for art, take reasonable risks, achievement-oriented, driven, have a sense of mission, and honourable. According to Madeira, Palrão, Mendes, and Ottenbacher (2022), artists transform the events they observe into an artistic and self-liberating experience. This experience can be defined as an expression of the chefs' private world in which they try to convey an inner feeling through food. Horng and Lin (2009) argue that although measuring and assessing creativity is difficult and subjective, there is a consensus that for a product to be creative, it must be novel and appropriate. Each chef may use different methods in the creation of new and creative recipes. Bouty and Gomez (2013) state that creativity is a specific three-way phenomenon: individual idea work, creative team and naming. In addition, Presenza, Abbate, Casali, and Perano (2017) argue that the participation of the whole team in this creative process under the leadership of the chef is essential (Vargas-Sanchez & López-Guzmán, 2022). Horng, Meng-Lei, and Hu (2008) worked on a model of creativity in the kitchen and argue that, the first stage, new ideas develop through chefs imitating other chefs' creations and then developing their own originality, influenced by many sources of inspiration. Madeira et al. (2022) investigate where chefs' inspiration comes from; in the first stage, inspiration comes from imitating other famous chefs' dishes and current trends in gastronomy, but as it matures, the source of inspiration becomes ambiguous, as it can come from anything the chef does, and from daily life and the environment. Especially in studies on fine dining restaurants, it is determined that the products produced in the kitchen have a strong relationship with aesthetics and art, and that chefs are also referred to as culinary artists. On the other hand, among the studies on the creative process in the kitchen and the creativity of chefs (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2013; Aubke, 2014; Bouty & Gomez, 2013; Byrkjeflot et al, 2013; Capdevila et al., 2015; Ekincek & Günay, 2023; Horng & Lee, 2010; Horng & Lin, 2009b; Madeira, Palrão, Mendes, & Ottenbacher, 2021; Ottenbacher & Harri, 2021; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2008; Özdemir & Özdemir, 2023), there is little focus on chefs' creative projects.

As stated in the existing studies, chefs' personalities and sources of inspiration influence creative presentations, especially in restaurants offering refined cuisine. When the creative projects of Maksut Aşkar, the chef of Neolokal,

are evaluated, it can be said that Aşkar is a "culinary artist" or one of the "extraordinary chefs". Pointing to his family as one of his primary sources of inspiration, the chef's interest and predisposition towards art is reflected in his dishes. It is possible to say that the chef possesses all the qualities that Horng and Lee (2010) identified in their definition of culinary artists. NFT, one of the creative projects of Neolokal, is important for being the first in the world. The association of technological developments with food is evaluated from an innovative point of view and brings Neolokal to a position that keeps it up to date. In general, Michelin Star restaurants use cinema as a means of self-expression, as in the case of Jan Roca-El Somni (Akbulut, 2020). Although Neolokal's short film project "A Nature Odyssey" resembles previous examples, it differs in terms of the originality of what is intended to be told. Again, this expressed in terms of the diversity of sources of inspiration in the formation of creative processes and that the first stage in the creation of aesthetic works is achieved through imitation and differentiation of that imitation with some features specific to the chef (Horng et al., 2008; Madeira et al., 2022). On the other hand, chef Maksut Aşkar, who frequently states that products are designed together with his work team, points to a process that supports studies emphasizing importance of teamwork in creative processes (Bouty & Gomez, 2013; Presenza et al., 2017). In addition, although he states that new recipes and techniques are created within the team, there is no doubt that the chef himself provides a driving and force motivation for this innovation in terms of his personality traits. The art exhibitions in which the chef takes part to showcase his dishes and his thoughts on food take both Neolokal and the chef's relationship with art to a completely different place. This situation, which should be considered as a project that combines the concepts of artist and culinary artist, can be a source for the literature on food as a work of art.

Sustainability Perspectives and Sustainable Practices

Since the mid-2000s, a movement called "New Anatolian Cuisine" emerged in Türkiye thanks to the efforts and work of innovative chefs, and highly successful restaurants practicing this cuisine has started to gain international fame. One of the striking features of the New Anatolian Cuisine is its emphasis on sustainability (Üner, 2024). As a matter of fact, sustainable gastronomy requires an understanding that supports the production of food in a way that respects nature, not wasting resources, developing sustainable methods for the future existence of production and producers, and preserving and transferring food cultures to future generations (Aysen & Sakli, 2023; Onat & Keskin, 2019). Huang et al. (2023) evaluated the sustainable features of Michelin Star restaurants on three dimensions: food procurement (local food, organic food), preparation (energy use, food waste, disposable ingredients) and presentation processes (sustainable menus, community outreach, sustainability success). As a result of the research, the authors argue that Michelin

Green Star Restaurants can be sustainability ambassadors and promoters. Batat (2020) examined the perspectives of Michelin-starred chefs on sustainability and their efforts towards implementation. The study revealed that chefs were influenced by internal (plate, taste and place) and external (planet and people) factors that created sustainable practices.

One of the most important examples in terms of sustainable gastronomy is undoubtedly the Mirazur Restaurant in France, which has 3 Michelin stars and is on the Best of Best list among the best restaurants in the world. The restaurant was the first restaurant in the world to receive a plastic free management system certification. Mirazur has created a sustainable cycle by replacing single-use plastics with compostable alternatives (Interreg Project, 2024; Michelin Guide, 2024e; Plastic Free Certification, 2024; The World's 50 Best Restaurants, 2024c). Aponinente Restaurant in Spain shifted its focus from land to sea farming and stands out not only for its gardens but also for its extraordinary products from the sea (Michelin Guide, 2024f). Chef Ángel León is a renowned "chef of the sea", creating delicious dishes from unknown or overlooked ingredients. Torun (2024), noting that marine plants have a big role to play in tackling the climate crisis, mentions a sea grass called *Zostera Marina* that Chef Ángel León is working on, which is a cross between rice and quinoa and has a significant nutritional value. Discovered in the sea, these crops could perhaps replace staple food sources in the future. Another green-starred restaurant that builds the zero-waste system into every aspect of its restaurant is Silo Restaurant in London, which describes itself as the world's first zero waste restaurant (Michelin Guide, 2024g). The restaurant has also taken part in a project that draws attention to invasive species in a dinner series with famous chefs (Silo London, 2024a). The restaurant adopted a "no bin" philosophy in many aspects such as reused containers, recycled plates, composting practices, use of recycled products in furniture and accessories, and also has an in-house fermentation factory (Silo London, 2024b). When examining examples of Michelin Guide Green Star restaurants around the world, it becomes evident that they prioritize sustainable practices in both their menus and restaurant operations. It can be said that the perspective of restaurants on sustainability is often directly related to the thoughts of their chefs and their outlook on life. When Neolokal's sustainable approach is analysed, it stands out both in terms of focusing on sustainability in its creative projects and adopting a philosophically sustainable system. Neolokal created a menu that draws attention to a special "zero waste" approach with the "Original by Nature" project, which aims to transform the leftover material used for each plate by using it for another plate, producing only 2.32% waste. Neolokal managed to source its product from an organic farming garden and local suppliers in a big city like Istanbul, and also created a small garden inside the restaurant. Neolokal is involved in all kinds of activities and projects to promote good, clean and fair agriculture,

and focuses on the sustainability of traditional dishes through innovation. Many elements such as creating the least waste, ensuring that the waste is returned to the soil, creating awareness about sustainability in the management philosophy by taking orders in advance, paying attention to seasonality in the menus, and striving to preserve local cuisine and transferring the culinary culture to future generations make Neolokal a good example of sustainable understanding.

When the results of the research were analysed, it becomes evident that the Michelin Green Star restaurant has different sustainable practices that prioritize the creativity of the chef and his team as well as its unique business features. The research can provide a guiding perspective for chefs with a refined culinary approach to enter the Michelin Guide Green Star selection, which is a prestigious award. On the other hand, it can benefit industry stakeholders in terms of sustainable and creative practices. For future research, studies with other methods on chefs' creativity, sustainability and unique business characteristics are recommended. In addition, the contribution of restaurants to gastronomic experiences, destination development, and image are suggested for future studies.

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INFO PAGE**Evaluation of Michelin green star restaurants in Türkiye: sustainability and creativity in the case of neolocal****Abstract**

The main purpose of the research is to identify chefs, services, business characteristics and the sustainable, unique and creative elements of Michelin Green Star restaurants in Türkiye. Using an exploratory research model, the data for this study were obtained from multiple sources. Neolokal, a restaurant from Türkiye that was added to the Michelin Green Star list in 2023, was selected as the case study due to the expectation that more information would be available. Texts, visuals, and video appeared between January 15, 2024, and May 11, 2024 on the website of the restaurant were analysed. Based on the information reviewed, the following headings were revealed: Neolokal, Maksut Aşkar, Neolokal's sustainability approach, menu information and wine selection, the working team and guest relations, spatial features, and creative projects. These topics were created considering their frequency in the data and objectives of the study. The findings revealed that Neolokal was unique in terms of its business characteristics, and exemplified the chef's creativity, and stood out for its remarkable sustainable practices. Furthermore, it was anticipated that this study, which examined a Michelin Green Star restaurant, would serve as a guide for stakeholders in the industry.

Keywords: Michelin Green Star , Sustainable Practices, Refined Cuisine, Creativity Restaurants , Neolocal.

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Burcu Ayşenur Saklı	Conceptualism, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization	100%

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This paper does not required ethics committee report

Justification: The methodology of this study does not require an ethics committee report.