



**FOOD AND BEVERAGE EXPERIENCE IN TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF EXPERIENCE  
ECONOMY**

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**Abstract**

Nowadays, new tourism activities have emerged with the demand for the single experience of the components that comprise the whole of tourism activities. Especially the attraction of food and beverage in recent years has started to stand out; this increase in the importance of the sector indicates that enriching the experiences in food and beverage will increase the value of tourism in general. Food and beverage experience in tourism supports the total experience in terms of presenting the potential opportunities about entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist experiences; it thus has a positive impact on holistic consumer satisfaction. In the study, the concept and dimensions of the experience economy are explained, and food and beverage experience in tourism is evaluated. It is determined that supporting the food and beverage experiences in terms of presenting a holistic experience might develop consumer experiences. Additionally, it is found that the potential in the dimensions of experience economy can be developed. According to the result, activities in these dimensions' scope are efficient in ensuring an optimum experience level. On the other hand, suggestions about developing this potential are presented in the study.

**Keywords:** Experience Economy, Touristic Experience, Food & Beverage Experience.

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## **1. Introduction**

Until the 1980s, behaviors of consumers about purchasing had been regarded as a process in which they completely try to find solutions to a specific problem with a rational point of view and focus on functional features of products (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Polat, 2021). However, after this period, consumption has started to become a kind of “experience” about satisfying different elements of human nature such as entertainment, escapist, learning, esthetic, or satisfaction (Manhas, 2013). The idea of experience has thus become a concept that is frequently analyzed and explained from many dimensions (Volo, 2009).

The concept of experience is defined as a whole of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that human beings acquire through their perceptions and behaviors (Hosany & Witham, 2010). In other words, experience is the trace, the subjective memory left by the incidents that human beings involve in their mind, reason, and feelings (Oh, Flore, & Jeoung, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Volo, 2009). These definitions indicate that experience is a highly personal fact. Although consumer products or experiences are the same, each consumer processes them in different mental construction and intellectualizes them in a different manner (Richards, 2012).

Today, there has been a demand for satisfying the increasing and changing requests and necessities of consumers and tourists in the service industry in general and in the tourism industry and tourists in private. When these requests and necessities are evaluated, experimental features have come into prominence in general (Xu & Chan, 2010). Therefore, the elements of supply in the scope of the tourism sector need to produce experience-based services. In addition to this, because of the increasing competition in tourism, it is crucial to differentiate products and produce experiential service (Birenboim, 2016).

It is possible to approach the case of consumption from different viewpoints when it is analyzed in the scope of the concept of touristic experience. For instance, according to a definition, it is “an example of hedonic consumption”, according to another, it is “a peak point of specific experience by a tourist visiting a destination” (Volo, 2010); in another resource, it is described as “a complex composition of factors that shapes the emotion and attitude of a tourist about his/her” (Volo, 2009). Besides, it can be said that the concept of touristic experience in the related literature is generally analyzed in two basic dimensions as social sciences approach and the management/marketing approach.

The social sciences approach focuses on “intense and pure touristic experience” completely isolated from the daily routines. Activities such as eating, drinking, and sleeping are regarded as supporting factors that affect the quality of experience (Mossberg, 2007). Different studies that embrace this approach analyze touristic experience as a journey that presents the opportunity to escape from daily routines, to be in environments that are authentic, new, and independent (Quan & Wang, 2004). If these elements are seen as low-quality during the journey, supporting elements such as food and beverage can meet this deficit. If the expectations cannot be met with these supporting elements the consumers are dissatisfied and the quality of the total experience decreases (Mossberg, 2007).

In the management/marketing approach, which is the other approach used in touristic experience studies touristic consumption is analyzed as a part of holistic consumer experience (Mossberg, 2007). The topic of “supporting experiences”, which isn’t sufficiently studied in the literature of social sciences, is often analyzed in the scope of this approach (Quan & Wang, 2004). Besides, the impacts of different elements that affect the quality perception of a tourist throughout the journey such as the quality of supporting experiences and human interactions, past experiences, information obtained from the external stimulus, are researched, and studied in this approach (Volo, 2009).

In parallel with the results obtained from the studies about the issue of touristic experience, Quan & Wang (2004) analyzed touristic experience as “intense touristic experience” and “supporting consumer experience”. In this model, intense touristic experience is the main source of motivation, and dissatisfaction in this dimension cannot be compensated by a high-quality perception in another dimension. However, when the issue is a total experience, having satisfied supporting experiences can be regarded as sufficient for the total quality perception of the consumer. On the other hand, there are studies in the literature defending that these two experience levels should be analyzed together in terms of touristic consumption. In Mossberg’s model (2007), touristic experience is analyzed as a combination of the two experience types and the boundary between the two is blurred. In both models, it is stated that the main element of the journey, in other words, the resource of touristic experience, can be relocated according to the developments throughout the journey. Some indicators prove the fact that the idea of daily routines and touristic experiences has become the same with the post-modern era. Supporting this viewpoint, daily routines and touristic experience perception have been evaluated

together in the post-modern era (Uriely, 2005). People today can see different destinations and live some touristic experiences through virtual reality technology; these are the examples of the evidence that support this understanding.

Food and beverage activities, which are the important parts of daily life, can be analyzed from a broad perspective. The activities vary from meeting physiological necessities to presenting the opportunity to have socio-cultural experiences (Soner, 2013). When food and beverage experience is a component of tourism activities, it can be analyzed both in the scope of supporting and intense experience types. Especially with the increase of interest in local cuisines, the element of food and beverage has become a motivation for traveling. This change increased the tendency to use food and beverage activities for creating intense touristic experiences in the frame of tourism activities. It can be said that food and beverage experiences also have a significant place in developing positive behavioral intentions and consumer satisfaction in terms of experience (Özdemir, 2019). This study analyzes food and beverage experience in the scope of experience economy's dimensions.

This study examines the food and beverage experience in tourism in the context of the experience economy. The research mainly focuses on the problem of what activities contribute to food and beverage experiences within the scope of the experience economy. In this context, the concept of the experience economy and touristic experience has been discussed in the research with a holistic perspective, and the activities that can be done within the scope of food and beverage according to the dimensions of experience economy have been examined and interpreted in the focus of the studies in the literature. In addition, ethics committee approval was not required since the research was not within the scope of human or human experimentation, examination and field research, and ethics committee approval was not obtained.

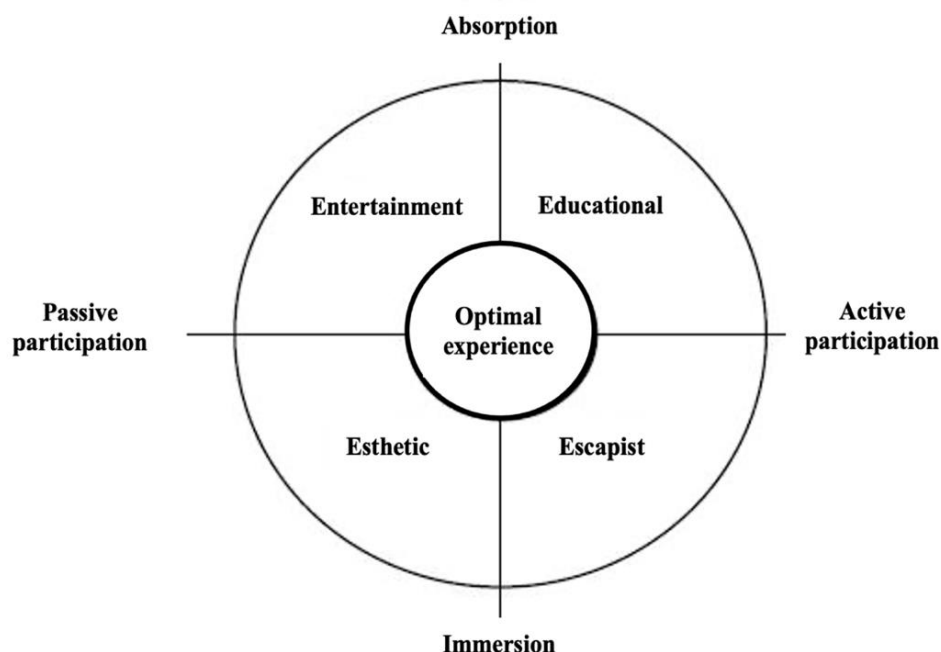
## **2. Experience Economy and Touristic Experience**

The increasing importance of experience in the context of consumption and the recent research about this issue has given birth to some other concepts about the experience. The concept of “experience economy” introduced by Pine & Gilmore (2011) is one of them. Today's consumers want to have unique experiences beyond merely benefiting from functional features of products by simply consuming them (Nair, Sinha & Dileep, 2020). Therefore, the paradigm of businesses has been transforming from an understanding based on “ensuring” high-level product quality/function to a concept focusing on presenting and “staging” unforgettable experiences (Lai, Lu, & Liu, 2020). In the experience economy characterized by this staging, customers' demand of having unforgettable experiences with intense emotions is satisfied. In this context, the purpose of this experience economy is to ensure both the businesses' and consumers' benefit from the process (Ketter, 2018).

Pine & Gilmore (2011) analyze the concept of experience from two basic dimensions. These dimensions are “active” and “passive” participation according to participation level on the horizontal axis and “absorption” and “immersion” according to connection-level on the vertical axis. During active participation, the individual can affect activity or performance while in passive participation he/she can only experience an activity through observation without the opportunity to affect it. On the other hand, there is a mental experience in absorption (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). There is a distance between individual and activity, and individual mentally absorbs activity (e.g., watching a concert on Television). During immersion, the individual is virtually or physically a part of the activity (e.g., watching a live concert) (Song et al., 2015). At the intersection point of these fields, experience fields named educational, entertainment, esthetic and escapist occur. Four fields of experience in the context of the experience economy are presented in Figure 1.

The dimension of entertainment is at the intersection of absorption and passive participation. Activity or performance in this dimension should attract the attention of the consumer and it should be passively absorbed (Oh et al., 2007). It should be mentioned that consumers cannot affect the activity or performance in the dimension of entertainment which is the oldest and most well-known experience field (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Watching people rodeoing at an amusement park or participating in a festival are examples of this dimension.

**Figure 1. Four dimensions of experience**



**Source:** Pine & Gilmore (2011)

The educational dimension is at the intersection of absorption and active participation. Individual completely concentrates on the activity and adopts it at this dimension, which is like entertainment dimension (Chang, 2018a). However, this dimension is different from entertainment as it requires active participation. In this context, individuals either learn new information or acquire skills throughout activities (Chang, 2018b; Hosany & Witham, 2010). Mentioning the functional features or preparation/consumption principles of the food products on the product label is an example of the educational dimension of experience.

The dimension of escapist occurs under the impacts of immersion and active participation. When individuals are actively involved in activities, when they are physically or virtually become a part of an activity, or when they have an impact on an activity, they have escapist experiences (Chang, 2018a). It is similar to the dimension of education in this respect. However, individuals want to “learn” in the educational dimension while they want to “go and participate” in an event in the escapist dimension (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). They thus can get away from monotonous activities, decrease stress levels and get the chance to have a good time for a while. Gambling, rafting, or hiking are some of the examples of these experiences (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

The esthetic dimension is at the intersection of immersion and passive participation. In these experiences, individuals are immersed with an activity or environment; individuals have either little or no impact on activities or environments (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). They take pleasure in “being” in an environment rather than touching it or intervening in it (Oh et al., 2007). For instance, visiting a wonder of nature is regarded as an esthetic experience (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

Entertainment, educational, escapist, esthetic dimensions that are the bases of experience economy are also very functional in terms of touristic experience (Quan & Wang, 2004) and they can be illustrated in the scope of various touristic activities. For instance, the dimension of entertainment in tourism includes activities such as festivals, shows, and other recreational activities throughout the process of tourism activities. An example of an educational experience is the culture tours that enable tourists to acquire information throughout their journeys (Hwang & Lee, 2019). On the other hand, tours that are designed to present learning experiences such as farm and vineyard visits are some other striking examples of educational dimensions in tourism experiences (Oh et al., 2007).

The dimension of escapist experience in the experience economy is directly related to travel (Hwang & Lee, 2019) as tourism activities are escape-based (Park, Oh, & Park, 2010). On the other hand, the dimension of esthetic is related to the concept of “atmosphere” in service marketing, and this is a significant determinant of holistic touristic experience (Oh et al., 2007). For instance, the design of a museum during a visit, location of

objects, and lighting are some of these elements of the atmosphere. City tours designed for tourists in different streets are also examples of esthetic experience.

The area at the center of the above-mentioned four experience fields and made of the most proper combination of these experience types is named “optimal experience”. Pine & Gilmore (2011) mention that to reach a rich experience, it is necessary to present a process that presents all these dimensions poisedly to individuals rather than a process based on a single dimension. Like in the other fields of consumption, the wish to have experience in touristic consumption has become the primary goal of consumers; it is thus a must to combine different, satisfying experience elements (Thanh & Kirova, 2018).

Having all these dimensions with a balance in touristic experiences is necessary to reach optimal experience level in tourism (Oh et al., 2007). Keukenhof, located in Holland, is one of the biggest flower gardens in the world, and it consists of touristic consumption elements. The place is a good example that presents the opportunity of optimal experience to the visitors. The garden has locations to view flowers (esthetic), walking-tracks (escapist), signboards giving information about flowers and gardening (educational), and periodical music shows (entertainment); it can be said that the garden presents all of the four different dimensions to the visitors (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

### **3. Experience Economy and Food and Beverage Experience in Tourism**

Food and beverage experience has become a significant, special element of tourism experience in recent years. The basic reason for travel experience may or may not be trying different types of food, but one thing is for sure: Good food will give tourists extra opportunities to have unexpected, memorable, unique experiences during vacation (Quan & Wang, 2004). Like in all other types of consumption, the basis of touristic consumption is to “experience” intangible cultural dimensions such as atmosphere, authenticity, or lifestyle rather than merely “seeing” physical objects in museums of historical places. In this respect, food, as one of the most basic elements of all of the cultures, is an important tool that presents such experiences to tourists (Richards, 2012).

Food and beverage experience can be an instrument that can easily support the dimensions of “intense touristic experience” and “supportive experience” in touristic activities. For instance, in the scope of the supportive consumer experience, wine tasting activities in a specific wine destination can teach tourists how to recognize quality wines; the field of “education” in the experience economy is practiced through this process (Thanh & Kirova, 2018). Besides, the increase in the expectation of authenticity in food and beverage experiences during the journey and searching for new, special journeys on this basis (Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012; Richards, 2012) caused sector professionals to regard food experience as an important part of the touristic experience.

If food education is at an optimal level, in a way that it involves all dimensions of the experience economy, travel can be more unforgettable and positive (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013) and it can open the door to destination loyalty. In addition to this, besides the preferences about climate, accommodation facilities, natural/historical beauties, it is an important element for destination choice. Cuisine diversity can be highly effective in travel choices (McKercher, Okumuş & Okumuş, 2008).

#### ***Entertainment Dimension in Food and Beverage Experience***

The fact that there is entertainment experience at the heart of touristic experience (Hosany and Witham, 2010) seems the same for food and beverage experience. Getz & Carlsen (2008) state that “entertainment” is a significant source of motivation in wine tours.

Festivals and different types of activities shaped around the food and beverages that are produced according to region-specific, original methods with the ingredients that are special to a region have become famous in recent years. These can be regarded as the activities that present food and beverage, and entertainment experiences (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). Additionally, tourists can be satisfied from tasting food and beverage that are prepared and presented in unique styles and they can regard such experiences as pleasurable. For instance, rice, usually cooked in pans under normal circumstances in Jiangxi/China, is cooked and presented in bamboo pans for tourists; the purpose of this is to ensure tourists have entertaining, memorable experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004). On the other hand, visiting a local restaurant with a social group during travel can be an entertaining, unique experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). It is significant to note that the experience of the entertainment is sometimes more important than the food quality at a restaurant (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009).

#### ***Educational Dimension in Food and Beverage Experience***

It was previously mentioned that individuals seek experiences based on acquiring new information and skills. Today, there are many opportunities to have special experiences in terms of food and beverage in the scope of education. For instance, the fishermen in Apulia, southern Italy, host tourists in their boats and allow them to experience the history of navigation in the region. The tourists are also given the chance to participate in traditional fishing activities. This process not only includes food and beverage experiences but also allows having educational experience and seeing what is traditional (Sidali, Kastenholz & Bianchi, 2015).

Kim et al. (2009) state that it is possible to learn about local cultures by tasting local food and beverage and to have an educational experience by learning how they are originally cooked/prepared. The educational experience is an especially important source of motivation in wine tours (Getz & Carlsen, 2008). It is more important for the tourists that visit a destination for the first time (Bruwer & Alant, 2009). The most common educational tourist activity is wine tasting, followed by wine-course matching activities at local restaurants. Some wineries organize seminars about making wine at home while some have partnerships with chefs and farmers to give cookery classes (Thanh & Kirova, 2018). In addition to these, “cookery education tourism”, which has become an important tourism market in recent years, can be regarded as a type of educational tourism experience (Luoh, Tsaur & Lo, 2020).

### ***Esthetic Dimension in Food and Beverage Experience***

Destinations are chosen according to the pleasure and uniqueness they present that is different from daily life (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). Being in such destinations gives the chance to have esthetic experiences. For instance, when a tourist watches the process of frying bugs on streets in Bangkok, he/she experiences a view that is different from his/her daily life and there is an esthetic dimension of this experience (Mak et al., 2012). Vineyards visited as a part of wine tours, trips to the rural destinations that have orchards, being in a cellar, watching the wines left for aging are some of the esthetic experiences (Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Thanh & Kirova, 2018).

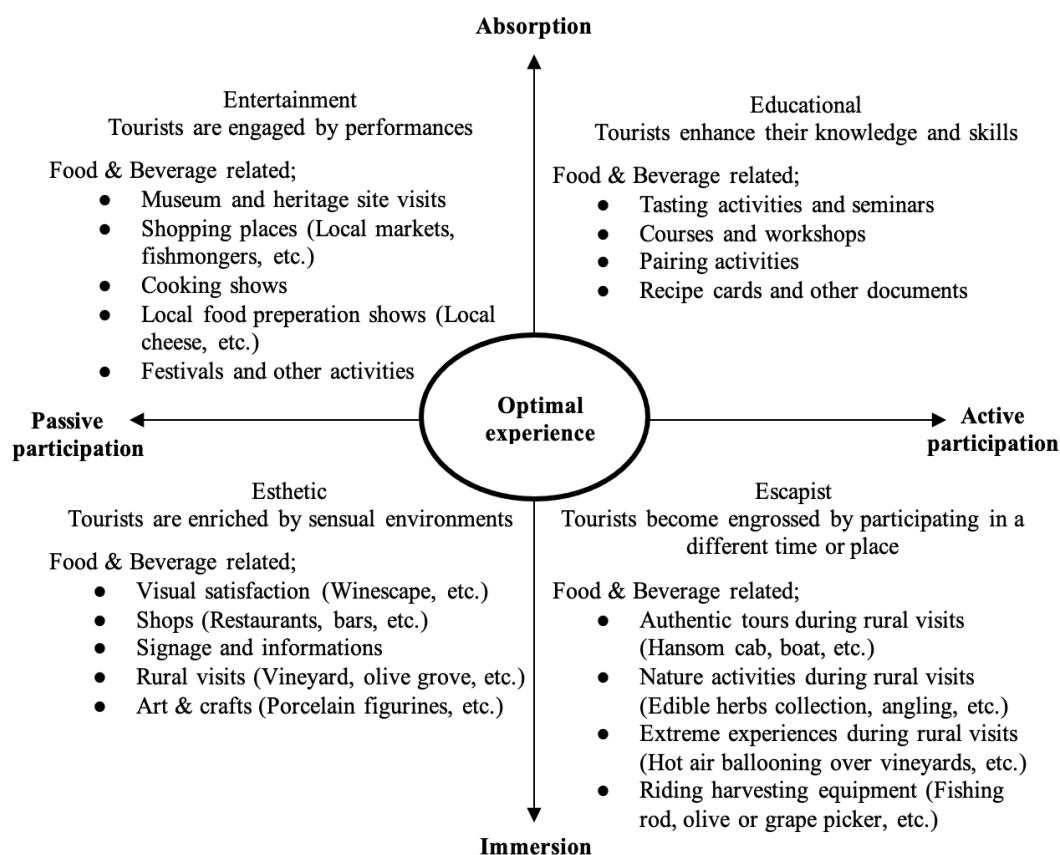
Esthetic experience, on the other hand, can sometimes be about the hygiene, comfort, size, or traditions reflected at a restaurant (Kim et al., 2009). Walker (2013) carried out a study and analyzed three different restaurants at the Mexican American border. The restaurants date back more than 100 years and the media of both countries mentioned them in the news. Aztec and Maya civilizations’ cooking methods have been used in these restaurants; the architecture, clothing of the workers, menu, and atmosphere are all based on Mexican culture. Visiting these restaurants gives tourists the chance to have an esthetic experience.

### ***Escapist Dimension in Food and Beverage Experience***

Escapist experience is the search of tourists for different opportunities. Especially traveling to different destinations to experience different food and beverage can be regarded as an escapist experience. This can even satisfy the escapist experience needs of tourists who already have satisfying and comfortable life (Kim et al., 2009).

Another element that can be analyzed as a part of the escapist experience is food festivals (Richards, 2021). Through these festivals, tourists experience different foods, cooking, or presentation methods and they eventually experience environments that are different from their daily routines. Activities that present esthetic experience also allow having escapist experiences. For instance, wine tourists can watch the view of grape harvest while at the same time be involved in a variety of recreational activities in natural and rural environments of wine destinations. These destinations present many different activities that attract the attention of tourists such as hot air balloon rides, bicycle tours, grape picking, and harvest. It can be said that these participatory activities are opportunities to have escapist experiences (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013).

**Figure 2. Theoretical framework for understanding the food and beverage experience in the context of tourism**



**Source:** Adapted by the authors from the study by Thanh & Kirova (2018)

### ***Optimal Experience Dimension in Food and Beverage Experience***

Understanding the concept of optimal experience can help facilities increase the value of food and beverage experience in tourism. By knowing all the elements, destination managers can present the richest possible experience opportunities to potential tourists through different activities (Carlsen & Boksberger, 2015). It is possible to mention a variety of opportunities to present optimal experience in the food and beverage experience. For instance, wine tasting (educational experience) can be combined with wine blending shows (entertainment experience), the view of vineyards (esthetic experience), and a walk at the vineyard (escapist experience). When all these different dimensions are successfully combined, the optimal experience will be ensured (Thanh & Kirova, 2018). Food and beverage festivals are the other instruments that help to present an optimal experience. For instance, a cheese festival was organized by the Slow Cheese Bodrum team that included different elements. Cheese-making classes (educational experience), one-day gastronomic tours (escapist experience), home activities in different neighborhoods of Bodrum (entertainment experience), and traditional kitchenware exhibitions (esthetic experience) (“Slow Cheese Bodrum” 2021) were combined in the festival targets ensuring an optimal experience.

It can be said that it is possible to combine many other food and beverages such as olive, seafood to organize activities similar to the touristic activities that combine wine and cheese. Using a holistic understanding while combining different elements in tourism will contribute to the sector. Food and beverage experience in tourism includes both experiencing the products and involving in the other attractions about the concept of food and beverage in tourism as a whole of activities. It is thus possible to mention that activities that can be related to food and beverage experience in tourism have a very high potential to ensure an optimal experience. Elements that can be regarded under the dimension of food and beverage experience are presented in Figure 2.

#### **4. Discussion and Result**

There are studies in the literature about the evaluation of food and beverage experience based on the entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist elements which are regarded as the dimensions of the experience economy model presented by Pine & Gilmore (2011). Among these studies, the ones that especially focus on rural vineyard areas (Gregorio & Licari, 2006; Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hall, 2005; Martin & Delmelle, 2021; Mitchell, Charters, & Albrecht, 2012; Montella, 2017; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012; Robinson 2020; Vukovic, Maiti, Vujko & Shams, 2019) represent the esthetic and escapist dimension of food and beverage consumption in tourism and they are mentioned in the literature the most. In these studies, the sustainability of the tourism activities in rural areas is analyzed in the context of wine tourism. On the other hand, with their model adapted from experience economy elements about wine tourism, Thanh & Kirova (2018) mentioned activities that can be included in the dimensions of the experience economy.

Analyzing experience economy activities of food and beverage in tourism based on the product can be efficient in the use of the potentials of existent in products. Although wine tourism reflects a significant travel motivation that has the potential to create demand in the long term, it is necessary to make studies focusing on different products to reach sustainability and support the impacts of food and beverage activities in the context of the experience economy. Olive, tea, coffee, mushroom, sea, and dairy products are some of the products that can be used for this purpose. For instance, Skuras et al. (2006) analyzed local food, Yin & Lui, (2014) and Dimara, & Petrou (2011) analyzed agricultural products, Fusté-Forné analyzed dairy products (2019) and the products collected from nature (2021) such as mushroom in the context of rural tourism.

As esthetic and escapist experiences based on these products presented in the above-mentioned studies require traveling to the rural areas, it can be said that it is necessary to include elements that ensure attraction. Through supportive attraction elements, it becomes possible to have holistic touristic consumer satisfaction. At this point, additional attractions throughout tourism activities based on these products can support choosing food and beverage activities that can be included in the other dimensions in the experience economy; these attractions can also ensure presenting optimal experience in terms of food and beverage activities in tourism.

It can be said that the dimension of entertainment, a part of experience economy dimensions, reflects the representation of more general activities in the frame of food and beverage concept. For instance, watching different shows and organizations, visiting places that combine cultural and historical elements, participating in festivals and similar activities are touristic activities. However, when they are combined with food and beverage, they become representations of food and beverage experience in the scope of entertainment activities (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Henderson, 2009; Silkes, Cai, & Lehto, 2013; Tsai & Wang, 2017). The dimension of education includes the transformation of passive and watching-based entertainment dimension activities into active and practice-based structures (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), such as participation in activities like tasting and cooking, wine-course matching activities (Ferreira & Muller, 2013; Lam & Xiao, 2000; Muangasame & Park, 2019).

These above-mentioned statements show that especially escapist dimension brings the necessity to be in rural areas in terms of food and beverage activities, with it. Besides, activities in the scope of the dimension of esthetic mostly require being present in rural environments. Activities in the scope of entertainment and education, on the other hand, are most likely to be carried out in rural areas (having a wine tasting activity in a vineyard or having an olive festival during harvest). However, it should be mentioned that when activities based on escapist experience aren't related to the rural environment, they will be insufficient in terms of tourist satisfaction.

When these factors are taken into consideration, it can be said that ensuring optimal experience with the contribution of food and beverage elements in tourism in the scope of the experience economy is possible especially when there are primarily rural elements (raw materials, etc.); rural areas play a key role in processing, advertising, presenting, and combining similar activities in touristic activities. This fact shows the importance of analyzing touristic food and beverage activities in the scope of rural tourism in ensuring optimal experience.



Combining experiences with different dimensions and transforming them into an optimal experience positively affect consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. This situation is also presented and supported by the studies in the literature which focus on analyzing food and beverage experience in tourism in the context of experience economy (Erkmen, 2019; Sidali et al., 2015; Song, et al., 2015; Piramanayagam, Sud, & Seal, 2020). It is thus necessary for the destinations aiming at presenting an intense touristic experience with food and beverage elements to follow this understanding. Destinations that adopt the concept of “rural food tourism” by combining food and beverage attractions with rural tourism elements will be successful in satisfying visitors and such satisfying processes will lead tourists to revisit that destination. On the other hand, facilities that function in touristic destinations and the ones whose primary purpose is not intense food and beverage experience can support consumer satisfaction by including the rural elements in supportive experience designs.

This study adopts a theoretical perspective regarding food and beverage as a part of the experience economy which contributes to tourism with added value. Research and studies that will focus on testing the impact of food and beverage elements on ensuring optimal experience, and obtaining results in this frame by using different, reliable scales will contribute to the theory about the issue in the literature and to future studies in the field.

Since this research is not within the scope of human or human experimentation, examination and field research, Ethics Board Approval is not required. All responsibility belongs to the authors.

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