



## On the Traces of Authenticity for Local Cuisine: Nevşehir's Key Local Agricultural Products

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### Abstract

This study investigates the key local agricultural products which are the base for the authentic local cuisine of Nevşehir province. In order to determine the genuinely authentic, rather than claimed, local cuisine elements, some pre-research was conducted with experts. After determining the key local agricultural products, the villages/towns/districts in which these local products are grown/made were visited to gather in depth information on the products' history and current issues related to them. The study adopted a qualitative approach and 16 key people were interviewed through semi-structured interviews in Ürgüp, Bahçeli, Ayhan, Topaç, Kalaba, and Kaymaklı. The findings indicate that these products, despite being quite authentic, face serious threats such as related social issues, climate change, and marketing/promotion disadvantages. The results also illustrate that the social context of any local cuisine is as important as other factors. In addition, flavor issues in the related products are reported by the interviewees, which could be another serious threat. Future research prospects of the key issues are proposed in the discussion part.

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## INTRODUCTION

Beside their cultural significance, authentic agricultural products are precious assets for any destination due to their gastronomical value. A distinctive local cuisine could constitute great advantage in a competitive market but it is getting more difficult to sustain authenticity due to various factors. For example, industrial seeds have gained more popularity in agriculture, then many native plant products were replaced with them. Although productivity, standardization, and quality – at least in the industrial sense – were the main motivation in the adoption of these seeds (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), 2005; 2024), this came at the cost of authenticity. As technological capacity evolved, farmers started to prefer irrigated farming on those lands which are actually a better fit to dry farming (Çelik & Akça, 2021). Native breed animals in Anatolia were replaced with culture breeds (or their hybrids) mainly due to productivity concerns (Şahin et al., 2022). In addition to all these authenticity threatening circumstances, climate change related issues such as harvest season changes, changes in plant growth speed, increased frost risk, pesticide issues, and water-related problems have been emerging (Çaltı & Somuncu, 2019; Partigöç & Soğancı, 2019; Gökkür & Şahin, 2020; Şensoy, 2015; Türkeş, 2020; Yaşar et al., 2021; Yavaş & Ünay, 2018). Authentic products produced in harsher climate regions, such as the Central Anatolia in Turkey, seem even more vulnerable and determination of them is the first step to their sustainability. Nevşehir, a province in the Central Anatolia, is well known due to being a major part of Cappadocia. This culture tourism-oriented destination (Tucker & Emge, 2010) possesses some key authentic agricultural products and relevant local cuisine assets (Aslan et al., 2014; Coban Yıldız & Yıldız, 2024a; 2024b). The purpose of this study is to evaluate the authenticity of these products, explore the current and potential changes in these products, determine the main risks they face, and develop applicable suggestions in order to preserve their authentic value and ensure the sustainability of this gastronomical heritage.

## Background

Authenticity is a complex and a common term both in the philosophical and commercial worlds. As also indicated by Lehman et al. (2019), there is more or less a consensus on what the concept of authenticity generally refers to but its definition, if we are to examine it in depth, could be different depending on the approach. Lehman et al. (2019), based on their review which mostly focuses on management studies, suggest three distinctive perspectives of authenticity, namely, consistency, conformity, and connection. The third approach, “connection between an entity and a person, place, or time as claimed” (Lehman et al., 2019, p.1), fits more to the authenticity regarded in this study. From a wider perspective, the concept of authenticity is quite related with cultural heritage (Rickly, 2022) and authenticity refers to being genuine rather than fake or imitation/pseudo and it plays a major role in the tourism industry both as a motivator for tourists and an ideal which may never be possible to reach (Seligman, 1965; Cohen, 1979; Heitmann, 2011; Knudsen et al., 2016; Yıldız & Eren, 2020).

An authentic local cuisine can significantly enhance tourists' experiences and give a destination competitive advantage (Zhang et al., 2019). Even when a critical approach to authenticity is adopted, i.e. if authenticity is not even possible in a commercial product, the role of authenticity seeking in consumers' motivation is not rejected (Yıldız & Eren, 2020). In line with all these, authentic local cuisine is usually noted as a desired element in the tourism industry (Akdağ & Üzülmöz, 2017). Moreover, authentic local cuisine products are not only commercial products but the locals' own food. In the preindustrial or more roughly earlier times, foods, thus cuisines, were usually

local (see e.g. the case of Japan in Rath, 2015) although it also depends on the time and place. Thus, the authenticity of a local cuisine was also not a matter of discussion or even the search for local cuisine was meaningless until the modern times. However, the relative similarity of different destinations, as a result of global industrial developments, has made the local cuisine elements harder to find and valuable. Local cuisine, both as sum of local food elements and a whole heritage, is also an identity definer (see e.g. Bessière, 1998; Wilk, 1999; Stapleton, 2015; Mahachi-Chatibura, 2016; Thomé-Ortiz, 2017; Abidin et al, 2020; Esen, 2022), which also means that it is a great tool for differentiation. Although there are other relevant factors such as cultural interaction, the physical – primarily geographical – basis for the food production seems more vital in the development of local cuisine and its culture (see e.g. Wahlqvist & Lee, 2007).

Nevşehir does not have a very rich living local cuisine but the province has some valuable local cuisine potential due to its cultural, historical, and natural wealth; which is threatened by various factors such as climate change (Güldemir & Işık, 2011; Aslan et al, 2014; Şahin Perçin et al., 2019; Coban Yıldız et al., 2023; Yönet Eren, 2023; Coban Yıldız & Yıldız, 2024a; 2024b). Some key local agricultural products of the region are well embedded into the local cuisine. Among those local dishes, some are controversial in terms of authenticity since very similar products are produced elsewhere. Aside from the facts as a result of the common features of geographically similar regions, such as some other grapes grown in some other parts of the Central Anatolia, the key to end this controversy – at least in the scholarly discussions – might be to define authentic agricultural products since they are the base for local cuisine.

If efficient and environmentally-friendly local agricultural methods are practiced, local food could, in essence, be considered as sustainable (Coelho et al., 2018). When Nevşehir's cuisine is examined, its close ties with local agriculture could be observed (see e.g. Aslan et al, 2014; Coban Yıldız et al., 2023). However, there are already various sustainability, primarily environmental, issues in Nevşehir's agriculture (Ateş & Türemiş, 2011). These issues are also threatening local cuisine's authenticity. Thus, defining truly authentic agricultural products and understanding the reason for their inclusion in Nevşehir's cuisine is crucial. Moreover, this could even be a starting point for re-considering local food in general. From a gastronomical perspective, the relevance of the agricultural issues noted in the literature such as drought, irrigation, soil health, and etc. (see e.g. Ateş & Türemiş, 2011) could be better interpreted through this study and similar studies.

## Methodology

The ethical board confirmation of this research was received from Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board as stated in the report dated July 30, 2024 with the decision number 2024.08.204.

Authentic products in this study were determined by the researchers by conducting some pre-research which includes short technical interviews with agricultural experts who have good knowledge on the territory. The purpose of this pre-research was to determine the agricultural products which are truly authentic, i.e. those which cannot be grown in the same quality elsewhere and which are grown from in-house seeds. The authenticity criterion for animal products was that they should be being produced only in Nevşehir. The pre-research indicated the following products: Ayhan eggplant, Topaç garlic, Ürgüp sivrisi (pumpkin seed), grape, Bahçeli dried plum, Bahçeli dried apricot, Kaymaklı dried cream, and Kalaba creamy yoghurt.

After determining the authentic products, key places were visited and key people to be interviewed were determined. Semi-structured interviews were preferred for the sake of limiting the topic without risking flexibility in this explorative study. The interviewees include regional governmental administrators, managers of agricultural chambers, and experienced local people – especially senior citizens – who have good knowledge of the relevant products and regions. 16 key people were interviewed in total through August 2024. Interviews lasted for about an hour on average. The following questions were asked to the interviewees:

- How long has this authentic product (eggplant, garlic, grape, pumpkin seeds, dried cream, dried plum, dried apricot, or Kalaba creamy yoghurt depending on the region) been produced in this region?
- Are they produced from ancient seeds/in-house seeds/native trees or industrial seeds? (For plant products)
- What breed are those animals used for production? (For animal products)
- What do you do with that product traditionally? How do you use it?
- If you sell that product, which positive and negative circumstances do you experience?
- What sort of changes happened in that product throughout the time you could remember or as far as you know?
- What are the reasons for these changes in your opinion?
- Is there any visible change in that product related to climate change? If yes, what are they?
- What do you think about the future of that product? What are the prospects?
- Is there any other comment on the issue that you want to add?

The interviews were content-analyzed with a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach ensured that the researchers focused on what the interviewees meant and emphasized. Trustworthiness of a qualitative study has four main aspects according to Guba (Shenton, 2004). These are transferability, credibility, dependability, confirmability. Since all these aspects are interrelated, the researchers considered this interrelatedness factor in every phase of the study. From a critical standpoint, transferability could be confirmed by only future research. However, applicability of the findings of this study is to be evaluated by the audience (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In order to allow this, relevant details of the research are presented throughout this paper. Dependability is supported by consistent procedure in each phase of the research (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) while the pillars of credibility started with accurate research procedure (Kyngäs et al., 2019), i.e. the explorative study was executed by precise selection of key informants and through semi-structured interviews with flexibility. The confirmability aspect is related with the objectivity of the researchers (Shenton, 2004). The researchers aimed to interpret the issues based on facts and interviewee responds. The precise pre-research to determine authentic products, the two-way communication in the interview phase, and the facts on which the interpretations were based all support the confirmability of the research.

## Findings

### Ürgüp Pumpkin Seed and Grapes

In Ürgüp district, they grow Ürgüp sivrisi (pumpkin seed) and three different species of grape. Emir and Dimrit grapes are used for wine and grape molasses production while Parmak grape (finger grape) is intended to be eaten. They also make some desserts (mostly aside and köftür) from grape molasses. These are grown traditionally from ancient seeds but some market conditions forced the farmers to use hybrid seeds. More recently, there is more

tendency toward ancient seeds since seed prices increased. Those grown from hybrid seeds cannot be named as authentic. The authenticity still seems to be in danger since farmers have to focus on efficiency. However, the interviewees believe that lack of marketing opportunities and marketing expertise are the real threats. Moreover, misuse of the fame of Ürgüp sivrisi by some retailers is another issue. They sell some other products but promote them as Ürgüp sivrisi. Since some farmers started to prefer to irrigate for more product, the flavor of those products altered. Thus, dry farming is more promising in terms of authenticity. On the other hand, even the most traditionally produced products do not have the same flavor in comparison to the past. The climate change forced the farmers to manage the growth of the plants and those who have irrigation opportunity have started to give pumpkins some growth encouraging chemicals within legal limits. In dry farming, they do not apply these or any other tools due to technical limitations. The interviewees state that there are novel diseases in many plants and they have to intervene this situation even though they do not want to use any chemicals. They also state that some dry farming products are not profitable at all and farmers avoid producing them. This is considered as a major threat to agricultural production. The only opportunity to sell the conventional dry farming products is the local markets but there is not much demand. Less snowfall and other altered precipitation have many negative outcomes for farming in the territory. As the impacts of climate change are accompanied with economic problems such as profitability, farmers are facing a tougher situation to manage; thus, authenticity concern is ignored since ‘survival’ is the major issue. The efforts initiated for organic production have not been very successful for the same reason. Geographical indication efforts do require some financial resources and this prevents more efforts on the issue since financial opportunities of the farmers and institutions are quite limited. Beside these issues, the interviewees think that farmers’ approach is also a matter of concern. They state that most farmers cannot actually understand the value of those authentic products and this prevents them from making efforts for the sustainability of authenticity. In addition, the interviewees, after noting the emigration issues, state that younger people do not wish to adopt the conventional agricultural lifestyle and this can even result in the extinction of ancient seeds.

**Interviewee 1:** There are climate change related issues in pumpkin seed production. We are trying to optimize the growing period because the climate is changing and leaving us a shorter period of time to grow the plant. We used to have 120 days to grow the pumpkins but we have only 90 days now.

**Interviewee 1:** There are also disease problems in plants, especially viral diseases, mainly because of the changes in precipitation and temperature.

**Interviewee 2:** Viticulture is now done with irrigation. You get more yield this way. Only those who do not have access to water do it the traditional way, through dry farming. However, the flavor of grapes which are grown through dry farming is richer. Dry-farming products are generally better but you get less yield. ... Now, we have to use more pesticides because we have more health issues and we focus more on efficiency.

**Interviewee 2:** 15 years ago, we tested organic apricot agriculture. Because the yield was low, some farmers even used chemicals secretly. In the end, we were unable to adopt organic farming.

**Interviewee 2:** We would like to have geographical indication but even these efforts cost too much.

### **Bahçeli Dried Plum and Dried Apricot**

Bahçeli village is located in Ürgüp, Nevşehir. The village is known for its dried plum and dried apricot. Villagers

report that those trees have been there for a very long time and new trees are produced from them. However, those commercialized versions of fruits are just processed in Bahçeli but imported from various locations. After being processed, they are mostly exported. Those authentic plums and apricots are traditionally dried without using any chemicals and used domestically but not evaluated commercially. Since fresh ones can be used only for a limited period, they are usually referred as dried plum and dried apricot – rather than just plum and apricot – due to their final form of use. They are still grown through dry farming. Having no financial or marketing concern allows the farmers focus on quality and health. They report that these products were not able to attract customers when they tried to sell them in the local marketplace. Since these are technically healthier and higher quality products in comparison to those commercialized versions, the villagers criticize that customers' taste was not developed upon these facts but only on marketing 'hype'. This also proves that marketing efforts are needed for a better commercialization of authentic products. Being unable to convince the customers about the value of these authentic products demotivated many farmers and this situation is resulting in less production of authentic agricultural products. This vicious circle can only be broken with systematic marketing efforts. Bahçeli villagers also report many issues related with climate change, such as increased pests and novel diseases. Thus, they have to use more chemicals although they would not prefer to do. According to the interviewees, geographical indication efforts are important for marketing advantage. They also emphasize that they use ancient seeds for wheat production and they use it domestically. They use the wheat flour for whole bread production and making some other conventional Turkish dishes. Plum and apricot are used for making jams and apricot is also used for making apricot dolma (stuffed apricots) and apricot ragout. Bahçeli village also suffers emigration and this is visibly observed in left vineyards. The villagers complain that destination managing authority ignores their culture and lifestyle and focuses too much on tourists. This makes the already difficult situation in agriculture even more difficult. For example, many efforts to preserve historical heritage are made at the cost of living culture. In other words, destination managing authority and other relevant institutions are trying to preserve historical heritage but they do ignore the living culture and local people. Thus, there is a visibly limited approach to cultural heritage and the past is overvalued while the present is undervalued. However, the cultural heritage, including gastronomical heritage, is a whole and local people are among the essential elements even from a pure commercial (or tourism-focused) view. Just like the other villagers interviewed in this study, Bahçeli villagers report that villagers do not produce what they need but what they sell. In other words, they are buying eggs, milk, and etc. from the stores. Thus, the traditional villagers, who produce almost everything they need, are going extinct. This makes them more vulnerable to the "super-powerful" financial system, which, in the end, threatens authentic ways of production and production of authentic agricultural goods. Another worry is that this unpleasant situation can continue and ancient seeds and those conventional trees may go extinct.

**Interviewee 7:** The consumers have no taste for food. They have a taste for package. Those we grow from ancient seeds, those high-quality ones do not attract them. They are attracted by the size of fruit, by just fancy appearance and larger size.

**Interviewee 7:** Climate change is visible. There is more humidity and higher temperatures. There are more insects. I had to use some pesticide on my walnut trees, yesterday.

**Interviewee 8:** The wheat I use, for example, is black (referring to a very dark color) and I make bread out of it.

**Interviewee 8:** We want to produce but the destination managing authority does not allow us to do that freely. In

the past, we used to grow our plants on our land. Now, we are not allowed to grow plants in some places; and they built roads on some of the agricultural land, then where should we grow our plants?

### **Ayhan Eggplant**

Ayhan (officially Büyükayhan) village is located in Avanos district. The village is also known as Ayhanlar (means Ayhans referring to the merged villages of Büyükayhan and Küçükayhan). Villagers report that Ayhan eggplant is being grown there for a very long time, which is confirmed by regional experts. There is no information on how the first plant was grown there or where it came from. Since eggplant is being cultivated in Asia for thousands of years (Daunay & Janick, 2007) and Ayhan village is a Turkish settlement (Kavalçalan, 2023), Turkish tribes might have brought this plant here. However, this indirect inference should be confirmed by various research. The interviewees state that there have been efforts to grow Ayhan eggplant in different parts of the country or province but the characteristics changed. Thus, it is quite a unique agricultural product. They produce their own seeds from the plants; thus, it continues to be unique. The villagers report that they used to grow eggplants through dry farming but they, more recently, prefer to irrigate due to productivity concerns. Currently, there is not any water scarcity problem in the territory. The villagers report that they do not use any chemicals in eggplant production. They do also want to gain geographical indication for Ayhan eggplant. They mostly sell the eggplants at retail in local markets throughout the province and they do not report any problem related to demand. They complain that some other sellers sell other types of eggplants as if they were Ayhan eggplants, thus cheat the customers using the fame of it. Beside other ethical concerns, they think this will harm the image of Ayhan eggplant. Senior villagers report that Ayhan eggplant used to be sort of white but it is currently purple-like. Although they are not sure why it changed, they guess that changes in soil structure might be the reason. The villagers do not observe any climate change impact on eggplants. A dam (Ayhanlar dam) was built in Ayhan village about 20 years ago (DSİ, 2024) and this increased the humidity in the region. However, many vineyards were destroyed since they are now under water. The villagers state that they used to produce grape molasses for domestic use but they cannot do it anymore since they lost the vineyards. They used to produce eggplant jam using grape molasses (rather than sugar) so they also stopped making eggplant jam. They used to conserve those eggplants for domestic use in jars or as dried but they prefer keeping them in the refrigerators now. Thus, they report that leaving the conventional preservation ways has resulted in flavor changes in the final use of the eggplants. They continue to apply the same recipes with their ancestors in eggplant-containing dishes but they state that the tourists visiting the region cannot access these authentic dishes since the restaurants do not offer any of them. In other words, they indicate the promotional disadvantage due to the local restaurants' approach. A serious worry stated by the villagers is that many villagers prefer to buy some easily-producible goods (such as eggs or milk) from stores rather than producing themselves as they did in the past. Younger people do not prefer to continue an agricultural lifestyle and emigrate. The emigration issue is relatively less serious in comparison to the other rural places of Nevşehir probably due to Ayhan's fertile lands but it is still a problem. Thus, it is considered as a serious threat to the sustainability of authentic cuisine elements.

**Interviewee 3:** The eggplant seeds are ancient seeds. ... We used to do dry farming but we irrigate now.

**Interviewee 3:** The color of eggplants used to be white. Now, it changed. They are light purplish and kind of striped now.

**Interviewee 3:** We did not use to have refrigerators or deep freezers, so we used to dry or pickle them. We also

used to make jam out of eggplant. Because we also used to add grape molasses to make its jam, we cannot do it now because there is not that much grape production due to the fact that we lost many vineyards.

**Interviewee 4:** I still cook the eggplant dishes in the way I learnt from my ancestors. In our village, the locals did not use to buy anything from somewhere else but they used to produce everything themselves. Once they went out (s/he is referring to the locals' migration and more frequent visits to the cities), they started to imitate (that city life); they stopped producing; they even buy yoghurt (rather than producing it).

**Interviewee 5:** Some dishonest people sell some other eggplants as if they were Ayhan eggplants. This just harms the reputation of Ayhan eggplant.

### **Topaç Garlic**

Topaç village is located within the borders of Acıgöl district. It is reported that garlic seeds, at first, were brought to Topaç village from Babaeski, Kırklareli and Topaç villagers started to produce their own seeds from the garlics they grew. Babaeski garlic is known for a very long time and the seeds are regarded as ancient seeds (Trakya Development Agency, 2023). Throughout years, the garlic grown in Topaç evolved and Topaç garlic was created. Topaç garlic is known for its strong and unique flavor. Moreover, preservation time is longer as the interviewees state. There have been efforts to grow Topaç garlic in other parts of Nevşehir but characteristics of the plant changed. A garlic processing facility (for peeling and packaging garlic) was founded in Topaç so that the villagers could sell more refined products. However, the interviewees, without rejecting the benefit of the facility, do note many marketing – especially promotional – challenges. Conventionally, Topaç villagers do not use any chemicals while growing garlic. However, they state that they faced some disease and pest issues recently. So, they had to use some chemicals within legal limits but there were some flavor issues in those products. Due to this altered flavor, the facility management do not prefer the garlics in this sort of conditions. Topaç villagers also note that changes in precipitation times caused some issues, such as fungal issues, in garlic production. Garlic is grown through dry farming and this has a major impact on flavor. Misuse of Topaç garlic's fame is criticized by the interviewees and it is considered as a serious threat to the image. The fields in Topaç are usually smaller and villagers do not want to grow garlic for the next season when garlic prices are low in the current season. This causes fluctuations in production and this is another threat sustainability. Keeping profitability high is even more important for small-scale producers. According to the interviewees, if garlic prices continue to be low for a few consecutive years then producers may totally stop producing garlic. In other words, financial limitations make this authentic product so vulnerable. There are geographical indication efforts and Topaç garlic has already been selected as one of the best in some international competitions. If these are wisely used for promotional purposes then sustainability could be better established according to the interviewees. The processing facility in Topaç do also process some imported garlics but demand for Topaç garlic is reported to be quite higher.

**Interviewee 6:** Actually, its origin is Babaeski. It is grown from ancient seeds. It has a strong and tasty flavor.

**Interviewee 6:** The farmers produced plenty of garlic last year but the price was low. Now, they did not produce that much and price is higher.

**Interviewee 6:** We do dry farming. ... We used to use manure as fertilizer but we faced disease issues in plants. Then we turned into chemical fertilizers; this changed the flavor.

**Interviewee 6:** Mostly, the farmers do not use pesticides. Products on which the pesticides were used are not accepted to the processing facility of the union.

**Interviewee 6:** Changes in precipitation are challenging. When it rains a lot, we face fungal disease issues in plants; when it does not rain enough, we face yield issues; when it rains in times it shouldn't, we face mold issues in the product.

**Interviewee 6:** We want to gain geographical indication because they sell other garlicks as if they were Topaç garlicks (we want to prevent this).

### **Kalaba Creamy Yoghurt**

Kalaba town is located within the borders of Avanos district and the town is on a major highway which also reaches to Kayseri, a major province in the region. Kalaba is about the same distance, around 55 kilometers, both from Kayseri and Nevşehir. Although Kalaba is a small town, the current population is quite diverse. In addition to immigrants from other places, there are also local people who are the retirees of European countries, mostly Germany.

Kalaba creamy yoghurt (or Kalaba butter yoghurt) can be defined as sort of a butter consumed traditionally like a yoghurt. The content is roughly 80% butter and 20% milk. The local people call it “machine-head” (Tur. makina başı) which refers to the tap of the tool they use for producing butter. In the literature, it is usually referred as machine-mouth or machine-nozzle (Tur. makina ağzı) (see e.g. Esen et al. 2020; Demir Özer et al., 2021) but locals do not prefer this name. In order to produce Kalaba creamy yoghurt, they first produce butter and heat it up then mix it with milk. This mixture is rested like yoghurt. The locals report that some people use yoghurt instead of milk but the taste changes a lot with that method and locals do not prefer that. It is unknown when Kalaba yoghurt was first invented but it is reported that it is known since Kalaba town was built in the early 1800s. In the earlier times, Kalaba creamy yoghurt used to be produced out of sheep milk. Later on, native breed cow milk, which was quite high quality and rich in fat, was used. However, milk from hybrid cows is currently used and it is reported that the quality is lower and it is not rich in fat. Even the texture of the product altered, as a result. They cannot give up higher-amount milk producer breeds because they sell milk rather than creamy yoghurt. Native people of Kalaba traditionally eat Kalaba yoghurt at breakfast. The locals state that they cannot totally commercialize Kalaba creamy yoghurt since the production efficiency is naturally low which results in higher cost and higher price. There are a couple of small businesses which produce Kalaba creamy yoghurt commercially but the taste is not on par with the home-made ones. Since Kalaba creamy yoghurt is of high quality but not very well-known, some after-sellers promote it like some other more famous yoghurts such as water buffalo yoghurt. This unethical behavior harms the promotional efforts on Kalaba creamy yoghurt. The locals report that climate change issues are quite visible. Since water is not anymore abundant in the town, this is reported to have had some major impacts on animal husbandry activities. Kalaba people currently have to rely on dry agriculture and they even have to import some wheat. There are issues in grain production due to precipitation changes and some stress issues in animals due to higher temperatures. These all have undesirable outcomes for Kalaba creamy yoghurt production directly or indirectly. Another issue reported by locals is that people do not have much desire to work. They report that the projects aimed at the employment of women are almost failing since they do not want to work even if they are financially in need; instead, they want to rely on the relative advantage of social roles rather being financially independent. According to the interviewees, the women's approach is putting pressure also on their role in traditional production since they have been taking the major role in

the production of dairy products. Leaving the traditional roles while not adopting an industrial culture is the real social dilemma to be dealt for a more sustainable conventional and professional production of Kalaba creamy yoghurt. Due to the fact that the town has a limited workforce, if more men employees are shifted to Kalaba creamy yoghurt production, then the other sectors are likely to suffer from insufficient workforce. These all indicate the dependency of an authentic product on the social, or related such as socio-economical, setup.

**Interviewee 10:** It (Kalaba creamy yoghurt) used to be made even in my grandparents' time (the interviewee is a senior citizen). In those times, we used to make it out of sheep milk.

**Interviewee 11:** Our native breed cows were producing less milk but we used to get more cream out of that. Now, we have Holsteins, they produce plenty of milk but we cannot get that much cream out of that.

**Interviewee 11:** We wanted to found a manufacturing business, a wheat processing facility, and we were planning to employ only women. However, it did not work; women did not want to have jobs. Then we had to employ whomever we can find.

### **Kaymaklı Dried Cream**

Kaymaklı dried cream is basically a milk cream which is dried, as its name suggests. It is unknown when it was first developed but they report that it is being produced in Kaymaklı for a very long time. The villagers developed this product since they did not use to have refrigerators or any other cold preservation systems. However, they continued to produce this product traditionally even after they had these possibilities since they like the taste and demand for this product remained higher. They emphasize that especially tourists demand this product. They state that the changes in livestock inventory and grazing opportunities affected the quality of Kaymaklı dried cream. In the past, they used to raise native breed cows and these animals used to graze a lot. In the winter, they used to feed them with clovers. Currently, the animals are hybrid cows and they just feed them in the barns due to the lack of grazing opportunities. In the earlier past, sheep milk is also reported to be used. The current quality of Kaymaklı dried cream, despite still being high, is reported to be decreased. While selling the product, the producers prefer to sell it to the end consumer, usually to tourists, because the restaurants and hotels are willing to pay only a very low price. The production methods are still traditional but there are not many producers and the younger generations do not show any interest in producing authentic products. Moreover, the social changes, such as changing gender roles, changing attitudes toward hard work, and even unwillingness to work all threaten the sustainability of Kaymaklı dried cream. The interviewees state that the farmers are obliged to sell their products very cheap since they are vulnerable in the economic system. They are not well organized and remain disadvantageous in comparison to merchants. They suggest that manufacturing facilities could be built to produce authentic products such as Kaymaklı dried cream with some governmental incentive; thus, more power could be gained in the market. That could also attract younger generations due to financial benefits, according to the interviewees.

**Interviewee 9:** Now, the animals changed. They applied artificial insemination. Most of the cows are now hybrids. The native breeds produce less milk but with higher fat content which is good for cream production. However, Holsteins, for example, produce a lot of milk but with less fat.

**Interviewee 9:** Especially tourists show a lot of interest in Kaymaklı dried cream.

**Interviewee 9:** Now, the men became women and the women became men (husbands became wives and wives

became husbands) (indicating that both are unwilling to play their social roles in the traditional production system). The children (referring to the younger generations) say “Daddy you earn and I spend”. People want to get everything without any effort. Then how can people produce (who is to produce) if everybody wants to get everything readily?

**Table 1.** Key Codes & Categories

| Codes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Categories                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Irrigated farming (due to drought)<br>Drought<br>Growth season/duration and relevant changes<br>Precipitation issues<br>New plant diseases<br>Less and lower quality grazing opportunities<br>Becoming obliged to use chemicals                                                                                                                                                                               | Climate change & other environmental issues/factors |
| Preferring industrial farming (seeds, methods, etc.) due to productivity concerns<br>Ancient seeds/Inhouse seeds<br>Native vs. industrial breed animals<br>Dry-farming<br>Challenges of productivity due to traditional methods<br>Flavor, taste, and other sensory issues<br>Preferring bovine rather than ovine (for productivity)<br>Some continuation of traditional methods of production                | Authenticity issues/factors                         |
| Social structure<br>Social context<br>Changes in social roles (and their reflection on the division of work)<br>Attitudinal changes towards work<br>Ignorance of local people & living culture<br>Changes in consumer preferences<br>Ethical issues<br>Less and less villager families & migration issues<br>Promotional and other marketing challenges (including the challenges of geographical indication) | Social and other issues/factors                     |

**Table 2.** Nevsehir’s authentic agricultural products: Uses, authenticity value, changes & issues

| Product        | Primary traditional use(s)                                                                                                          | Authenticity                                                                   | Changes and issues                                                                          |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pumpkin Seed   | •Snack                                                                                                                              | •Native seeds<br>•Unique flavor                                                | •Climate Change/growing season issues                                                       |
| Grape          | •Fresh or dried fruits<br>•Wine, grape molasses, köftür (a dessert), and aside (a dessert)                                          | •Native seeds<br>•Well-embedded into the local culture                         | •Climate change/water issues, flavor issues, plant disease issues                           |
| Ayhan eggplant | •Roasted-dried eggplant (to be used in dishes)<br>•Dried eggplant (to be used in dishes)<br>•Fresh eggplant dishes<br>•Eggplant jam | •Native seeds<br>•Distinctive flavor and color                                 | •Color change<br>•Issues in social base for traditional production (non-producer villagers) |
| Topaç Garlic   | •Add-in to dishes<br>•Garlic pickle or add-in to other pickles                                                                      | •In-house produced and locally adapted seeds<br>•Strong and distinctive flavor | •Climate change issues/plant diseases, precipitation issues                                 |

**Table 2.** Nevşehir's authentic agricultural products: Uses, authenticity value, changes & issues (cont.)

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bahçeli dried plum    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dried or seasonally fresh fruits as snacks</li> <li>•Plum jam (out of fresh ones)</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Native trees</li> </ul>                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Flavor change issues</li> <li>•Climate change/Plant disease issues</li> <li>•Changing consumer preferences/taste</li> <li>•Too much tourism orientation of the destination managers at the cost of agriculture and other activities</li> </ul>          |
| Bahçeli dried apricot | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dried or seasonally fresh fruits as snacks</li> <li>•Stuffed apricots</li> <li>•Apricot jam (out of fresh ones)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Native trees</li> <li>•Ability to preserve firmness for longer time (some varieties)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Flavor change issues</li> <li>•Climate change/Plant disease issues</li> <li>•Changing consumer preferences/taste</li> <li>•Too much tourism orientation of the destination managers at the cost of agriculture and other activities</li> </ul>          |
| Kaymaklı dried cream  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Breakfast food</li> </ul>                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Locally developed-unique product</li> <li>•Unique taste</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Loss of native breed animals</li> <li>•Decreasing grazing opportunities (As climate change and land use issues)</li> <li>•Inability to sustain traditional production in the industrial era</li> <li>•Inability to commercialize the product</li> </ul> |
| Kalaba creamy yoghurt | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Breakfast food</li> </ul>                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Locally developed-unique product</li> <li>•Unique taste</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Loss of native breed animals</li> <li>•Decreasing grazing opportunities (As climate change and land use issues)</li> <li>•Inability to sustain traditional production in the industrial era</li> <li>•Inability to commercialize the product</li> </ul> |

In general, both social and climate change related issues seem to be threatening all these products. As can also be inferred from Table 2, animal products, sharing the same authenticity value and issues, seem more vulnerable.

## Conclusion & Discussion

An important result of this study is that it illustrates – especially in Ayhan, Kaymaklı, and Kalaba cases – the local cuisine's relation to the social roles and social context. An authentic local cuisine is formed through a long time and in a social context. When there are rapid developments which alter the structure of society, such as industrialization, then the local cuisine cannot adapt to the novel situation since it is detached from its basis. However, at least as an authentic value to be preserved, local cuisine elements might be integrated into the commercially vibrant industrial world as just “products with (hi)story”. This could risk the authenticity as well but the discussion could then go around the term “staged authenticity” which does not necessarily mean inauthenticity (see: Cohen, 1988). When the staged authenticity approach is adopted, commercialization/commodification discussion will not be over. Even more

challengingly, the complexities and ambiguities of post-modern era could make greater difficulties about what to focus on for authenticity, starting with a discussion of its contemporary meaning (see e.g. Heitmann, 2011). Nevertheless, there are successful examples of staged authenticity at least in terms of consumer perception (see e.g. Chhabra et al., 2003). Future studies may focus on how to make this transformation, from authentic cultural product to authentic tourism product, successfully in such a complicated era. Other, but not less challenging, alternative could be the preservation of culture and lifestyle as original as possible. This could also require some adaptation to industrialization but the focus should be on culture and the commercial truth should be just a motivation and a tool for the preservation of culture (rather than culture being a tool of gaining competitive advantage). The villager lifestyle could be promoted through both promotional activities, such as some concept movies or even commercials, and various governmental incentives. This may have an impact on younger generations and ultimately contribute to sustainability. Social context seems to be the last knot of the ‘fabric’ which also includes local cuisine. In case it is untied for any reason, then the whole system is put at great risk. Then a destination needs to either preserve these knots or replace them with new ones.

Culture is quite complicated and possesses many other elements in addition to cuisine. Moreover, social structure, as well as culture, is in relation with many factors. Controlling all these variables does not seem quite possible. Thus, tourism practitioners should adopt a well-established multidisciplinary vision. Local cuisine assets, such as those authentic products in this study, could be focused with this wide perspective. In other words, a complicated issue such as preserving authentic local cuisine assets requires a visionary perspective comprehensive enough to consider the wide range of relevant factors.

The factors affecting agriculture have inevitably local cuisine outcomes. Climate change is clearly a major issue to worry about local cuisine. The Central Anatolia, including Nevşehir, has already suffered from degradation of nature (Öner et al., 2016) which is quite related with the current climate concerns. Moreover, drought and other water-related issues accompanied and/or triggered by increases in temperatures, decreases/fluctuations in precipitation, and increases in extreme meteorological events/extreme temperatures (Kızılelma et al., 2015; Özfıdaner et al., 2016; Acar, 2018; Acar & Gönençgil, 2018; Şen, 2022; Çamalan et al, 2023; Coban Yıldız & Yıldız, 2024c; TSMS, 2024) indicate serious issues for Nevşehir. Thus, rehabilitation efforts (such as those suggested by Öner et al., 2016) are quite crucial. Sustainability of an authentic cuisine, or the preservation of natural resources of authentic cuisine, does not seem possible unless the preservation, and if necessary, rehabilitation, of nature is achieved. Inappropriate methods in agriculture should also be questioned again considering threats and current issues. For example, expected changes which are likely to impact grape production (An et al., 2024) should be considered. Flavor or visual changes in the local products should be monitored and managed. Otherwise, they could become ordinary products, thus lose their distinctive characteristics; or they could even become worse than an ordinary agricultural product in terms of technical quality. Productivity concern for native plants and native breed animals could be compensated through better promotion since their quality is higher. In line with the high value of authenticity, significance of visual appeal of authentic food products, and significance of securing a steady supply of related food products assumed from the results of this study, Gupta & Sharma’s (2024) study in Fiji highlights similar factors. This set of similar findings determined in two quite different destinations by different researchers is significant.

As some interviewees note the significance of formal approval of the authenticity of related products which are

already authentic in essence, this indicates the relation between cool and hot authenticity (or authentication) both of which are described by Cohen & Cohen (2012). In other words, possession of an authentic product may not be sufficient to get the most out of it for the tourism industry unless the authenticity, or any other related originality, is confirmed officially. On the other hand, geographical indication is not the only way of acquiring this confirmation and relevant patents including those gained by private companies could also serve the same purpose. There is also future research potential of cool and hot authentication in local cuisine matters.

Preservation, or sustainability, of local cuisine is as complicated as its initial formation. Local cuisine seems to be under serious threat for various reasons from social challenges to climate change. The commercial world puts great pressure, especially as limitations, on any effort for local cuisines' sustainability. Thus, this truth should also be considered in the adaptation of local cuisines into the modern era and innovative ways should be sought in order to overcome the dilemmas such as efficiency vs. quality, social advancement vs. preservation of traditions, changing consumer tastes vs. originality of the local dish, and etc. Future studies or practically-oriented projects could focus on these issues.

Lastly, it is useful to note that although the products examined in this study is regarded as Nevşehir's authentic products for the indicated reasons, that does not mean that there is no similar product elsewhere. Especially geographical and cultural similarities have inevitably resulted in the creation of similar products. For example, pumpkin seed and various grapes are grown in Ankara (Ermiş, 2010; Ankara Provincial Government, 2015). Erzincan and Sivas are also provinces in which another sort of dried cream is produced but they usually make it out of sheep or goat milk (Atamer et al., 2016; Albay et al., 2021); which may even indicate a higher level of authenticity. The province of Kayseri, Nevşehir's neighbor, has geographically indicated Yamula eggplant (Yönet Eren & Ceyhun Sezgin, 2021; Uysal et al., 2023). Babaeski garlic is another geographically indicated product from a far-away territory (Trakya Development Agency, 2023) and Topaç garlic's ancestor. Yahyalı butter yoghurt (Tur. Yahyalı yağ yoğurdu) is produced in Yahyalı district of Kayseri. For sure these products will never be the same as long as they are based on local sources (e.g. in-house seeds and unspoiled fertile land for plant products and native breed animals grazed on unspoiled local pasture for animal products). Once again, this also means that any standardization in the industrial sense (e.g. using the same breed of animal and feeding them with a standardized, i.e. same content of, food) will harm the authenticity of relevant products.

## Declaration

All authors of the article contributed equally to the article process. The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. The ethical board confirmation of this research was received from Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board as stated in the report dated July 30, 2024 with the decision number 2024.08.204.

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**Appendix 1. Ethics Committee Permission**

T.C.  
NEVŞEHİR HACI BEKTAŞ VELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ  
Bilimsel Araştırmalar ve Yayın Etik Kurulu

TOPLANTI SAYISI  
08

KARAR SAYISI  
2024.08.204

TOPLANTI TARİHİ  
30.07.2024

**Üniversitemiz Turizm Fakültesi Öğretim Elemanı Arş. Gör. Dr. Onur Şevket YILDIZ'ın "On The Traces Of Authenticity For Local Cuisine: Nevşehir's Key Local Agricultural Products" isimli bilimsel araştırma projesi hakkında alınan 10.07.2024 tarih ve 2400063569 sayılı yazının görüşülmesi.**

**2024.08.204** Üniversitemiz Turizm Fakültesi Öğretim Elemanı Arş. Gör. Dr. Onur Şevket YILDIZ'ın "On The Traces Of Authenticity For Local Cuisine: Nevşehir's Key Local Agricultural Products" isimli bilimsel araştırma projesi hakkında alınan 10.07.2024 tarih ve 2400063569 sayılı başvuru dosyası görüşüldü.

Yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda, aşağıdaki tabloda isimleri belirtilen araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan **"On The Traces Of Authenticity For Local Cuisine: Nevşehir's Key Local Agricultural Products"** isimli araştırma projesi dosyası ve ilgili belgeler araştırmanın gerekçe, amaç, yaklaşım ve yöntemleri dikkate alınarak incelenmiş olup, projenin gerçekleştirilmesinde etik sakınca bulunmadığına kurulumuz üyeleri tarafından oy birliği ile karar verilmiştir.

| YÜRÜTÜCÜ                         | ARAŞTIRMACI/UZMAN                 |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Arş. Gör. Dr. Onur Şevket YILDIZ | Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Gamze ÇOBAN YILDIZ |

- \* Prof. Dr. Muhammet Şevki AYDIN toplantıya katılmadı.
- \* Prof. Dr. Lütfi BUYRUK toplantıya katılmadı.
- \* Prof. Dr. Suzan ÇOBAN toplantıya katılmadı.
- \* Prof. Dr. Zübeyde KUMBIÇAK toplantıya katılmadı.

Belge Doğrulama Kodu: HU3U3EU

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