



Exploring the Slow Food Perception of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts Students

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Abstract

Slow Food is an international movement that emerged in response to globalization and its harmful effects on gastronomical pleasure. The Slow Food movement focus on conserving biodiversity, which is essential for human well-being and sustainable development. The awareness of youth about slow food is very important for sustainable future of the world. The purpose of this study is to explore the slow food perception of university students who study at the department of gastronomy and culinary arts as being a representative of next generation of professionals. Semi-structured interview technique carried out as one of the well-known technique of qualitative research method and the research sample was consisted of 20 students. Thereafter, the data analyzed through the content analysis with frequencies. Results indicated that slow food is a life-improving concept, which also helps people acquire new gastronomical skills and perspectives. Expectations of students' from slow food concept is appropriate and standard service which should fit with the traditions and customs. Study findings pointed out the students have gained awareness about the concept of slow food.

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INTRODUCTION

By the impact of globalization, not only the structure of food industry but also people's food consumption patterns have changed in time and consequently several negative effects have emerged on human health, environment and society. For instance; obesity, heart related problems, tension, and some well-known diseases such as; mad cow, bird flu and e-coli infection have destructive effects on human health and cause many deaths or unrecoverable health problems in all around the world (Jones, Shears, Hillier, Comfort & Lowell, 2003; Schlosser, 2012; Schneider, 2008; Scrinis, 2007). Moreover, genetic transformation and mass production of food are another negative effects of globalization (Meneley, 2004).

As being a relatively new gastronomic trend; Slow Food Movement arisen as a striking response to these negative impacts of globalization (Özgürel & Avcıkurt, 2018; Paul, 2014; Sağır, 2017). Slow Food is an international movement that launched in 1986 by Carlo Petrini and group of Italian activists. This international movement emerged from a simple local protest that against the opening of Mc Donald's in Piazza di Spagna (also known as Spanish Steps) which situated in the heart of Rome (Chrzan, 2004; Hsu, 2015; Yurtseven, 2007). Chronologically, three years later, in 1989 Slow Food Movement founded officially in Paris through the signature of Slow Food Manifesto (Slow Food, 2020a). As a social movement, impact area of slow food has grown up exponentially since its foundation. The main center of Slow Food located in Bra (Italy) and this organization maintain its existence over 160 countries such as; Italy, France, Canada, United States, Brazil, Russia, United Kingdom, Greece, Deutschland, Turkey and South Africa. (Slow Food, 2020b). The organization structure of Slow Food constituted as an international non-profit and ecogastronomic (Heitmann, Robinson & Povey, 2011) organization that supported voluntarily by 1,000,000 members, 1,500 convivias and 2,400 communities (Slow Food, 2020c). In addition to these; Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, Presidia, Ark of Taste, Terra Madre Foundation, University of Gastronomic Sciences (UNISG) and Earth Markets are known as greatest tools to accomplish main purposes of Slow Food Movement (Buiatti, 2011; Slow Food, 2020d).

In parallel with Slow Food's tremendous spread in the world, eating habits and preferences of people have shifted from fast to slow in recent years. According to Voinea, Atanase and Schileru (2016), people are becoming more conscious than before and they turn their attention healthy food alternatives and culinary pleasure to protect not only themselves but also environment (Parasecoli, 2007). In other words, slow food phenomenon has been gaining much more attention than fast food and perception of people have changed increasingly towards the concept of slow food and its applications in all around the world.

Ultimately, slow food movement focus on conserving biodiversity, which is essential for human well-being and sustainable development. The awareness of youth about slow food is very important for sustainable future of the world. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate the slow food perceptions' of gastronomy and culinary arts students. In this regard, examination of perception towards slow food movement of gastronomy and culinary arts students presents the originality of this paper.

Literature Review

Slow Food is a fresh notion that emerged in response to the standardization of food and the disappearance of gastronomic pleasure in the late 1980s. The opening of a new McDonald's restaurant near the historical Piazza di

Spagna sparked the birth of this new philosophy (Özgürel & Avcıkurt, 2018). As being a response to the domination of fast-food chains, International Slow Food Movement was launched in the year of 1986 by Italian activist and journalist; Carlo Petrini to support the culinary traditions through the existence of local foods and traditional ways of cooking (Andrews, 2008).

Although being a relatively new phenomenon, it has already examined by several scholars within the existing literature. According to the clear definition of Sassatelli and Davolio (2010) “right to pleasure” is the key determinant of Slow Food Movement. From a similar angle, Voinea et al., (2016) well-defined the concept of Slow Food with three distinctive features as follows; “pleasure”, “rhythms of life”, and “a harmonious relationship with nature”. The same authors also claimed that the desire to eat “tasty” and “healthy” foods are the initial points of this movement. As clarified by Mayer and Knox (2006) slow food is a rebellion against the negative effects of globalization that focus on the significance of “healthy food production”, “eating for pleasure”, and “hospitality” as well. On the other hand, Pietykowski (2004) asserted that the Slow Food Concept acts as a protector of “unique tastes”, “local food customs or traditions”, and “quality of food and beverages”. As declared by scholars, Slow Food Movement against three different approaches namely as follows; “mindless”, “mass”, and “unhealthy” production and consumption of food (Peace, 2006; Ferrara et al., 2008). In contrast to these, artisanal production and local growth are the crucial components of the philosophy of Slow Food (Meneley, 2004). It was also proposed as a new gastronomy model that emphasis on not only the biological but also cultural features of food within all production and consumption phases (Schneider, 2008). As summarized by Kinley (2012) slow food is a widespread process that involves the “usage of local seeds in agriculture”, “maintenance the genuineness”, and “avoidance from standardization” in both production and consumption processes.

According to Petrini (2003), Slow Food Movement is a local way of resistance to McDonaldization of food (Miele and Murdoch, 2002) with the precious supports of thousands of volunteers over 160 countries. As added by Petrini (2013) ensuring the access to the “good”, “clean”, “fair” food for all humanity is the foremost objective of this movement. Undoubtedly, as being principles of movement; triad of “good, clean, and fair” play a crucial role on the Slow Food Philosophy (Walter, 2009; Heitmann, Robinson, & Povey, 2011; Siniscalchi, 2013). Here the first principle; “good” associates with the words of quality, natural, appearance, healthy, and tasty. To be more precise, this principle is referred to the pleasantness of taste (Payandeh et al., 2020). In this regard, food must be “good” if it is evaluated under the roof of Slow Food Phenomenon. Secondly, the term of “clean” represents the production methods which do not destroy the environment and be respectful for both environment, human health, and animal welfare. In other words, environmentally friendliness, sustainability, and respectfulness are known as indispensable aspects of the second principle (Yurtseven, Kaya & Harman, 2010, p.18; Gökdemir & Sünnetçioğlu, 2017). As third, “fair” stands for the creation of mutual benefit through the enabling of accessible price and fair conditions not only for consumers but also producers as well (Slow Food Manifesto, 2020). According to Siniscalchi (2013) “fair” corresponding to social justice on behalf of the producers. In a nutshell, production and consumption of quality food behave respectfully towards the environment and support the rights of consumers and small producers represent the core objectives of Slow Food Movement. As listed widely; preventing the disappearance of food culture, food heritage, local tastes, local producers, local products, artisanal techniques and protecting the environment, agriculture, biodiversity, culinary based traditions and customs are the objectives of this developing movement (Slow Food, 2020e).

Although the movement began in Italy, it has spread to the entire world very fast in recent years. According to Nosi and Zanni (2004), the concept of slow food was introduced as an alternative trend in the beginning but nowadays its existence has been globally accepted as being a new consumption pattern. Thus, not only the topic itself but also perceptions of people (involve students, consumers and professionals) towards Slow Food have gained attention and discussed by various scholars within the related literature. For instance, Voinea et al., (2016) conducted an exploratory research in Romania in order to reveal the perceptions of youth towards the slow food phenomenon. Study findings showed that the majority of students who referred as the new generation of consumers are familiar with the notion of slow food. Despite this, when the origin country of slow food was asked to the respondents, most of them gave wrong answers instead of Italy. In addition to this, study findings also revealed that their awareness in respect to the activities of slow food network (in Romania) and slow food related products are extremely low. Similarly, Acemioğlu and Doğan (2020) investigated the slow food based perspectives of students who study at the department of child development. Results indicated that, students who study in unrelated department are not familiar with the concept of slow food and its applications as well. On the other hand, Bazzani et al., (2016) carried out the research with the aim to determine the consumer perceptions and attitudes towards earth markets as being one of the well-known slow food projects. Their result demonstrated that products purchased by consumers identified as; tasty, high quality, fresh, local, seasonal, and safe. In this regard, social and environmental aspects were also found as main motivation factors to buy products from earth markets. Furthermore, Özgürel and Avcıkurt (2018) conducted a research to examine the slow food perception of academicians from a tourist point of view. According to the study findings, the concept of slow food corresponded the different meanings for respondents namely as follows; traditional food production and consumption, local or regional food, healthy nutrition, enjoyment of eating food, organic or natural food, and living, supporting and sharing table culture. Additionally, they also found that; slow food related practices play a crucial role on destination selection criteria of the majority of respondents and most of them experienced the components of slow food during their holiday. Eventually, same research demonstrated that majority of respondents' perception towards slow food has changed after they experienced it.

Recently, slow food related studies have been gaining popularity and receiving significant attention by many scholars. In spite of this, there is a lack in the literature about the topic of perceptions towards slow food movement. As indicated in the literature part, perceptions of consumers, academicians or students who study at other than gastronomy related departments examined in a detailed manner. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study about exploring slow food perception of gastronomy and culinary arts students will be the first in the literature.

Methodology

Main purpose of this study is to reveal the slow food perception of university students who study at the department of gastronomy and culinary arts as being a representative of next generation of professionals. In this regard, university students who study and live within the borders of İzmir province were determined as a sample. Thus, the research sample consisted of 20 students. To explore small number of sample's perspectives on a particular ideas, issue or situation, Boyce and Neale (2006) proposed in-depth interviewing as one of the well-known technique of qualitative research method (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009). In this regard, semi-structured interview questions developed to collect required data from students. Interview questions prepared by investigation of extended literature, adapted and inspired from similar research papers (Özgen & Süren, 2019; Özgürel & Avcıkurt, 2018).

Within a questionnaire totally 8 questions (2 questions for demographic and 6 questions for slow food perception) developed for the interview. Data were gathered in one week between the dates 03.03.2020 and 10.03.2020. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Yasar University Ethics Committee with approval no 2020/7 dated March 2nd, 2020. Students were interviewed individually. Average duration of interviews was approximately took 15-20 minutes. Thereafter, the data were analyzed through the content analysis with frequencies.

Findings

Based on the research findings, Table 1 displays the demographic profiles of students. As indicated in methodology part; the research sample consisted of 20 students. The gender of interview respondents' equally distributed as 50 % male (n=10) and 50 % female (n=10). In addition to this, the age of interview participants varies between 19 and 38.

Table 1. Demographic profile of students

Student (n=20)	Gender	Age
Student 1	M	20
Student 2	F	19
Student 3	F	21
Student 4	M	20
Student 5	M	20
Student 6	M	20
Student 7	M	19
Student 8	F	38
Student 9	M	21
Student 10	F	23
Student 11	F	19
Student 12	F	20
Student 13	F	20
Student 14	M	19
Student 15	F	21
Student 16	M	19
Student 17	M	19
Student 18	M	20
Student 19	F	28
Student 20	F	20

The Concept of Slow Movement

Regarding to the first question “*what does the concept of slow movement mean to you*”, the participants’ responses vary as demonstrated in Table 2. For the vast majority of the respondents (f=13) slow movement stands for being environmental friendly (ecofriendly). In addition to this, “living the moment”, “sustainability” and “pleasure” keywords were found to be determinants of slow movement concept with the same frequency numbers (f=11). Besides this, 9 respondents find the concept of slow movement “meaningful”. Moreover, 8 respondents mentioned that slow movement has emerged as an anti-modernism/anti-globalization trend. Finally, “slowness” has ranked as least significant item for the respondents (f= 6).

Table 2. Slow Movement Perception of Respondents

Q1: What does the concept of slow movement mean to you?	Frequency (f)
Environment Friendly (Ecofriendly)	13
Living the moment	11
Sustainability	11
Pleasure	11
Meaningful	9
Anti-modernism/Anti-globalization	8
Slowness	6

The Concept of Slow Food

Secondly, the question; *what does the concept of slow food mean to you?* asked to the respondents. As seen from Table 3, the replies to slow food concept has produced 16 variable meanings compared to 7 meanings given to first answer. Thus, the maximum replies gather around “healthy”, “conscious consumption” and “local tastes” as 12, 11 and 10 frequencies, respectively. These items are followed by “protecting local producers” (f=8), “environment friendly (ecofriendly)” (f=7), “organic consumption” (f=7) and “supporting local development” (f=7). In addition to this, the concept of slow food stands for being “natural” (f=6) and “good” (f=6) with same frequencies. The least ranked replies were found to be “traditional”, “enjoying the meal”, “safe”, “clean”, “quality” and “fair” which got 5 or less replies.

Table 3. Slow Food Perception of Respondents

Q2: What does the concept of slow food mean to you? Please explain.	Frequency (f)
Healthy	12
Conscious Consumption	11
Local Tastes	10
Protecting local producers	8
Environment Friendly (Ecofriendly)	7
Organic Consumption	7
Supporting local development	7
Socializing	6
Natural	6
Good	6
Traditional	5
Enjoying the meal	5
Safe	4
Clean	4
Quality	4
Fair	2

Slow Food Experience

Based on the research findings, all respondents have slow food experience and the destinations of the experience tabulated in Table 4. The top cities are Seferihisar (f=14), Bodrum (f=9), Karaburun (f=6) and Gökçeada (f=5), respectively. Then, Şile (f=2), Şirince (f=2), Kars (f=2) and other (which imply foreign countries) (f=2) are listed having same frequency. On the other hand, the least mentioned destinations are Sivas (f=1), Kayseri (f=1) and Mardin (f=1).

Table 4. Slow Food Experience Places of Respondents

Q3: Have you ever had slow food experience? If yes, where?	Frequency (f)
Seferihisar	14
Bodrum	9
Karaburun	6
Gökçeada	5
Şile	2
Şirince	2
Kars	2
Other (Foreign Country)	2
Sivas	1
Kayseri	1
Mardin	1

Perceptual Changes of Respondents

The question; *has your perception changed after your slow food experience? How?* asked to the respondents. In this context, 18 respondents agreed that their perception mostly changed after experienced the slow food. Only two of the respondents asserted that there is no change in their perception after experienced the slow food. In the second part of same question, the majority of replies gather around “gaining awareness”, “making healthier decisions” and “discovering new tastes” as 14, 13 and 8 frequencies, respectively. In addition to this, “learning new food combinations and cooking techniques” and “developing the taste buds” have ranked as least mentioned items for the question. (f=5)

Table 5. Perceptual Changes of Respondents

Q4: Has your perception changed after your slow food experience? How?	Frequency (f)
Gaining awareness	14
Making healthier decisions	13
Discovering new tastes	8
Learning new food combinations and cooking techniques	5
Developing the taste buds	5

Slow Food Motivation Factors

According to answers of question five, *what are the main motivation factors to consume slow food?*, 12 different slow food related motivation factors gathered at the end of this research. The vast majority of the respondents (f=15) claimed that “consuming healthy foods” is the main motivation factor in preference to slow food. “Discovering local foods” ranked as second with 12 frequency. Not only “consuming healthy foods” but also “consuming quality foods” considered as significant by 10 respondents. “To support local producers” (f=9) and “to engage with local culture” (f=9) were found as another essential motivation factors for slow food consumption. The least ranked motivation factors found as “to experience new tastes”, “to consume for pleasure” and “to maintain the sustainability” which have four or less replies.

Table 6. Slow Food Motivation Factors

Q5: What are the main motivation factors to consume slow food?	Frequency (f)
To consume healthy foods	15
To discover local foods	12
To consume quality foods	10
To support local producers	9
To engage with local culture	9
To protect cultural food heritage	7
To protect nature	7
To consume organic foods	5
To increase my quality of life	5
To experience new tastes	4
To consume for pleasure	4
To maintain the sustainability	3

Slow Food Related Expectations of Respondents

Table 7 demonstrates the expectations from the concept of slow food from the perspective of respondents. According to the answers, “appropriate and standard service” (which should be compatible with traditions) is the most replied expectation from slow food. As second, 11 respondents believe that slow food products (ingredients) must include “more healthy food alternatives”. “accessible price” and “localness” found as another essential expectations that replied by 9 respondents. These expectations are followed by “localness”, “quality standardization”, “high level taste”, “fresh/daily products” and “sustainability” by 9, 7, 6 and 5 respondents. Finally, the least mentioned (f=4) expectations are “low price” and “accessible restaurants” that replied with same frequencies.

Table 7. Slow Food Expectations of Respondents

Q6: What is your expectations from the concept of slow food?	Frequency (f)
Appropriate and standard service (according to traditions)	12
More healthy food alternatives	11
Accessible price	9
Localness	9
Quality standardization	7
High level taste	6
Fresh/Daily products	5
Sustainability	5
Low price	4
Accessible restaurants	4

Discussion and Conclusion

In contrast to adapting the fast and modern life, slow food philosophy supports the traditional way of life, local food, local producers, environment, sustainability and gastronomic pleasure. According to Schneider (2008), slow food phenomenon gives answers to these essential questions “*where and how we get the food we eat?*”. Actually, slow food have been gaining much more attention by scholars and professionals than before and its sphere of influence has tremendously expanded day by day. In this regard, this research examined slow food perception on perspective of university students who study at the department of gastronomy and culinary arts. In the context of research, six different questions asked to the students.

Firstly, “*what does the concept of slow movement mean to you?*” questioned to all interview respondents. Within the related literature “slow movement” described as a pioneer of the concept of “slow food movement” (Sağır, 2017). More precisely, slow movement is the art of living that concerns about the issues of “living the moment”, “sustainability” and “getting pleasure out of life” (Gallagher, 2013). In the context of first question, it was revealed that the majority of respondents associate slow movement with the words of “environment friendly”, “living the moment” and sustainability”. These findings are also in parallel with the existing literature. Following this, “*what does the concept of slow food mean to you?*” asked to students. According to the ranking replies, it was found that the concept of slow food visualizes as “healthy”, “conscious” and “local” in students minds. As indicated by Petrini (2003) slow food has three indispensable principles; good, clean and fair. According to research findings (as demonstrated in Table 3), all three mentioned principles were stated by respondents which means that respondents are aware of the concept of slow food. This result displayed similarity with previous study (Voinea et al., 2016) which examined the perception of students towards the concept of slow food. As third; “*have you ever had slow food experience?*” was asked to the students. Not surprisingly, Seferihisar was the most common answer, simply because all of the respondents are from İzmir province, which is about 47 km away from Seferihisar. The next question asked as follow; “*has your perception changed after your slow food experience?*” 90% of respondents answered that their perception has changed whereas remaining 10% declared that they maintain their perception about slow food concept. This result is parallel with the study of Özgürel and Avcıkurt (2018). In the second part of this question, analysis yielded five different answers namely; “gaining awareness”, “making healthier decisions”, “discovering new tastes”, “learning new food combinations and cooking techniques” and “developing the taste buds”. Therefore, the results of this question indicate that slow food is a life-improving concept, which also helps people acquire new gastronomical skills and perspectives. In the fifth question, “*what are the main motivation factors to consume slow food?*” were asked to reveal the main motivation drives for consuming slow food. According to gathered answers; 12 different motivation factors revealed. The most significant answers among all other are; “to consume healthy foods”, “to discover local foods” and “to consume quality food” that conform to existing literature (Pietykowski, 2004; Voinea et al., 2016). Finally, in the sixth question we tried to gain and insight about the expectations of the respondents towards the concept of slow food. Their first and foremost expectation from slow food concept is “appropriate and standard service” which should fit with the traditions and customs.

In the light of the findings, it was observed that, the students of gastronomy and culinary art departments have already developed awareness about slow food concept. In a future study, we will explore the slow food perception of university students from different departments. Since, raising awareness of slow food in the students of today or in other words, consumers of future is of great importance for sustainable future of the world.

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