



Research Article

CAN THE CULTURAL ROAD FESTIVAL CREATE CULTURAL INTERACTION? EVIDENCE FROM ERZURUM

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the event held in Erzurum of the Culture Road Festivals, which have been held in Turkey since 2021, in order to determine the level of creating cultural interaction. Unlike previous years, the Cultural Path Festivals are planned to be organized in 16 cities across Turkey in 2024 by increasing the number of events. In this context, it was aimed to determine how and to what extent the festival held in Erzurum created cultural interaction among the participants. In addition, this level was analyzed in detail in terms of demographic characteristics. Data were collected from 645 volunteer participants who participated in the Culture Road Festival via face-to-face surveys, and analyses were performed using the SPSS 20 package program. Participants consider local products as the most basic indicator of society's culture and are of the opinion that they should definitely be used to create cultural interaction through festivals in the formation and promotion of the destination's image. This result can be evaluated as an indicator that cultural discovery visits create cultural interaction.

Keywords: Culture, Cultural Interaction, Cultural Road Festival

Introduction

Festivals have become an increasingly important tool for economic development, both through tourism and the re-emergence and branding of cities as modern cultural centers. Festivals, defined as a type of themed special event that involves a sense of celebration or joy among participants, are distinguished from other events because they are more likely to draw on the cultural identity of a community and contribute to defining a sense of place. Therefore, festivals are often closely linked to the established and preserved history and cultural heritage of the places where they take place (Ma and Lew, 2012).

Destinations introduce their cultures to their surroundings through various events such as festivals, aim to attract attention in order to create tourism potential and try to achieve this goal by hosting more tourists and earning more income (O'Sullivan and Jackson, 2002). Within tourism studies, research on festival tourism has been growing steadily in terms of quantity and importance since the 1990s (Getz and Cheyne, 1997). Festivals, which create motivation on tourists and accelerate tourism movements, also provide employment in different areas together with tourism, create positive effects in many sectors related to the tourism industry and contribute to the promotion of the country and the destination at the international level (Çulha, 2008). These events, called festival tourism, create interesting and sometimes exotic cultural effects on tourists (Quinn, 2010). However, while it is possible to come across studies examining the socio-cultural impact of festivals (Nair and Aiswarya, 2022; Richards and King, 2022; Rossetti and Quinn, 2021) in the literature, studies presenting the views of the participants on the cultural interaction created by the festivals (Eröz, et al., 2023; Saçlı, 2020) are still limited.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey has planned events in 7 regions and 16 cities across Turkey in 2024 for the Culture Road Festivals, which it has been organizing since 2021 in order to

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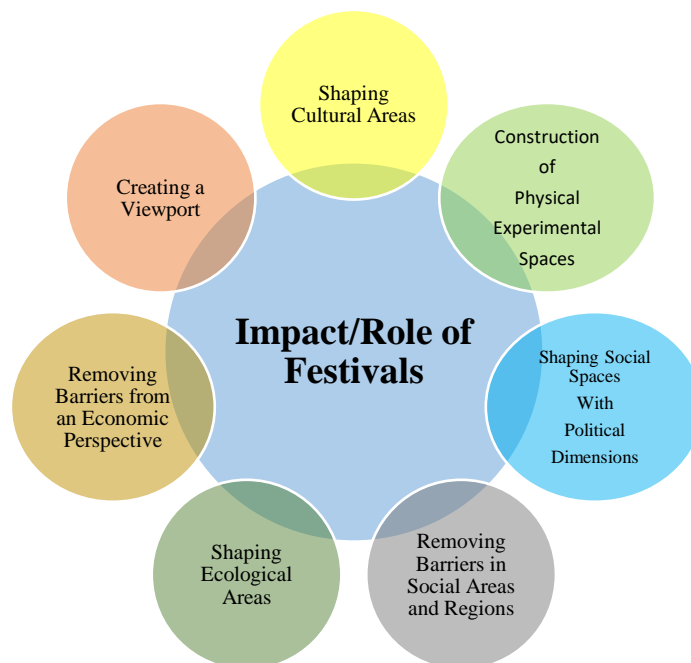
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stimulate domestic tourism, strengthen Turkey's tourism image and keep its cultural history alive. The Erzurum leg, which is among these cities, was held between August 17-25. In the festivals held, various cultural values specific to the region are tried to be revived, artistic activities, exhibitions and interviews are organized, workshop activities are included, concerts are organized with famous artists and different activities are also included for children. In this context, studies to determine the cultural interactions of the participants through festivals are limited in the literature and the study aimed to determine how this interaction can be provided and to what extent it is provided. Therefore, the study findings are important in order to determine whether the organized festivals achieve their purpose, to provide ideas to the festival organizers and to guide them correctly. The results to be obtained can provide ideas for organizations and offer a different perspective for destination managers. The study was carried out based on this.

Conceptual Framework

Festivals usually present the heritage, culture and traditions of a particular region by creating a state of joy and enthusiasm. Tourists also head to destinations to experience and sometimes celebrate local traditions, beliefs, heritage from the past, cuisine and culture (Getz, 2008). At this stage, festivals can be effective and can be seen as rituals performed every year (Akintan, 2013). Festivals are important events that strengthen the image of the destination where they are organized and support the economic development of the region where they take place (Bruwer and Kelly, 2015). The Turkish Language Association Dictionary defines festivals more than once as “An art show of special importance, the period, the environment in which it is held, the number or quality of participants specified in the program” or “A show held for the most famous product of a region; festival” (TDK, 2024). These events, which can be considered as community-based activities, are very important in terms of tourism. Festivals aim to reduce poverty, create alternative income for the society, mediate the socialization of the society, keep the cultural heritage alive and ensure the sustainability of this heritage. These community-based tourism initiatives also encourage respect for local traditions and customs as well as natural heritage (Hai and Ngan, 2022). In this way, tourism awareness increases and develops in society. Therefore, festivals, which are the subject of tourism, need to be managed carefully for the benefit of society and social stability. At the same time, it should be considered important to promote sustainable approaches to tourism development through such events (Quinn, 2006). Figure 1 below shows the effects of festivals on the destination where they are held.

Figure 1. Effects of Festivals on Society



Source: Moussa, 2017.

It is undeniable that festivals play an important role in developing and shaping social life in the regions where they are organized. In addition, social experiences in local places provide new social opportunities and strengthen the participants' connection with the local culture (Figure 1). It also helps to keep emotions and

memories current and strong in both participants and local people (Moussa, 2017). The festivals also improve the living conditions of local people and provide them with the opportunity to socialize (Getz, 2008).

Festival Tourism

Festivals are social events aimed at meeting the needs of the spiritual life of society. Festivals, which are also described as a type of folklore event that includes features such as belief, religion, architecture and landscape, can be attractive to visitors within the scope of the subject they cover. Festivals can usually be organized in or near historical and cultural monuments, natural areas, sacred relics and cultural venues. Although these areas or venues attract tourists, they also encourage society to protect and develop the festival within the scope of tourism activities (Hai and Ngan, 2022). Because events such as festivals can increase the attractiveness of the destination where they are held, raise tourism awareness in society and offer visitors the opportunity to have unique experiences (Mihajlović and Vidak, 2017).

A study conducted in Portugal clearly demonstrated that festivals promote cultural heritage, popularize tourist attractions, and create economic benefits. In addition, the findings show that it is important for visitors to attend festivals in a destination with a different culture, and that being close to their culture helps tourists interact better with the destination. The results obtained draw attention to the role of culture on festivals. Therefore, events aimed at improving the destination image and festivals focused on determining the equivalent characteristics of the destination culture can create a positive destination image. The research shows that tourism managers and relevant stakeholders should align destinations with tourists' expectations (Xu, 2024). Therefore, festival tourism is examined by many scientists and many of its positive contributions are tried to be explained with examples.

The destination of Erzurum has the potential to offer unique experiences to its visitors in terms of both cultural tourism and festival tourism with its historical and cultural heritage. When this potential is used through festivals, it can benefit the local people with activities such as increasing the number of overnight stays, promoting and consuming local delicacies, tending to handicraft activities and selling these products, and it can also help increase income (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2019). Visitors who participate in tourism events can perceive this as an opportunity to promote the culture of the region and at the same time see it as a stable source of income. Therefore, determining this situation can provide ideas about what can be done to shape the festival name and activities and make the destination more attractive.

Cultural Road Festival

Celebrating culture, identity and belonging is a fundamental element of multicultural festivals. This element can serve as a platform for shared experiences and can have the role of uniting people (Lee et al., 2012). The Culture Road Festivals are a cultural festival that has been organized in various provinces of Turkey since 2021, and the number of cities it is organized in continues to increase each year. The festival, which was organized in Istanbul in the first year, was organized in four cities across Turkey in 2022 and in six cities in 2023. In addition, the Culture Road Festival was accepted as a member of the European Festivals Association (EFA) in December 2023. It is one of the most comprehensive events organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, covering 16 cities across Turkey for 2024 and aiming to evaluate an 8-month period throughout the year within the scope of tourism activities with various events by addressing different dimensions such as art, culture and history in these cities. These festivals, which bring cities together with the spirit of the festival and aim to attract attention at an international level, aim to transform the cities where they are held into centers of attraction through the creation of special routes in the cities where they are held, as well as the cultural heritage they possess. In addition to concerts, cinema, exhibitions and theater activities at local, national and international levels, workshops and talks are held. In addition, many events for children are organized at the Culture Road Festivals and they strive to make the festival atmosphere felt in all segments of the city where they are held. These activities mentioned are carried out free of charge and open to the public. Various workshops, concerts, exhibitions for the promotion of local cultural products, concerts and many other events for children were organized at the Erzurum leg of the Culture Road Festival. In this context, some examples are given in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Images from the Cultural Road Festival



Source: Added from the authors' photo archive.

Cultural festivals have been adopted to assist in efforts to redevelop cities or destinations and change attitudes towards the area. Community-owned artistic activities and leisure activities have often been used to assist in wider regeneration plans to change people's perceptions of neglected areas. In this respect, cultural festivals have been adopted as an important part of urban strategies. The events have had a positive impact on urban life due to their widespread adoption by cities to achieve instrumental benefits (Finkel and Platt, 2020).

Literature review

Festivals attract the attention and interest of all segments as a rich and multifaceted phenomenon. Researchers have addressed the issue of festivals in different regions around the world from different perspectives. In a study conducted in Ireland, it was determined that tourism emerged as an important force that encouraged festival growth and expansion. In addition, some problems were identified regarding the quality of the relationship established between festivals and the local people in the relevant places. As a result; It was stated that the interaction of festivals with tourism should be managed carefully in order to support the social sustainability function and to promote sustainable approaches to tourism development (Quinn, 2006). In a different study conducted on the cultural festival held in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, the effects on society were investigated. As a result; It was determined that the level of impact of the cultural festival created economic benefits from strong to less strong, tourism products and services were diversified, tourism resources could be used actively, policies for the development of social tourism were developed, cultural interaction was provided and an environment for collective action was created (Hai and Ngan, 2022). In another study, Richards (2006) viewed festivals as a tool for socio-cultural dynamics and the transformation of society and expressed the increasing impact of festivals on socio-cultural structures. He stated that they affect the lifestyles and values of individuals in society (Akhundova, 2024). Similarly, in another study, it is emphasized that

festivals not only create moments of pleasure and entertainment, but also deeply affect the social structures and dynamics of society. It is also stated in the study that festivals serve as a strong catalyst for the formation of new social networks and community ties (Picard, 2016). In a recent study, it is stated that the nature of festivals has begun to change with the influence of commercialization along with globalization. It is noted that this situation also affects the cultural structure and tourism in society (Duffy and Mair, 2021). Festivals are not only cultural events, but also play an important role in shaping the image of the region as a tool of sociocultural dynamics, contributing to economic development and encouraging innovation processes (Akhundova, 2024). In a study on Cultural Path Festivals, two websites were focused on research during the Taşbaşı (2023) leg held in Beyoğlu, Istanbul. These; Beyoğlu Culture Road Festival and Culture Road Festivals are their official websites. The contents of these websites are examined through analysis. City branding and cultural development of the sites in question It has been concluded that it contains the principles of planning and legitimizes these principles through discourse. A different study was about the Culture Road Festival held in Şanlıurfa. The research aimed to determine the participants' perceptions, satisfaction and support towards tourism regarding the Şanlıurfa Cultural Route Festival. Participants stated that the festival reduced daily stress, contributed to the promotion of the region, provided opportunities for social interaction to the local people, increased the business volume of local businesses, and their satisfaction was determined to be high. It has also been determined that the festival supports the development of tourism in the region (Erdem, 2024).

It has been concluded that it contains the principles of planning and legitimizes these principles through discourse. Therefore, despite the known benefits and disadvantages of cultural festivals, the cultural interaction they create on the participants is not clear. Determining this interaction can provide important insights for managers, policy makers and relevant stakeholders in terms of diversifying activities, determining social needs and the image of the destination. The aim of this study is to determine the cultural interaction created by the Culture Road Festival held in Erzurum for two years. While there are studies on festivals held in many cities and regions in the literature, there is no study on the Culture Road Festival specifically for Erzurum. In addition, studies on determining the cultural interactions of visitors through festivals are limited. The study can be considered important because it fills this gap.

Methods

The purpose of this research is to determine whether the festival organized under the name of Culture Road creates cultural interaction and if so, to analyze how and to what extent it affects the participants through demographic characteristics. In this direction, the quantitative research method was applied in the study. The quantitative research method is a research method based on the understanding of positive science and in which quantitative data is collected and examined (Sönmez and Alacapınar 2011). The experimental design, one of the quantitative research designs, was used in the research. The research was conducted with a pre-test-post-test control group random design, which is one of the types of real experimental design.

The universe of the study was selected as adults over the age of 18 who volunteered to participate in the study and who were easy to reach and collect data, and who participated in the Culture Road Festival held in Erzurum between August 17-25, 2024. This situation caused the criterion sampling technique in the purposeful sampling method to be used in the study. The purposeful sampling technique is defined as the determination of the sample by selecting from the population in line with the researcher's own purpose (Gürbüz and Şahin, 2016). At the same time, the sample is formed from individuals, events or objects that have the specified characteristics related to the problem. Since the sample is determined in line with a specific goal, the power of representing the population decreases. This situation is defined as the limitation of the study. However, the important point is that each individual included in the sample is special in terms of the objectives of the study. Since participation in the festival is free, the size of the universe is not known exactly. According to Tavşancıl (2002), it is stated that the number of items should be 5 times in determining the sample size, and 645 participants were deemed sufficient in the study in this context.

The data collection method of the study is face-to-face survey technique and online remote forms, and it was obtained through field visits in the events organized between August 17-25. The survey used in the study was created by utilizing the research of Saçlı (2020). The survey consists of two parts, and the first part includes questions to determine the demographic information of the participants. In the second part, it is composed of 10 propositions related to cultural transmission, 8 propositions related to cultural protection, 5 propositions related to cultural change and 5 propositions related to the cultural balance dimension, a total of 28 propositions and scaled with a 5-point Likert type. SPSS 20 package program was applied in the analysis of the data, and the process was completed by calculating t-test, Anova, Descriptive statistics and Correlation coefficients.

Ethics committee permission for this study was given by Atatürk University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee.

Findings

Demographic characteristics of the participants of the Cultural Road Festival are classified under the headings of gender, age, education level, nationality, occupation and income in Table 1. Of the participants in the study, 47.8% (n=308) were male and 52.2% (n=337) were female. It can be said that there was a balanced participation within the gender group. The age range distribution of the participants was as follows; 12.4% (n=80) of the 18-25 age group, 25.0% (n=161) of the 26-35 age group, 34.6% (n=223) of the 36-45 age group, 18.4% (n=119) of the 46-55 age group and 9.6% (n= 62) of the 56 and over age group. It was determined that the participants were concentrated in the 26-55 age group.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants According to Demographic Characteristics

Descriptive Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	308	47.8
Woman	337	52.2
Average ($\bar{X} \pm SS$) 1,5225 \pm 1.49988		
Age		
18-25 years old	80	12.4
26-35 years old	161	25.0
36-45 years old	223	34.6
46-55 years old	119	18.4
56 and above	62	9.6
Average ($\bar{X} \pm SS$) 2,8791 \pm 1.14111		
Education Level		
Primary education	36	5.6
High school	125	19.4
Associate Degree	65	10.1
Licence	228	35.3
Graduate	191	29.6
Average ($\bar{X} \pm SS$) 3,6403 \pm 1.24396		
Nationality/Citizenship		
Türkiye	663	98.1
Iranian	-	-
Azerbaijan	6	.90
Russian	6	.90
Other	-	-
Average ($\bar{X} \pm SS$) 1,0465 \pm 1.34489		
Job		
Public Employee	293	45.4
Private Sector Employee	91	14.1
Retired	46	7.1
Freelance	56	8.7
Housewife	72	11.2
Student	84	13.0
Unemployed	3	.50
Average ($\bar{X} \pm SS$) 2,6698 \pm 1.90645		
Average Income Level		
Less than 17,002	161	25.0
17,002	14	2.20
17,003-35,000	94	14.6
35,001-50,000	163	25.3
50,001-65,000	116	18.0
65,001-80,000	44	6.80
More than 80,001	53	8.20
Average ($\bar{X} \pm SS$) 3,6248 \pm 1.88043		

Source: Created by authors

The education levels of the individuals who participated in the festival were determined as follows; Primary school 5.6% (n=36), High school 19.4% (n=125), Associate degree 10.1% (n=65), Undergraduate 35.3% (n=228), Postgraduate 29.6% (n=191). The participants were individuals with a higher education level. In terms of nationality, almost all of the festival visitors were citizens of the Republic of Turkey (n=633). Although limited, visitors from Azerbaijan (n=6) and Russia (n=6) contributed to the study. This result is an expected and natural situation. When the distribution of the participants' occupational groups is examined, Public Employees come first with a rate of 45.4% (n=293). Private Sector Employees come second with a rate of 14.1% (n= 91), and Students come third with a rate of 13.0% (n=84). Almost all of the participants, including individuals from other occupational groups, are employed and earn income. In the income level distribution, it was determined that almost all of the participants were concentrated at the income level of 65 thousand and below (85.1%). In this group, the majority are participants with incomes at and below the minimum wage level determined in Turkey for 2024 (27.2%).

Table 2 shows the extent to which the events organised within the scope of the Cultural Road Festival created cultural interaction among the visitors attending the festival.

Table 2. Distribution of Cultural Road Festival Participants' Views on the Cultural Interaction Created by the Festivals

Propositions	Average	Standard Deviation
Festivals provide interaction between visitors and cultural values.	4,1829	,83630
Festivals enable the transfer of cultural values while having fun.	4.2527	,76594
Festivals are effective in ensuring intercultural interaction.	4,2155	,70606
Festivals are an important tool in the promotion of cultural values.	4,2620	,73586
Festivals are effective in choosing cultural travels.	4,1612	,74687
Festivals are effective in transferring traditional culture to today's values.	4,0853	,83621
Festivals are an intermediary between local culture and visitor culture.	4,1938	,70796
Festivals are effective in conveying culture, traditions, customs, and all other abstract and concrete values.	4,0930	,76858
Festivals are an important tool for gaining cultural experience.	4,1628	,70480
Festivals enable new friendships to be established between local people and visitors.	4,1364	,74140
Festivals ensure that historical and cultural values are passed on to future generations.	4,1132	,80828
Festivals are effective in preserving cultural values.	4,1209	,76061
Festivals, cultural values through tourism is effective in gaining material value.	4.1395	,79149
Festivals are effective in creating awareness of protecting cultural values.	4.0465	,78476
Festivals are effective in the consumption of local products in the regions visited.	4.2636	,70402
Festivals are effective in gaining experience about cultures.	4,1597	,70110
Festivals are effective in shaping cultural attitudes.	3,8806	,91554
Festivals are effective in cultural mediation.	4,1194	,76391
Festivals are effective in changing moral values and behavior.	3,6217	1.09040
Festivals are effective in changing religious beliefs and behaviors.	3,2760	1.12487
Festivals are effective in changing dressing habits.	3,2000	1,09573
Festivals are effective in changing eating and drinking habits.	3.3736	,99295
Festivals are effective in changing the language of the local people.	3.0326	1,16651
Festivals help create balance between cultures.	3,8062	,83664
Festivals aim to resolve cultural incompatibilities.	3,4977	1,00561
Festivals have a mission to create intercultural empathy.	3.8636	,80564
Festivals enable individuals from different societies and cultures to exchange information with each other.	4.0806	,71563
Festivals are effective in changing the way of thinking of local culture.	3,5116	,97258

Source: Created by aouthours

According to Table 2, the participants' thoughts on the level of cultural interaction created by the Cultural Road Festival are as follows: “Festivals are effective in consuming local products in the regions visited” (X=4.26, SD: .74) with the expression “Festivals are an important tool in the promotion of cultural values”

($X=4.26$, $SD: .71$) and “Festivals enable the transfer of cultural values in a fun way”($X=4.25$, $SD: .77$) This situation is concentrated in the statements. They stat that visitors see local products as a part of the culture, that culture, deep-rooted heritage and traditions from the past are introduced through festivals through organized events and that this introduction is also conveyed through various entertaining activities. This situation can be interpreted as local products must be seen in the festivals visited, that new experiences must be gained in experience workshops if possible and that entertainment activities must definitely be attended. This result can also be evaluated as cultural interaction is created, that local products are especially effective in this and that festivals mediate this interaction.

The last three propositions with the lowest evaluation in Table 2 are as follows: Participants: “Festivals are effective in changing religious beliefs and behaviors” ($X=3.27$, $SD: 1.12$) The statement, “Festivals are effective in changing dressing habits” ($X=3.20$, $SD: 1.09$) expression and “Festivals are effective in changing the language of the local people” ($X=3.03$, $SD: 1.17$). They expressed low level of opinion on the statements. This situation revealed the view that the visitors cannot create a change in the religious beliefs, behaviors, attire and most importantly the language of the society where the festivals are held. As a result, societies are strictly attached to their religious beliefs, traditions and customs, clothing styles and communication languages and this situation can be interpreted as having very strict views on these facts.

While it is generally thought that the festivals that are or will be organized will not have an impact on this cultural heritage and folklore, it has been determined that festivals are seen as an important opportunity to introduce the traditions, culture and products of the local society and that cultural interaction can be achieved by conveying these to the visitors.

In order to determine the cultural interaction relationship that the Culture Road Festival organized among the participants could create, firstly, analyses were carried out based on gender, age group, education level, nationality, profession and income level. In these analyses, at gender level; ($t(643)=-110$, $p>.05$), Eta squared size (12.743), for age groups; $F(4,640)=.2043$, $p>.05$. Eta squared effect size was $.013$, for education levels; $F(4,640)=1.321$, $p>.05$. Eta squared effect size was $.008$, for profession types; $F(6,638)=1.545$, $p>.05$. Eta squared effect size was $.014$ and for income levels; $F(6,638)=1.198$, $p>.05$. Eta squared effect size was $.245$. In order not to bore the reader, these results are not presented in detail and in a table. As a result of the analysis, a significant difference was found on the nationality of the participants. Detailed analyses on this subject can be found starting from Table 3 below.

In order to determine the cultural interaction relationship that the Cultural Road Festival could create, a one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was conducted between the nationalities of the participants and the results are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Levels of Relationship Between Cultural Road Festival and Cultural Interaction According to Participants' Nationality

	Nationality of Participants	Number of People	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Unidirectional Variance Analysis FP	
Relationship Points	Türkiye	633	110,4597	15.31273	63,388	.000
	Iranian	-	-	-		
	Azerbaijan	6	115,8333	11.83920		
	Russian	6	39.8333	21.63716		
	Other	-	-	-		

Source: Created by aouthours

According to Table 3, it is seen that there is a significant difference between the relationship levels between the Cultural Road Festival and cultural interaction according to the nationalities of the participants; $F(2,642)=63.388$, $p<.05$. The eta squared effect size was found as $.165$ and it shows that the nationality variable has a high level of effect on the relationship between the organized festival and cultural interaction. According to the Dunnett C comparative tests from Post Hoc tests, the citizens of the Republic of Turkey ($X=110.46$, $SD=15.31$), citizens of Azerbaijan ($X=115.83$, $SD=11.84$) and participants who are citizens of Russia ($X=39.83$, $SD=21.64$) were statistically determined. A statistically significant difference was found between the groups. The citizens of the Republic of Turkey, where there is a significant difference, have more positive thoughts about the cultural interaction created by the Cultural Road Festival compared to foreign nationals. This result may be due to the presentation of products belonging to the culture of the local people in the organized events and the realization of activities aimed at the cultural heritage. In addition, the possibility that

the Azerbaijani people have more knowledge about Turkish culture and that there are similarities in cultural practices may have been effective in the order of interaction with the nationalities of the participants in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of One-Way Variance Analysis Between Cultural Road Festival and Cultural Interaction According to Participants' Nationality

Relationship Points	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean of Squares	F	P	Significant Difference
Intergroup	29864,118	2	14932,059	63,388	.000	Russian<Türkiye<Azerbaijan
Intragroup	151232,889	642	235,565			
Total	181097,008	644				

Source: Created by aouthours

As seen in Table 4, when the results of the ANOVA test are examined, there is a significant difference between the nationality groups in the relationship between the festival held in Erzurum and cultural interaction. The relationship score between the Cultural Road Festival and cultural interaction in terms of the nationality variable of the participants is given in Table 5.

Table 5. Relationship Score of the Relationship Between Cultural Road Festival and Cultural Interaction in Terms of Nationality

Variable	r	P
Relationship score between cultural interaction and festival	-.319**	.000

As seen in Table 5, the relationship between the festival held in Erzurum and cultural interaction has a negative and medium level relationship score in terms of nationality variable. This shows that there is a negative and medium level relationship between the nationalities of the participants and the Cultural Road Festival and cultural interaction.

Discussion

This study aimed to determine whether the Culture Road Festival, which was planned to be held in 16 cities across Turkey, created any cultural interaction during the time period when it was held in the Erzurum region, and if so, how and to what extent it created an impact. In this context, it aimed to contribute to the limited studies in the literature in a new dimension and to develop suggestions for the relevant stakeholders. The study findings are in line with the literature, especially in terms of cultural interaction. The results reveal that the organized festivals contribute significantly to regional tourism and the local people, as well as the development of intercultural communication (Erdem, 2024; Eröz, Uğurlu, & Ay, 2023). Participants evaluate local products as the most important indicator of culture and think that this heritage should be used effectively in the promotion of entertaining activities. Thus, they are of the opinion that cultural interaction will be experienced and festivals will serve as a mediator in this regard. Local people see the organized festivals as a part of their social identity and evaluate them as an event that accelerates annual family and community gatherings. (Nair & Aiswarya, 2022). Participants also believe that trips to cultural festivals will be effective in gaining new experiences. This result is consistent with the literature (Erdem, 2024; Hai and Ngan, 2022; Quinn, 2006).

In the analyses conducted in terms of demographic characteristics, the highest cultural interaction was observed among Azerbaijani citizens, while it created a medium-level effect among local participants. It was determined that it created low levels of cultural interaction among Russian citizens. It is possible to create a high level of cultural impact, such as Azerbaijani citizens contributing to the study in societies with similar traditions, customs, lifestyles and various cultural backgrounds. This situation is consistent with the literature (Picard, 2016; Taşbaşı, 2023; Xu, 2024).

However, there are also results that are not consistent with the findings of the study conducted recently. Individuals participating in the Culture Road Festival Erzurum event are closely tied to their traditions and customs, religious beliefs, clothing, and especially their language, and see the possibility of interaction on these issues as low. However, recent studies in the literature state that the characteristics of festivals have begun to change with commercialization and globalization, and that lifestyles and values in society are affected

by this situation (Akhundova, 2024; Duffy and Mair, 2021). These results are not consistent with the study findings.

Conclusion and recommendations

Festivals play an important role in tourism activities. There is an increase in the number of tourists visiting locations to participate in festivals that have become rituals today. Festivals, which can keep the culture, traditions and customs of the society and the past heritage up to date and transfer this unique past to future generations, have an important place in terms of tourism. The perceptions of local and foreign tourists who participate in these events towards festivals are an important issue. Therefore, in the study, the perceptions that may arise regarding the pride of society, economy, quality of life and the situation of creating cultural interaction of the visitors who participate in the Culture Road Festivals, which are considered important for Turkey tourism, were investigated in Erzurum. In addition, whether the organized festival created cultural interaction and if it did, how and to what extent it affected the participants were examined based on demographic characteristics. Among the demographic characteristics of the festival participants, it was determined that the majority were women, had a high level of education, more than half were between the ages of 26-45, almost all were citizens of the Republic of Turkey, worked in the public and private sectors, and more than half of the participants had an income below 50 thousand TL. Participants see local products as part of the culture, and they believe that festivals are an effective tool in protecting, promoting and ensuring sustainability of these products. In addition, entertainment activities should definitely be included in festivals. The participants found it very unlikely that festivals would create major changes in the traditions and cultural heritage of the people living in the region where they are held.

In line with the data obtained from the research, the following recommendations were made to the relevant authorities:

- ✓ The number of festivals organised at national levels should be increased and taken to international levels, thus attracting foreign tourists to the regions and allowing them to interact with the local people.
- ✓ Local government and stakeholders should act together to make improvements in festivals and expand the scope of alternative tourism.
- ✓ Festival organizers should consider ways to influence different cultures by adding a more international dimension to the events organized at the festival.
- ✓ When Erzurum is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind for visitors to the location is its winter tourism feature, but its other qualities should also be highlighted and Erzurum, which has a rich cultural heritage, should be promoted nationally and internationally.
- ✓ In order to increase the sales of local food and beverages of Erzurum province, more comprehensive festivals should be organized and non-local products should not be sold in festival areas.
- ✓ In order to increase the number of visitors attending the festival and ensure they enjoy their experience, the necessary infrastructure services must be fully provided.
- ✓ Local, national and international media and social networking sites should be used more actively and effectively within the scope of this event. They should both attract participants to the region and encourage local people to participate in festival activities.
- ✓ Ensuring the sustainability of such activities is very important. Therefore, activities that increase tourism awareness in society should be carried out and deficiencies should be eliminated through training.
- ✓ Quality, safe and fast transportation services should be provided to the event areas for visitors, and the necessary sensitivity should be shown by the relevant authorities regarding issues such as environmental pollution and food hygiene. The inspection mechanism should also be established by local governments and effective control should be ensured in these practices.

In this context, the Cultural Road Festivals that are held are mediating the preservation of cultural heritage, keeping the past alive and transferring these traditions to future generations. Future studies can focus on the satisfaction level of visitors towards the festival as well as investigating the satisfaction of local people. Festival tourism can be an area of study that will continue to attract increasing interest in future studies.

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