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Abstract

Gastronomy is an important part of culture, and interest in traditional foods is increasing. In this context, boza, a traditional Turkish beverage, is one of the prominent products. However, today's interest in boza and its consumption are not at the desired level, threatening the sustainability of this traditional beverage. This study aims to examine the perceptions of traditional boza producers regarding gastronomic value and to evaluate the importance and sustainability of boza in Turkish gastronomy. A qualitative method was used in the research, and individual interviews were conducted with five traditional boza producers. The obtained data were evaluated with content analysis and supported by expert opinions. As a result of the interviews, it was determined that boza producers perceive boza under two main headings: (1) boza as a fermented beverage and (2) boza as an ancient cultural heritage that should be passed on to future generations. Boza is an important part of Turkish gastronomy and has been consumed widely from Central Asia to the Balkans throughout history. However, the failure of traditional boza producers to institutionalize and the inability of family businesses to grow at an international level make the sustainability of boza difficult. The study revealed that although producers accept the gastronomic value of boza, they are not fully aware of its importance in Turkish cuisine. Therefore, it is recommended to increase information sharing and create gastronomic awareness through industry-academia cooperation.

Keywords: Boza, Gastronomy, Turkish gastronomy, Gastronomic value perception, Turkish gastronomy culture

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

In recent years, while interest in traditional and artisan products has increased in the gastronomy world, boza is also gaining popularity again with its healthy and authentic structure. This fermented grain drink, which has a history of approximately 9000 years, has an important place in Turkish culture. Boza, which was quite common during the Ottoman period, has gradually faded into the background with the rise of coffee. Today, its decreasing consumption and the limited number of producers put the sustainability of this traditional flavor at risk. This study examines the gastronomic value of boza, its historical development, and its place in Turkish cuisine and emphasizes the necessity of industry-academia cooperation to pass it on to future generations.

Traditional Boza and Its Production Process

Definition and Standards:

According to the Turkish Standards Institute (TS 9778), boza is a traditional beverage obtained by fermentation of grains such as millet, rice, wheat, or corn, with an alcohol content of less than 2% and an acid content of less than 1%, with a unique consistency and taste.

Fermentation Process:

A double fermentation process is effective in boza production. Lactic acid bacteria (*Leuconostoc*, *Lactobacillus*) and yeasts play a role in this process. Fermentation increases the aroma and nutritional value of boza, as well as extending its shelf life. Boza, which can last for about a week under appropriate storage conditions, has limited production in the summer months, but modern technologies have largely solved this problem.

Notable Features:

Boza is a homogeneous, viscous, and unique sour-sweet beverage that can be consumed in the summer with its refreshing effect.

History of Boza and Its Place in Turkish Gastronomy

Origin and Etymology:

Boza has a history of approximately 9000 years and is thought to have originated in Mesopotamia. Its name is derived from the Persian word "Buze," meaning "millet."

Historical Development:

Boza, produced by the Turks of Central Asia and spread to wide geographies, gained great popularity during the Seljuk and Ottoman periods. Varieties such as "sweet boza" and alcoholic "Tatar boza" were consumed, and even Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname recorded that there were more than 300 boza houses in 17th-century Istanbul.

Cultural and Social Importance:

Boza has played an important role in ceremonies and social life throughout history. For example, it was used as a ceremonial drink in the Karachay-Balkar culture, and in the Ottoman Empire, it was frequently consumed by the public because it was cheap and nutritious. It is also known that alcoholic varieties were banned from time to time.

Its Current Position:

Traditionally served with cinnamon and roasted chickpeas, boza used to be consumed only between September and May, but today, thanks to technological developments, it can be produced all year round. Boza, which continues its existence as a historical and cultural heritage of Turkish gastronomy, maintains its importance with its flavor from the past to the present.

Boza is one of the most deep-rooted and sustainable beverages of Turkish culinary culture. It has preserved its value in social, cultural, and gastronomic terms throughout history and continues to keep its traditional flavor alive today.

Materials and Methods

This study aims to deeply examine traditional boza, an important component of Turkish gastronomy, using qualitative research methods and to contribute to its sustainability. The study aimed to determine the perceptions of traditional boza producers regarding the gastronomic value of boza produced using traditional methods and thus to support the continuity of traditional production. The originality of the study lies in revealing the perceptions of producers regarding gastronomic values and contributing to the literature.

In the study designed with a qualitative research design, "individual interview" was preferred as the data collection method. The interview questions were prepared by taking the Boza Standard of the Turkish Standards Institute (TS 9778, 2017) and Turan (2007) as references. Participants were first asked about their experiences and demographic information, then information was obtained about the historical processes and production methods of their businesses. Finally, their opinions on the gastronomic value of the boza they produce were evaluated. The reason for choosing the individual interview method was to ensure that participants gave independent answers without being influenced by each other (Kozak, 2021).

The universe of the study consisted of firms producing boza using traditional methods in Turkey. Participants were selected from among the owners and executives of firms that do not engage in mass production, do not use additives, and continue traditional processes. Due to time constraints, online interviews were conducted with representatives of five of the eight firms determined by the snowball

sampling method. Ethical rules were followed in the interviews, and personal data were coded and processed (Willis, 2019). In the first stage of the interviews, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and after obtaining written consent, semi-structured questions were asked and recorded. The thirty- to forty-minute interviews were transcribed into text and presented to the participants for approval (Kallio et al., 2016).

Content analysis was used in data analysis, and the findings were supported by the opinions of two gastronomy academics and two sector representatives. After testing the data obtained from the first three interviews, it was determined that data saturation was achieved by repeating similar results in the last two interviews (Fusch and Ness, 2015). The validity of the themes that emerged in the analysis was ensured by the feedback from the participants and the evaluations of four independent researchers (Kynğäs et al., 2020). The study was conducted with the approval of the Istanbul Gelişim University Ethics Committee (2022-13).

Results and Discussion

In the study, online interviews were conducted with the officials of five companies producing traditional boza, and detailed data were collected on the production processes, raw materials, fermentation techniques, and gastronomic and cultural value of boza. When the profiles of the participants were examined, it was seen that the companies were established between 1850 and 1989 and that they mostly used corn, wheat, and millet as raw materials. While the data on the production processes show that fermentation periods vary between 6 hours and 1 month, it was determined that most producers ferment for up to 24 hours and that fermentation continues after bottling.

As a result of the content analysis, the gastronomic value of boza was examined under two main themes: Boza as a Fermented Beverage and Cultural Heritage. The producers drew attention to the geographical spread of boza from Central Asia to the Balkans and emphasized that the choice of raw material varies according to regional conditions. For example, it was stated that boza produced from millet is more suitable in terms of taste, and it was argued that this situation is related to sociocultural and geographical factors.

Different practices regarding the fermentation process have attracted attention. While one producer stated that fermentation takes a month, others stated that they usually ferment for 1-5 days. It was determined that fermentation is stopped in industrial boza, while in traditional production, the process continues after bottling, and therefore the shelf life is shortened. One of the participants explained that they shortened the fermentation period in boza produced for markets and minimized post-bottling problems.

The study emphasized the importance of boza in Turkish gastronomy while revealing that the diversity of production techniques and cultural context are critical for sustainability. The findings indicate that standardized production protocols should be developed to preserve tradition.

Boza as an Ancient and Future Culture

In the research, the analysis of the questions posed to the producers to understand the cultural and gastronomic value of boza revealed that this traditional drink is a heritage of thousands of years and has a value that should be passed on to future generations. The participants see boza as a common cultural heritage of a wide geography extending from Central Asia to the Balkans and emphasize the importance of its sustainability in this context.

The fact that the origins of boza date back to the Fertile Crescent region (Anatolia and Mesopotamia) is supported by archaeological findings and ancient texts dating back to 8000-9000 BC. With the migration of the Turks from Central Asia, boza spread to the Caucasus and the Balkans, and during the Ottoman period, it experienced its golden age and became a widespread commercial product in cities. However,

the origins of most of today's producers date back to the post-19th century, and this situation is explained by the lack of institutionalization in the sector.

The vast majority of the participants stated that boza is an indispensable element for Turkish gastronomy and drew attention to its health benefits (containing B vitamins and minerals). One participant stated that boza originated in the Balkans but has integrated with Turkish culture. These views show that despite having a multicultural past, boza has an important place in Turkish culinary culture. Boza is more than just a drink; it is an ancient heritage with its historical depth and cultural ties. To preserve this heritage and pass it on to future generations, it is of great importance to improve production standards, strengthen institutional structures, and promote its cultural value.

Conclusion

The research results reveal that traditional boza producers perceive this ancient beverage in two basic contexts:

1. As a fermented beverage:

- The focus is on grain-based production processes and fermentation techniques.
- It has been determined that the selection of raw materials (corn, wheat, millet) and fermentation periods (6 hours-1 month) are of critical importance to producers.

2. As a cultural heritage:

Boza, whose origins extend to Central Asia and the Balkans, carries a gastronomic value that overlaps with the geography where Turkish culture spread.

- However, most producers are not fully aware of the historical and cultural importance of boza in Turkish gastronomy.

Evaluation and Recommendations

Boza is an important representative of the fermented food tradition that is as old as human history. Although factors such as the spread of beverages such as coffee and tea were effective in the loss of its glorious position in the Ottoman period, the real problem was the lack of cultural awareness and inadequate institutionalization. For the sustainability of this heritage:

- Awareness should be created among producers through industry-academia collaboration.
- Traditional production techniques should be preserved and standardized.
- The health benefits (vitamin B, minerals) and cultural identity of boza should be emphasized, and its consumption should be encouraged.

In conclusion, boza is not just a drink but a living historical document of Turkish gastronomy. Carrying this value into the future requires collective effort and strategic planning.

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