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The effect of preserving and celebrating culinary traditions on emotional well-being in multicultural societies: a case study of Hatay, UNESCO City of Gastronomy

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the impact of preserving and celebrating gastronomic traditions in Hatay on emotional well-being following the city's designation as a UNESCO Gastronomy City. The research was informed by an evaluation of existing literature and a qualitative methodology, which involved conducting face-to-face interviews. The participants indicated that culinary traditions and celebrations serve to reinforce the bonds between family members and friends, and provide an opportunity to address emotional needs and repair relationships. Such events serve to reinforce social connections, enhance feelings of attachment to one's social group, and have a beneficial impact on social interactions. Furthermore, it was emphasised that culinary traditions play a significant role in the preservation of cultural identity, and that the continuation of these traditions fosters social harmony and cultural diversity. In conclusion, the preservation and celebration of culinary traditions in Hatay has been found to increase emotional well-being, ensure the sustainability of cultural heritage, and strengthen social ties.

KEYWORDS

Culinary traditions; multicultural societies; well-being; emotional well-being; Hatay

Introduction

Food is not merely a biological necessity; it is also a profound cultural and social phenomenon. Over time, the role of food has evolved to encompass not only its basic nutritional function, but also a range of vital social and cultural functions. Food serves as a conduit for social interaction, facilitating connections and reinforcing relationships through the act of sharing (Rozin, 2005). Furthermore, it holds symbolic value within religious and cultural contexts, and has become a form of aesthetic expression, shaped by cultural values and traditions (Mintz, 1997). The manner in which food is prepared, consumed, and ritualised reflects a society's historical and cultural identity, becoming associated with concepts such as home, family, and security (Anderson, 2014). Hatay, known in antiquity as the "Queen of the East" (Orientis Apicem Pulcrum), has historically been home to numerous civilisations, including the Assyrians, Hittites, Persians, Macedonians, Egyptians, Romans, Arab

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Muslims, Seljuks, Crusaders, Mamluks, and Ottomans (Kaypak, 2010). Following the cessation of hostilities in World War I, Hatay remained under the French mandate. In 1936, the region began to be referred to as Hatay under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey. In 1938, the State of Hatay was established, and in 1939, Hatay officially joined the Republic of Turkey (Sökmen-Kök & Uşma, 2022). The province of Hatay is located in the south of Turkey, on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Iskenderun. Hatay is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Syria to the south and east, Adana to the northwest, Osmaniye to the north, and Gaziantep to the northeast. Hatay's strategic geographical location serves as a gateway to the Middle East, marking the point at which Mesopotamia meets the Mediterranean Sea. Beyond its inherent geological and tectonic characteristics, Hatay boasts a multifaceted tourism potential, attributable to its geographical and climatic characteristics. Hatay's religious diversity, exemplified by its ancient cities and numerous historical monuments, positions it as a significant tourist attraction. Furthermore, Hatay is recognised by UNESCO as one of the 57 creative cities in the field of Gastronomy, owing to its rich culinary culture, which serves as a nexus for diverse civilisations (UNESCO, 2024).

Culinary traditions are fundamental to the preservation of cultural identity and the promotion of social cohesion. Dietary habits serve to reflect both individual and collective identity (Counihan, 1999). The production, distribution, and consumption of food serve to reinforce social ties with family, friends, and religious beliefs. As Mary Douglas posits, the consumption of food is imbued with social codes that signify relationships and events (Beardswort & Keil, 2011). The consumption of food during shared meals serves as an expression of underlying social structures (Goody, 2013). The socio-cultural dimensions of food are in a state of constant evolution, with eating habits serving as a reflection of both social differences and relationships (Zubaida & Tapper, 2000). Food is utilised as a means of establishing connections with communities, recharging, and realigning oneself with nature and the divine (Armesto, 2007). As defined by Block et al. (2011), food well-being (FWB) represents the positive relationships that individuals have with food at the physical, psychological, emotional, and social levels. This concept underscores the notion that food plays a pivotal role in well-being, extending beyond the biological domain to encompass the psychological and social dimensions. Indeed, individuals' food consumption preferences are based on functional, symbolic, and hedonic goals, indicating that food serves not only nutritional purposes but also contributes to emotional states (Bellisle et al., 1998; Dye & Blundell, 2002; Gibson & Green, 2002; López-Olivares et al., 2020; Shimizu, 2003). The pleasure dimension of food is exemplified by Plato's distinction between "those who eat to live" and "those who live to eat," as well as Escoffier's assertion that "true happiness is based on good food" (İflazoğlu, 2020). The pleasure derived from food, as reflected in Plato's distinction between "those who eat to live" and "those who live to eat," serves to underscore its significant emotional implications. In regions with a rich culinary culture, such as Hatay, food serves as a source of social sharing and enjoyment (Türk & Şahin, 2004).

The impact of food on mood, emotions, and social relationships illustrates the substantial influence of food culture on individuals' psychological and social well-being, extending beyond its effects on physical health (Canetti et al., 2002; Macht, 2008; Rozin, 2005). In this context, food consumption is a social phenomenon shaped by a number of factors, including the type of food consumed, the methods used to produce it, the individuals

involved in its preparation, and the social interactions that occur around it. Culinary traditions are frequently commemorated through festivities that elicit feelings of joy, safeguard against misfortune, and reinforce social cohesion. The culinary culture of Hatay plays a significant role in the region's social practices. Therefore, it is important to explore how the preservation and celebration of these traditions affect emotional well-being. While there are numerous studies on a variety of subjects, including religion, politics, history, literature, sociology, gastronomy, and more, pertaining to individuals of diverse religious and denominational backgrounds residing in Hatay province, there is a notable absence of research examining the influence of preserving and celebrating culinary traditions on emotional well-being. The absence of a comprehensive investigation into the influence of preserving and celebrating the culinary traditions of individuals from diverse religious and sectarian groups residing in Hatay province on their emotional well-being underscores the significance of this subject. It is of paramount importance to gain insight into the role of celebrating culinary traditions on individuals' emotional well-being, particularly in multicultural societies, in order to ensure cultural and social sustainability. In this context, the research questions were formed by taking advantage of similar studies in the literature on the effects of celebrating culinary traditions on the role of individuals' emotional well-being (Ares et al., 2015; Batat et al., 2019; Block et al., 2011; Bublitz et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2021; Engel et al., 2011; Holder, 2019; López-Olivares et al., 2020; Piqueras-Fiszman & Jaeger, 2014; Rand et al., 2017; Rodríguez-Arauz et al., 2016; Rozin, 2005; Utter et al., 2016, 2017). In light of the aforementioned considerations, the research questions were formulated as follows:

> What are the effects of preserving and celebrating culinary traditions in Hatay on the emotional well-being of local people? What is being done to ensure that Hatay's culinary traditions are passed on to future generations?

This study aims to investigate the impact of maintaining culinary traditions on cultural identity and emotional well-being in the multicultural context of Hatay. The study focuses on individuals from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, including Muslim Alevis, Muslim Sunnis, Orthodox Arab Christians, and Orthodox Armenians. Antakya and Samandağ districts were specifically chosen for the research as they are areas where these diverse communities have historically coexisted, fostering a rich environment of cultural and culinary interaction. This is achieved through qualitative research involving in-depth interviews with 20 participants from these districts. The research assesses the efforts of the participants to preserve their identities and the influence of these practices on their emotional well-being. While the study is constrained to Christian and Muslim participants in Hatay, and its findings may not be widely generalisable, it is anticipated to make a substantial contribution to the gastronomy literature. The research presents novel insights into the nexus between culinary heritage and emotional well-being, underscoring the imperative of safeguarding social and cultural traditions.

Theoretical frameworks

Hatay and its cuisine

Multicultural societies are defined by the coexistence and interaction of diverse ethnic groups, languages, religions, and traditions. In this regard, Hatay province is a significant region of Turkey, distinguished by its multicultural structure and rich culinary heritage.

Hatay has a long history of multiculturalism, with Jews settling there 2300 years ago. It subsequently became a centre of paganism and then Christianity during the Hellenic, Roman, Byzantine, and Crusader periods. It later evolved into a city dominated by Islam during the Arab, Seljuk, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods (Diker & Erkan, 2017). A review of the history of Hatay reveals evidence of numerous civilisations occupying the region since 1800 BC, including the Akkadians, Hittites, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, and Ottomans, among others (Taşkın, 2019). As in the past, Hatay remains a city with a diverse religious and cultural landscape. The predominant religious beliefs in the region are Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, all coexisting harmoniously. In a study, Köşker et al. (2019) highlighted the slogan of Hatay: "No me, no you, no him, we exist." This underscores the importance of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among individuals of diverse backgrounds. Hatay's strategic location at the crossroads of trade and migration routes has enriched its cultural and culinary traditions. Over time, the blending of cultures has led to shared tastes and culinary practices, reinforcing the city's reputation as a "city of peace and tolerance" (Bozkır, 2013).

Hatay's distinctive gastronomic identity is shaped by its unique geographical location, abundant natural resources, and the cultural influences of the numerous civilisations that have inhabited the region. These factors have collectively contributed to the richness and diversity of Hatay's cuisine. The region's fertile lands and favourable climate allow for the cultivation of a wide variety of agricultural products, while its access to edible wild plants and livestock has enabled the development of countless traditional dishes (İflazoğlu, 2023). Today, Hatay's cuisine is a cornerstone of Turkish gastronomy, with approximately 600 food varieties that reflect centuries of historical and cultural interactions. Classic dishes such as künefe, tepsi kebabı, and oruk are emblematic of the region's culinary excellence. Studies by scholars such as Tekin (1993), Budak (2008), Şahin (2012), Tanrıverdi (2013), and Balcı (2014) have further illuminated the intricate details and significance of Hatay's gastronomic heritage. In 2004, UNESCO launched the Creative Cities Network to promote global diversity, support local cultural values, and highlight creativity in fields such as gastronomy. Hatay was designated a UNESCO City of Gastronomy in 2017, joining a prestigious group of 57 cities worldwide (UNESCO, 2017; UNESCO, 2024). This recognition not only celebrates Hatay's unique culinary heritage but also underscores its vital role in preserving and promoting cultural identity through gastronomy.

Well-being, emotional well-being and food

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2014) defines well-being as the realisation of one's potential, the ability to manage life's stresses, productive work performance, and contribution to society. This definition encompasses not only the absence of mental illness but also the experience of positive emotions (hedonia) and positive psychological and social functioning (eudaimonia) (Keyes et al., 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Various authors have approached well-being through different dimensions. Hettler (1984) categorised it into six dimensions: physical, intellectual, social, emotional, occupational, and spiritual. Alternatively, Veenhoven (2000) proposed four dimensions: good living conditions, value achievement, coping ability, and subjective well-being. The hedonic approach to well-being emphasises happiness, positive emotions, reduced negative emotions, and life satisfaction (Dzokoto et al., 2007; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Subjective well-being is defined

as the cognitive and emotional evaluation of life, typically assessed through positive and negative emotions as well as life satisfaction (Diener, 1984). Emotional well-being, a specific dimension of subjective well-being, reflects the intensity of positive emotions, the scarcity of negative emotions, and cognitive assessments of life (Diener et al., 2003; Diener & Lucas, 2000; Eschbacher, 2010; Keyes, 2000). Food well-being (FWB) is defined as "a positive psychological, physical, emotional, and social relationship with food at both individual and societal levels" (Block et al., 2011). Food consumption preferences are shaped by functional, symbolic, and hedonic goals (Bellisle et al., 1998; Dye & Blundell, 2002; Gibson & Green, 2002; López-Olivares et al., 2020; Shimizu, 2003). Accordingly, food influences not only physical health but also psychological functioning and emotional states. Plato's distinction between "those who eat to live" and "those who live to eat" and Escoffier's assertion that "true happiness is based on good food" (İflazoğlu, 2020) underscore the role of pleasure in food consumption. In regions with rich culinary cultures like Hatay, food serves as a source of pleasure, social sharing, and emotional well-being, occupying a central place in daily life (Türk & Şahin, 2004). Table 1 highlights the multi-faceted relationship between emotional well-being and culinary traditions in Hatay. It illustrates the dynamic interplay between cultural elements such as food sharing, festivals, and traditional celebrations, and aspects of emotional well-being, including happiness, stress relief, and a sense of belonging. The table underscores how these interactions contribute positively to the overall emotional well-being of individuals within the region.

The relationship between food and well-being has been extensively examined in the literature. Rozin (2005) investigated the symbolic meaning of food in human life. Block et al. (2011) introduced the FWB paradigm, which was expanded by Bublitz et al. (2013). Engel et al. (2011) examined the interplay between appetite, stiffness, depression, and emotional well-being in older adults. Ares et al. (2015) analysed the cross-cultural

Table 1. Conceptual link between multiculturalism and emotional well-being in Hatay.

Cultural Element *(Represent key cultural practices and societal features in Hatay, such as traditional food, festivals, and religious rituals.)*	Emotional Well-Being Component *(These elements enhance various dimensions of emotional well-being, like social bonding, happiness, and stress relief.)*	Connection/Impact *(Show how each cultural aspect positively impacts emotional well-being and the overall sense of community.)*
Traditional Cuisine (Food Sharing)	Social Bonding, Family Relationships	Shared meals strengthen social ties and emotional support, fostering a sense of belonging and community (Türk & Şahin, 2004).
Festivals and Celebrations	Community Cohesion, Joy, Stress Relief	Participating in cultural festivals and celebrations promotes positive emotions and collective well-being (Canetti et al., 2002).
Multicultural Society	Cultural Identity, Social Support	Interaction between various ethnic and religious groups enhances mutual respect and emotional support (Ryan & Deci, 2001).
Religious Practices and Rituals	Coping Mechanisms, Sense of Purpose	Spiritual and religious practices offer emotional comfort and a sense of purpose, contributing to mental health (Rozin, 2005).
Community Events (Shared Rituals)	Happiness, Life Satisfaction	Collective participation in communal rituals contributes to life satisfaction and emotional well-being (Keyes, 2000).

dimensions of food and well-being, while Rodríguez-Arauz et al. (2016) explored the impact of food attitudes on well-being in various cultural contexts. Utter et al. (2016) highlighted the benefits of students' cooking skills on nutrition, emotional well-being, and family relationships. Similarly, Rand et al. (2017) evaluated psychological, emotional, and social well-being in the context of obesity, and Holder (2019) emphasised the contribution of food consumption to general well-being. Cultural context significantly influences perceptions of food and well-being. Ares et al. (2015) found that sensory attributes, production methods, and cultural consumption contexts affect emotional and life satisfaction. Chang et al. (2021) demonstrated that food consumption motivations and emotions influence experiential values and well-being among tourists in Taiwan, emphasising the mediating role of food experiences. Piqueras-Fiszman and Jaeger (2014) revealed that consumption context significantly shapes emotional responses to food. Utter et al. (2017) showed that family meals enhance adolescents' emotional well-being and reduce depressive symptoms, especially among females, highlighting the protective effect of shared meals. Similarly, Batat et al. (2019) introduced the concept of Experiential Food Pleasure (EPF), identifying three stages in food well-being: contemplation, connection, and creation. The "food as health" paradigm has evolved into the broader "food as well-being" framework (Block et al., 2011). This approach necessitates exploring food not only as a nutritional necessity but also as a multifaceted contributor to psychological, physical, and social well-being at both individual and community levels. As evidenced by López-Olivares et al. (2020), adherence to culturally significant diets, such as the Mediterranean diet, enhances emotional well-being. Similarly, Berge et al. (2021) demonstrated the role of family meal routines during the COVID-19 pandemic in supporting dietary health and emotional well-being among young adults.

The literature reviewed in this section provides invaluable insights for our research on the role of food in fostering emotional well-being. The concept of food well-being (FWB) introduced by Block et al. (2011) offers a critical theoretical foundation, highlighting how food impacts not only physical health but also emotional well-being. This framework is particularly relevant to our study, which examines the intricate ways in which Hatay's rich culinary traditions influence emotional well-being. Ares et al. (2015) underscore the significance of cultural context in shaping food-related well-being, an idea that aligns closely with our investigation of Hatay's culinary heritage. The region's traditions, rooted in communal sharing of food, parallel the social benefits identified by Utter et al. (2017), who found that family meals contribute positively to emotional well-being, particularly among adolescents. Similarly, the findings of Chang et al. (2021) and Piqueras-Fiszman and Jaeger (2014) regarding the emotional responses evoked by food experiences provide a valuable lens through which to analyse the psychological and social functions of food in Hatay. These studies collectively inform our exploration of how food rituals in Hatay contribute to communal identity and emotional connections. By offering both theoretical insights and empirical examples, they enable us to contextualise the interplay between food consumption and emotional well-being in a multicultural setting. Moreover, they guide our understanding of how Hatay's culinary practices foster emotional and social resilience, emphasising the broader implications of food as a unifying cultural force.

Materials and methods

This research employs a qualitative method to analyse and evaluate the impact of preserving and celebrating the culinary traditions of Hatay, a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, on emotional well-being. Based on the findings of the literature review, eight questions were formulated under three main headings: gastronomic traditions (three questions), emotional well-being (three questions), and food and gastronomy in multicultural societies (two questions). These questions were refined with input from two experts in the field of gastronomy (Associate Professor and Assistant Professor) and used to develop an interview form for data collection.

The purposive sampling method (Patton, 2014) was employed, forming a small sample group with maximum diversity to identify unique details and commonalities across varying situations. While Bertaux (1981) and Mason (2010) consider a sample size of at least 15 sufficient for qualitative research, Charmaz (2006) suggests 25, Ritchie et al. (2003) recommend fewer than 50, and Green and Thorogood (2009) propose 20 participants as adequate. Within this framework, 20 participants of Muslim and Christian faiths were selected from Antakya and Samandağ districts, where diverse religious and ethnic groups constitute the majority.

The sample was selected using the criterion sampling method, with the primary criterion being local residents of Hatay province. Data saturation was reached when participants' answers began to repeat, and no new themes emerged. The interviews, conducted in October 2024, averaged 35 min and were recorded with participants' consent. To ensure validity and reliability, triangulation was employed by interviewing multiple participants, and the findings were presented meaningfully, allowing readers to relate the results to their own experiences. General principles were derived from individual observations (induction), and assumptions were made based on these principles (deduction).

Recurring phenomena identified during the interviews were analysed and categorised into themes, with their frequencies summarised in tables. The ethics committee approval for this study was granted by Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Ethics Committee (Decision No: E-21817443-050.99-430651, dated October 2024).

Analysing the data

In accordance with the qualitative research method, the research problem was initially identified. In this context, the following questions guided the research: What are the effects of protecting and celebrating the culinary traditions of Hatay, the UNESCO City of Gastronomy, on the perception of emotional well-being? and what measures are taken to transfer the culinary traditions in Hatay to future generations? A case study was selected as the research design. In analysing the data obtained, the opinions of local people were taken into account using the "content analysis" method. This enabled the emergence of similar and specific themes and the establishment of relationships between these themes. In the initial phase of the research, the interview forms completed by the participants were analysed. This involved the evaluation of all twenty forms. The data was then analysed in the computer environment, with similar expressions placed in the most appropriate themes and direct quotations from the participants included. In addition, the codes were harmonised and the research was carried out in accordance with the criteria of "credibility, transferability, consistency and confirmability" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam, 2018).

Findings

The research involved the interviewing of twenty participants residing in Hatay province, with the findings presented in a descriptive manner. The participants were assigned alphanumeric codes, with the first participant designated as U1 and the final participant designated as U20. The following section presents the demographic information of the participants who took part in the research. Upon examination of the demographic characteristics of the research participants, the following professions were identified: teacher, doctor, engineer, lawyer, farmer, religious official, and housewife. The majority of participants were married (95%) and within the 28–65 age range. Furthermore, it was determined that 50% of the participants in the study adhered to Islam and 50% to Christianity. The findings that emerged as a result of the questions designed to analyse and evaluate the concepts obtained from the data on the effect of Hatay's culinary traditions on emotional well-being and the analysis of participant opinions are presented below. The first question of the research is about Hatay's Culinary Traditions. Participants expressed their feelings about the celebration of Hatay's culinary traditions on special days as sustainability (cultural heritage) ($f = 12$), family ties ($f = 15$), cultural identity ($f = 9$) and happiness ($f = 9$). Some of the prominent data of the participants regarding the first question are given below.

> I think the continuation of our culture depends on these celebrations. (U2) It means being happy and together. (U11) Important because the celebration of traditions brings people together. (U15) I think it is necessary for the preservation of culture, that's why it is important. (U19) We protect our very important culture. (U9) We have been celebrating since my childhood, it is very important for my family, of course it is also for me. (U3) I think it is very important in terms of gastronomic and cultural identity. (U1) We have been celebrating these festivities for as long as I can remember, this is our way of life, it is indispensable for us. (U16) Bringing blessings to our lives, preserving our cultural identity. (U15)

The participants' answers to question 1 clearly demonstrate the indispensable role that cultural celebrations and the preservation of gastronomic traditions play in the lives of societies. Participants emphasised that these celebrations not only promote happiness and togetherness, but also play an important role in preserving cultural identity. These results are supported by similar studies in the literature (Bublitz et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2021; Engel et al., 2011; Rodríguez-Arauz et al., 2016). However, the most important conclusion here is that such celebrations are perceived as a heritage from the past to the present and serve to strengthen cultural identities and family ties at both individual and societal levels. Especially in societies that are multicultural in nature, the maintenance of culinary traditions plays an important role in the preservation and transmission of identity to future generations.

The second research question pertains to the existence of culinary traditions associated with special occasions that have been acquired from family elders. If the response was affirmative, the subsequent question inquired as to the specific traditions in question. When the data on the existence of culinary traditions associated with special occasions are analysed, it is seen that the respondents identified a number of culinary traditions associated with special occasions. These include sütlaç ($F = 12$), kömbe ($F = 15$), fellah meatballs ($F = 9$), oruk ($F = 9$), hırisi ($F = 9$), and the Virgin Mary Feast Soup ($F = 8$). The following section presents a selection of the most notable responses provided by participants in response to the second research question.

> Bırbara is prepared on 21 December, while rice pudding is made on 14 March. On 14 February, the preparation of fellah meatballs is customary. This practice is believed to promote fertility. (U4) During the Ramadan Feast, we prepare and serve kömbe to our guests. In the New Year, Oruk is prepared, while in March, Sütlaç is made to ensure the fertility of the spring. (U7) A variety of special occasions afford opportunities to practise culinary traditions, including the Egg Festival, New Year's Barbara Day, and the feast of the Virgin Mary. (U11) I have acquired knowledge of numerous traditions, including those associated with the egg, Barbara, the Virgin Mary, New Year, and Christmas. (U2) Additionally, the Ras el seni dishes, the egg and Barbara feasts that are celebrated with Christians, and the preparation of rice pudding in March as a spring blessing are observed. (U3) In February, the Fellah meatballs are prepared, while in March, rice pudding is made. The new year is marked by the preparation of Oruk. (U8) Additionally, Oruk is consumed at Christmas, and a dish made from legumes is prepared on the feast of Barbara. (U10)

The responses to question 2 indicate that various special days and festivals celebrated in Hatay are integrated with gastronomic traditions, with each event associated with specific rituals. While birbara is prepared in December, rice pudding is made in March, and in February, it is customary to prepare fellah köftesi, which is believed to increase fertility. A variety of religious and cultural events, including Christian holidays and New Year celebrations, are commemorated with traditional dishes such as oruk, kömbe, and rice pudding. The preparation of these dishes is not merely a nutritional practice; it is also regarded as a significant ritual that reinforces cultural identity, facilitates intergenerational transmission, and fosters social unity.

Upon analysis of Figure 1, the participants in the study indicated that memories of celebrating special days have a significant impact on emotional well-being, particularly in terms of feelings of unity ($F = 16$), happiness ($F = 13$), and longing ($F = 8$). The following section presents a selection of the most salient data provided by participants in response to the third research question.

> The act of sharing a meal with family and friends has a profound effect on my well-being, particularly when I am able to engage in the act of sharing a table. Furthermore, it evokes

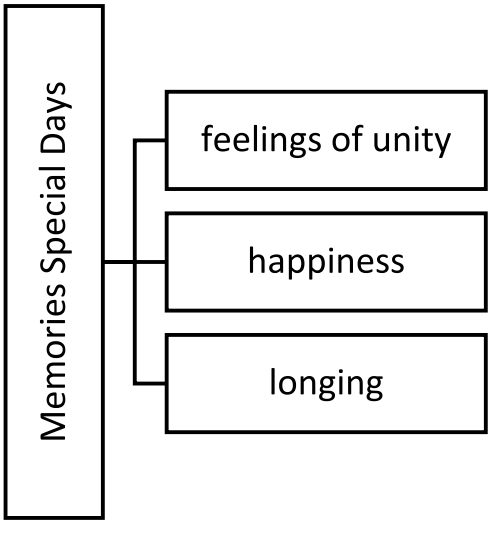


Figure 1. The effect of memories of celebrating special days on emotional well-being.

> memories of my childhood. We particularly recall our deceased relatives and recall the holidays we celebrated with them while they were alive. At times, I experience a sense of elation, while at others, a feeling of despondency. (U1)

> There are numerous individuals with whom I interact, and I currently have the opportunity to host a considerable number of guests from outside the immediate vicinity. All our loved ones are present, engaged in the preparation of meals and conversation. Such occasions evoke feelings of happiness. During these times, we experience a sense of unity and sharing, which in turn gives rise to a positive emotional state. (U9)

> I have recollections of past experiences. The act of collectively preparing and consuming meals in the context of Oruk, a traditional Hırisi practice, elicits a sense of physical and spiritual well-being. The shared experience of working for Hırisi from night to morning, and the enjoyment derived from it, contribute to a sense of unity and shared purpose. Additionally, the quality and variety of meals prepared and consumed during Oruk are perceived as enhancing the collective experience. The recollection of these experiences evokes a profound sense of joy and contentment, encapsulating the essence of our shared memories, conversations, meals, and the unparalleled happiness of children and elders. (U17)

> Such occasions invariably evoke a sense of tranquility and joy, as they typically encompass a gathering of the entire family. In particular, when relatives arrive from other locations, I experience a sense of personal worth. Typically, on such occasions, the entire family congregates, engages in conversation, performs folk songs, and partakes in the preparation and consumption of food. This is the manner in which we experience happiness. The sole recollection that remains is of gatherings with my cousins, during which we attempted to learn how to prepare traditional dishes. Those days were filled with joy, and I am gratified to recall them. (U14)

> It is a rare occurrence for us to convene with our entire network of friends and relatives. I will always retain a vivid recollection of our agreeable discourse. We engage in singing and partaking of food throughout the night, and I feel a sense of contentment as I recall the moments that have passed. I feel a profound sense of nostalgia. (U13)

> When I reflect on the experiences of assisting with culinary tasks during my childhood, I am overcome with a sense of fondness and a touch of nostalgia. (U20)

Responses to question 3 indicate that sharing a meal with family and friends has a significant impact on individual well-being and evokes a range of emotional meanings and experiences. The act of sharing a meal evokes a sense of both physical and spiritual fulfilment and serves to evoke childhood memories and other valued experiences from the past. These results are supported by similar studies (Ares et al., 2015; Batat et al., 2019; Block et al., 2011; Rand et al., 2017; Rozin, 2005). However, in this study, unlike other studies, it was found that the participants' experiences of preparing and sharing collective meals served to reinforce the sense of togetherness and social cohesion. Therefore, it can be stated that such experiences evoke a complex emotional response that includes both joy and nostalgia. Furthermore, the act of preparing food and the variety of these meals contributes to an enhanced collective experience, fostering a deeper sense of well-being and peace.

The responses to the fourth research question, "What emotions are experienced when preparing traditional Hatay dishes on special occasions?," yielded the following themes. The responses to the question, "What emotions do you experience while preparing traditional dishes of Hatay on special days?," are provided below.

Upon analysis of Figure 2, it becomes evident that the participants in the study identified the following emotions as being experienced when preparing traditional dishes of

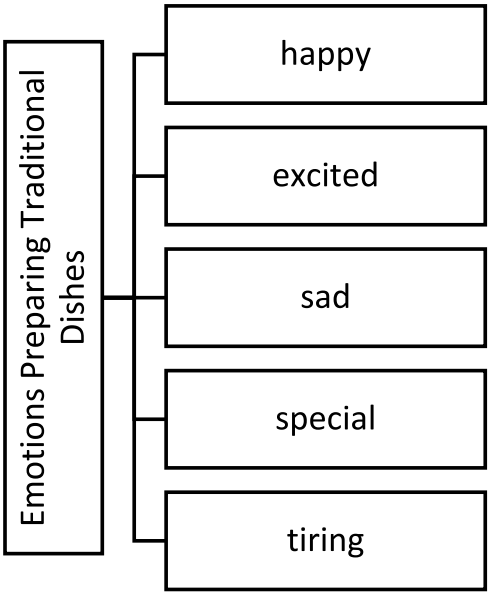


Figure 2. The emotions experienced when preparing traditional dishes of Hatay for special occasions.

Hatay for special occasions: happy ($F = 16$), excited ($F = 13$), special ($F = 8$), sad ($F = 5$), and tiring ($F = 2$). The following section presents a selection of the most notable data provided by the participants in response to the forth research question.

> I am gratified to observe the positive reactions of my children and guests to the traditional cuisine I prepare. While I do experience some fatigue due to the physical exertion involved in the preparation process, I remain enthusiastic and proud that we are upholding our cultural heritage. (U7) I experience a profound sense of exhilaration and joy, accompanied by a certain degree of physical fatigue. I feel a distinct sense of distinction, as our culinary traditions hold immense value. While the preparation of our traditional dishes may be somewhat arduous, I am consistently invigorated by the anticipation of their reception. (U3) It must be acknowledged that the preparation of the food is somewhat stressful and tiring. However, my ego is boosted when all guests leave the table satisfied. (U8) I experience a sense of peace and fulfilment when I adhere to the traditions. It is a source of personal satisfaction. (U17) I assist our elders more frequently, and engaging with them while preparing food is akin to a form of therapy for me. I derive enjoyment from the experience and am able to gain new insights. (U11) For me, it is akin to a mission, and thus I feel a sense of relief. I experience a duality of emotions, oscillating between happiness and sadness, as I contemplate the prospect of whether I will witness the next special day. (U14)

Respondents' answers to question 4 about their experience of traditional food preparation and the emotional fluctuations they experience during this process clearly reveal satisfaction with the maintenance of cultural heritage and the act of sharing food. Studies in the literature support these results (Bublitz et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2021; Engel et al., 2011; Holder, 2019; López-Olivares et al., 2020) In addition, it is among the important results that food preparation and this process provide significant personal satisfaction, contribute to feelings of peace and serve to strengthen traditional ties. Therefore, it can be emphasised that preparing meals with family elders offers a kind of personal therapy and facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge.

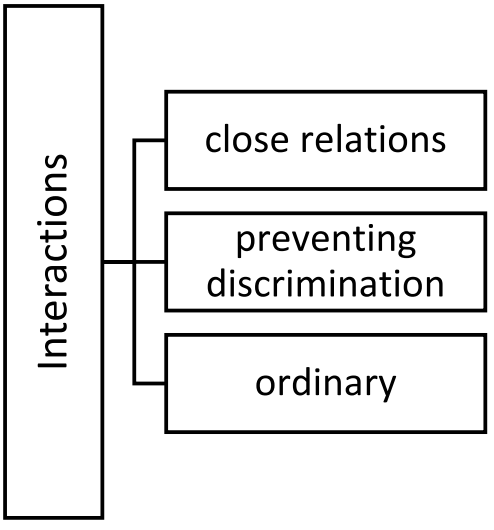


Figure 3. Interactions with the cuisines of different cultures in Hatay.

Themes were derived from the responses to the fifth research question, which inquired about the participants' engagement with cuisines from diverse cultural backgrounds in Hatay on special occasions. The participants were then invited to share their thoughts on these interactions, and their responses are presented below.

Upon analysis of Figure 3, it becomes evident that the participants in the research have identified the following as the key interactions between different cultures in Hatay regarding cuisines: close relations ($F = 16$), preventing discrimination ($F = 13$), and ordinary ($F = 8$). The following section presents a selection of the most notable responses provided by participants in response to the fifth research question.

> Indeed, I am gratified by this state of affairs and would be pleased to see it continue. I believe that this is an optimal approach, as it fosters mutual understanding between cultures. (U7) Indeed, we extend invitations to our neighbours, and they reciprocate. Thus, there is no evidence of discriminatory practices. (U1) Indeed, we provide sustenance to our neighbours on occasion, and we also extend invitations for them to partake of a meal in our company. I believe it is beneficial for our relationships. (U10) Indeed, some Muslims observe religious festivals, such as Hrisi. I am often invited to these celebrations, and I am gratified to accept. I find these occasions to be quite enjoyable, and we sometimes gather together on New Year's Day as well. (U17) Affirmative. Our immediate neighbours adhere to the Christian faith. I posit that such interactions are instrumental in shaping our identities and preventing discriminatory attitudes. (U16) Indeed, I have formed friendships with individuals of the Christian faith. I extend invitations to them, and they reciprocate. I always accept these invitations. Interactions that are respectful reinforce respect. (U20) Affirmative. As previously stated, this is a fundamental aspect of maintaining positive neighbourly relationships. (U18) On occasion, the situation may appear somewhat unusual, yet at other times, it may evoke a sense of familiarity. (U1) Affirmative. Such practices are not uncommon in Hatay. (U8) Indeed, they are not. Such occurrences are inevitable, normal, and unremarkable. (U10)

The participants' answers to question 5 demonstrate the beneficial impact of cultural diversity and the coexistence of different religious beliefs on social relations and cultural interactions. Participants emphasised that interactions with individuals from different

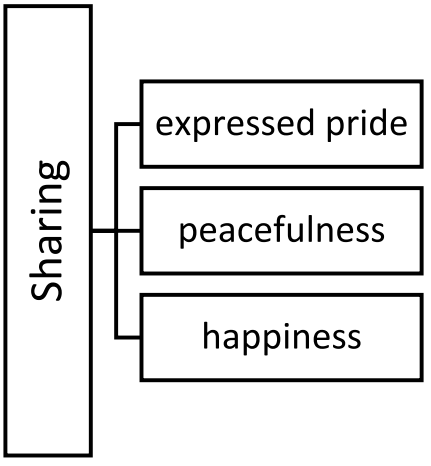


Figure 4. The sharing of cuisines from different cultures in Hatay.

cultural and religious backgrounds foster mutual understanding and respect, which serves to reduce discriminatory practices. It is argued that practices such as sharing food and inviting neighbours from different religious backgrounds serve to strengthen inter-communal relations and increase cultural diversity. Studies in the literature support these results (Holder, 2019; López-Olivares et al., 2020). Such social interactions serve to preserve cultural heritage and play an instrumental role in promoting social cohesion. It can be stated that such interactions are unique and intrinsic to cosmopolitan regions such as Hatay and exemplify the richness of cultural diversity.

The themes derived from the responses to the sixth research question, "What feelings are evoked when Hatay food is shared with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds on special occasions?," are presented below. The participants were then asked to provide their opinions on these interactions, which are presented below.

The data presented in Figure 4 indicates that the participants in the research study expressed pride ($F = 16$), peacefulness ($F = 13$), and happiness ($F = 8$) regarding the interactions related to the sharing of cuisines from different cultures in Hatay. The following section presents a selection of the most notable responses provided by participants in response to the sixth research question.

> It evokes a positive emotional response, fostering a sense of pride and tranquility. (U16) It instills a sense of honor and pride in one's cultural heritage. It is a source of joy to engage in the sharing of one's culture. (U14) It is a source of personal satisfaction to promote one's cultural identity, particularly when it is well-received. (U19) The act of sharing food is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, facilitating mutual understanding and fostering a sense of collective wellbeing. (U9) During special occasions, I often invite my Muslim neighbours to partake in the culinary traditions I have cultivated, and they have expressed great appreciation for these offerings, which has led to feelings of personal satisfaction. (U20) Such interactions motivate us and engender feelings of happiness and peace. (U3)

The participants' responses to question 6 show that the act of sharing and presenting cultural heritage creates a sense of pride and satisfaction among individuals. Similar studies in the literature support this result (Ares et al., 2015; Batat et al., 2019; Block et al., 2011;

Bublitz et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2021; Engel et al., 2011; Piqueras-Fiszman & Jaeger, 2014; Rand et al., 2017; Rodríguez-Arauz et al., 2016). However, the most important result in this study is that such interactions facilitate mutual understanding and collective well-being and are also an important source of personal happiness and peace of mind. This reveals the beneficial effects of cultural sharing and social interaction on social cohesion and individual satisfaction.

Conclusion and discussion

This research aims to examine the impact of the preservation and celebration of culinary traditions in Hatay on emotional well-being. In this context, the existing literature was initially examined and evaluated in order to ascertain the theoretical basis. The research initially concentrated on the perception of the preservation and celebration of culinary traditions on the emotional well-being of the local population. Subsequently, the research questions were evaluated in light of the theoretical basis and the data obtained regarding the effect of the preservation and celebration of culinary traditions of Hatay on emotional well-being. Should the necessity arise to assess the impact of preserving and celebrating culinary traditions in Hatay on emotional well-being, based on the findings, the practical contributions of preserving and celebrating the culinary traditions of Hatay, a UNESCO Gastronomy City, on emotional well-being perception can be evaluated from various perspectives. For instance, participants have indicated that the practice of culinary traditions and celebrations serves to reinforce the bonds between family members and friends. The act of sharing food provides an opportunity for individuals to satisfy their emotional needs and repair relationships, extending beyond the mere act of spending time together. As a result, these activities reinforce social connections and foster a sense of belonging, leading to a heightened emotional proximity and a positive impact on social interactions. Furthermore, participants highlight the significant role of gastronomic traditions in maintaining cultural identity. They posit that the perpetuation of these traditions fosters social cohesion and cultural diversity. The maintenance of these traditions serves to preserve and reinforce cultural heritage at both the individual and societal levels. Similarly, participants indicate that interactions with individuals from disparate cultural and religious backgrounds facilitate the perpetuation of cultural traditions and foster social cohesion. The act of sharing food and extending invitations serves to reinforce social bonds and exemplify the depth of cultural diversity. In order to guarantee the perpetuation of cultural traditions, participants persist in preparing traditional dishes on special occasions, deriving pride and satisfaction from this process, both for themselves and for their communities. In addition to maintaining cultural heritage, these practices are regarded as significant rituals that reinforce social cohesion and provide personal fulfilment. The findings demonstrate that the preservation and celebration of gastronomic traditions in Hatay contribute to social harmony and individual well-being, while also ensuring the transmission of these traditions to future generations. Furthermore, participants continue to prepare traditional dishes on special occasions to ensure the continuity of cultural traditions and experience pride and satisfaction for themselves and their communities in this process. Culinary practices are regarded as significant rituals that reinforce social bonds and offer personal fulfilment, in addition to maintaining cultural heritage. The findings demonstrate that the preservation and celebration of culinary

traditions in Hatay contribute to social harmony and emotional well-being, while also facilitating the transmission of these traditions to future generations. Furthermore, the preparation and sharing of traditional dishes engender a sense of both physical and spiritual satisfaction among the participants. The process evokes childhood memories and past celebrations, providing a nostalgic sense of satisfaction. The act of preparing food evokes a duality of emotions, encompassing both joy and fatigue. The interplay of these sentiments culminates in a state of personal satisfaction and tranquillity. Ultimately, the transfer of customary edibles and cultural inheritance is accomplished through the medium of education within the familial unit. The objective of participants is to educate their children and younger generations on the preparation of traditional dishes and the historical significance of these dishes. In this process, the active role of older generations in preserving cultural values ensures the sustainability of heritage and emphasises the importance of family education.

It can be reasonably deduced that the impact of preserving and celebrating culinary traditions on emotional well-being is not only dependent on the food consumed, but also encompasses the social, cultural, and societal factors that accompany this process. The impact of food culture on the emotional and social lives of individuals is manifested in the promotion of social cohesion, the reinforcement of cultural identity, and the nurturing of social bonds. A number of studies have addressed the emotional connection of food. Food is regarded as a form of art and communication, used to portray a range of emotions, values and experiences. The act of celebrating and consuming food can evoke a range of emotions and convey cultural values (Abrams, 2013; Brownlie et al., 2005; Fisher & Du Rand, 2022; Neely, 2007). The findings of this study demonstrate that culinary traditions are a crucial element in these processes. This finding is consistent with those of other studies. For example, the findings of researchers such as Engel et al. (2011) Rodríguez-Arauz et al. (2016), Berge et al. (2021), Ares et al. (2015), Utter et al. (2016, 2017), Batat et al. (2019), Chang et al. (2021), and Block et al. (2011) confirm that food consumption and social interactions contribute significantly to individuals' psychological and emotional well-being. These findings indicate that the preservation of culinary traditions is significant not only in terms of cultural heritage, but also due to their beneficial impact on emotional well-being.

Practical implications

The findings of the study indicate that the safeguarding of gastronomic values in Hatay has a beneficial impact on emotional well-being. This may indicate that local cultural and cultural protection policies should be complemented by policies aimed at safeguarding the gastronomic economy. In particular, local authorities may organise events and festivals that encourage the preparation, presentation, and celebration of traditional dishes, thereby supporting both the continuity of cultural sustainability and social harmony, as well as emotional strength.

Hatay occupies a significant position in the context of international gastronomy tourism, as evidenced by its applications for UNESCO Gastronomy City status. The findings of the research demonstrate that gastronomic displays serve to reinforce the emotional bonds between the local population. Furthermore, these regular tourism initiatives provide displays with events that not only highlight the culinary aspects but

also emphasise social interactions and cultural activities. For instance, interactive gastronomy tours or special events may be organised in which local residents can participate in traditional food preparation. Such events have the potential to enhance regional interest while facilitating a more profound engagement with local culture.

The research findings indicate that the transmission of gastronomic traditions is facilitated through intergenerational education and the transfer of cultural heritage within the family. Consequently, educational initiatives that impart traditional culinary techniques to younger generations in local educational institutions or cultural contexts can be encouraged. Education can facilitate the integration of cultural heritage into the curriculum, thereby encouraging young people to embrace their cultural heritage and contribute to the sustainability of local culinary culture. Moreover, these programmes can facilitate cultural interaction for residents of Hatay as well as individuals from other regions.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study, which examines the impact of preserving and celebrating the culinary traditions of Hatay, a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, on emotional well-being, is subject to a number of limitations. The most significant limitation of this study is that it focuses exclusively on Hatay province. A further limitation of the study is that only the comments of the identified individuals were subjected to analysis. In light of these considerations, future studies may wish to consider making comparisons between similar provinces with different ethnic diversity. The investigation of societies with disparate ethnic food cultures is a potential avenue for further inquiry. Subsequent studies could investigate differences according to different professions and age groups.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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