

## Prosumer Neo-Tribes: An Ethnography of Recreational Cycling Communities \* \*\*

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### Abstract

In postmodern community studies, a neo-tribal theoretical framework has been proposed to elucidate recreational and touristic communities, positing that neo-tribes coalesce around shared consumer experiences. This study diverges by examining the productive functions of recreational and tourist communities through the lens of prosumerism. The study investigates two distinct recreational cycling tribes in Türkiye using ethnographic methods and participatory observations. The findings highlight that these cycling tribes play active roles in organizing events, developing visitor experiences and destinations, and generating both economic and social benefits. This study introduces the concept of prosumer tribes within the leisure and tourism literature, supported by empirical evidence. It offers implications for policymakers and businesses seeking to understand and harness the prosumer dynamics within recreational cycling communities.

**Keywords:** *Tourism, recreation, cycling communities, neo-tribes, prosumer.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Neo-tribalism, pioneered by Maffesoli (1996), has become a theoretical perspective often used to explain community forms of leisure and tourism behaviour (Hardy et al., 2018; Pforr et al., 2021). Neo-tribes are defined as groups of people from different walks of life who meet physically or virtually in fluid groupings, bound by common interests, similar lifestyles, rituals and language (Hardy et al., 2013).

In the leisure and tourism literature, studies initially applied the neo-tribe approach to describe communities in various leisure and tourism settings, such as football fans (Hughson, 1999), urban dance music enthusiasts (Bennett, 1999), surfers (Moutinho et al. 2007), cruise tourists (Weaver, 2011), festival goers (Hannam & Halewood, 2006) or recreational vehicle (RV) users (Hardy et al. 2012), and more recent studies have focused on more specific themes such as neo-tribe formation (Hardy et al. 2021), collective space (Canosa & Bennet, 2021; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Lewis, 2021), cohesion (Asan et al. 2022) or political resistance (Caldicott, 2021). However, as the literature largely conceptualises and explains neo-tribes in terms of consumerism, their productive functions as sectoral actors are ignored and remain to be explored.

On the other hand, neo-tribes include people who not only make the same types of purchases, but may also participate to some extent in the production process (Weaver, 2011). Hardy et al (2021) state that tribes produce a range of identities, practices, rituals, meanings and even material culture itself. Sykes (2021) also claims that if the market does not provide the desired products and services, the tribe will co-create an authentic tribal experience. Similarly, Goulding et al. (2013) highlight that consumers are seen as active co-creators of value, rather than passive recipients of value that firms create and embed through their ability to design and produce goods and services with utility, which are then traded in the market and consumed by consumers. Thus, although neo-tribes are formed around consumption patterns (Maffesoli, 1996), they do not remain simply consumers as a result of the intertwining of production and consumption. Recently, Cova and Dalli (2018) have opened up the concept of prosumer tribes for discussion. Accordingly, prosumer tribes shape the future of consumer culture, including hybrid practices such as helping, recycling, surfeiting or volunteering from a collective perspective. These studies provide clues to the productive aspect of leisure tribes, but are insufficient to explain the prosumer aspect of these socialites and are limited in terms of empirical evidence. To fill this gap, this study examines the supplier characteristics of leisure and tourism tribes, rather than consumer communities, using the prosumer framework. The study aims to explore the productive functions of two different recreational cycling tribes in Türkiye.

An ethnographic approach was adopted for the purpose of the study. The results of the study are expected to shed light on leisure and tourism communities. In addition, the study will allow certain implications to be drawn for businesses and decision makers regarding the prosumer characteristics of recreational cycling communities.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Prosumerism**

Prosumption, first proposed by Toffler (1981), is essentially described as the intertwining of production and consumption spheres. The rise of prosumption has been explained by the development of new production technologies and DIY (do-it-yourself) consumption practices (Toffler, 1981; Ritzer 2015), the increasing cost of non-automated services (Toffler, 1981), web 2.0 technologies (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), network-based marketing approaches (Kotler, 1984) and the emergence of more individual, hedonistic and creative consumers, as opposed to traditional consumers (Cova & Cova, 2012). The prosumer is used interchangeably in the literature with concepts such as co-creator (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), post-consumer (Firat & Dholakia, 2006) or market partner (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Prosumers can be defined as individuals who consume and produce value, either for their own consumption or for consumption by others, and may receive implicit or explicit incentives from organisations involved in the exchange (Lang et al., 2021).

According to Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010), production and consumption should not be considered separately, as they include each other at different levels. As this strengthens the identification of prosumers, some studies have developed different prosumer typologies (Lang et al 2021; Perera et al 2020; Ritzer, 2015). For example, Lang et al (2021) have described prosumers in six categories based on their role in the Covid-19 crisis period (DIY prosumers, self-service prosumers, customising prosumers, monetised prosumers, collaborative prosumers, economic prosumers). Another study, Perera et al. (2020), concluded that green prosumers can be categorised into three levels, including contraction, control and creation.

There are studies in the hospitality, tourism and leisure literature that define and categorise prosumers (Ritzer, 2015; Sugihartati, 2020). However, a few studies have focused on the prosumerism of leisure communities (Bond et al. 2021; Lahav-Raz, 2019). For example, Bond et al (2021) examined the network structures that included *#ToiletRollChallenge* and *#ProjectRestart* as prosumed recreational activities during the COVID-19 shutdown. They introduced the concept of prosumption value by claiming that prosumption is naturally linked to networks of relationally interacting individuals. According to these, leisure is relational and prosumed leisure (Bond et al. 2021). On the other hand, leisure communities can be studied as areas of prosumer engagement, not only in terms of online representation, but also in terms of face-to-face interaction. As a result, it is understood that the studies investigating prosumer communities as industry stakeholders are limited.

### **2.2 Neo-Tribes in Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism**

The neo-tribe theory, developed by Maffesoli (1996), explains postmodern communities in terms of consumerism. According to Maffesoli (1996), the mass society based on class-specific consumption patterns broke down in the rising consumer society that was clearly evident in the 1990s.

It was replaced by more heterogeneous consumption patterns and socialisations based on new group formation dynamics. These socialisations have been defined as neo-tribes, referring to communal values such as emotionality, solidarity and symbolism (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova & Cova 2001). Neo-tribes are conceptualised as groups of people from different walks of life who meet physically or virtually in fluid groupings (Hardy et al., 2013; Hardy, 2021). In this regard, neo-tribe studies tend to describe consumption groups that emerge based on social solidarity based on collective identities and shared experiences, rather than class-based understandings (Lv & Qian, 2018).

On the other hand, neo-tribes are inherently prone to co-creation (Canniford, 2011; Cova & Dalli, 2018). In tribes, individuals transform the consumed object, which opens the way to a creative culture that revitalises the social ethos (Seraphin & Korstanje, 2021). With characteristics of plurality, playfulness, transience and entrepreneurialism (Cova et al., 2012), tribes remain in a state of co-creation with all kinds of market resources (Canniford, 2011; Scuttari et al., 2021). Consumer tribes are entrepreneurial because they generate innovative ideas for business ventures and act as a collective in marketing (Scuttari et al. 2021). In addition to entrepreneurship, Cova & Dalli (2018) argue that communities act as guardians of the market value created by consumers. They develop tactics to compete for market share and redistribute profits within the community. Tribes can also create an authentic tribal experience when the market fails to provide desired products and services (Sykes, 2021). Communities engage in market relations that change their own form, content and practices (Moufahim et al. 2018). In this respect, neo-tribes can play an active sectoral role, rather than simply being consumers.

Moreover, tribes do not always have to be made up entirely of consumers. Communities generate communal relationships and create feelings of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement and passion that permeate their joint activities, as well as cultural values such as ideas, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures and images that are then put into their activities (Cova and Dalli, 2018). Communities also provide sources of support, therapy and coping, as well as political engagement and resistance in market societies (Moufahim et al., 2018). For example, tribes can be the sites of representation of different social identities (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018; Sykes, 2021), and they also produce contested spaces with ideological bases against hegemony (Hayday et al., 2021; Hughson, 1999). The idea of community as a key component of social welfare planning, as a way of organising service delivery and health care, and as a way of engaging a range of actors, including non-profits, businesses and working-class communities in particular places (Moutinho et al., 2007). Thus, neo-tribes that can generate social and economic value should be considered not only as sectoral actors, but also as social actors that transcend sectoral boundaries.

In the leisure and tourism literature, some studies point to important implications regarding the productive functions of neo-tribes. First, the events organised by the tribes and conceptualised as rituals can be considered as production items. Studies show, for example, that tribes organise events such as

voluntary races (Dolles et al., 2018), vegetarian food festivals (Bertella, 2018), pride events (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018) or cycling tours (Asan et al. 2022).

Second, leisure experiences can be produced through the interactions of tribe members, sometimes without the need to purchase from a service provider company. Experience-based marketing argues that experiences as economic units can be designed and presented like products (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Experience-based marketing research suggests that experiences can be co-created to enhance link value (Cova & Dalli, 2018; Sykes, 2021). Similarly, in leisure and tourism tribes, experiences are formed through the interactions of members. In a recent study, Sykes (2021) also studied motorcycle tribes and concluded that members from different backgrounds co-create their experiences with dynamic fluidity. Furthermore, Sykes (2021) claimed that the formation of a tribe can occur through co-created experiences in the group. Dolles et al (2018) found that tribe members benefited from the value of the event in a co-creative manner, despite playing various roles such as spectators, volunteer facilitators and race participants in a racing event.

Finally, recent studies focusing on space and tribal relations shed light on the functions of tribes in producing space and/or place (Canosa & Bennet, 2021; Hayday et al 2021; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Lewis, 2021). For example, Hayday et al (2021) concluded that esport communities have a production space that involves multiple and diverse stakeholders, all of whom appear to share imperatives and form productive relationships. In the context of watersports tribes, Scuttari et al (2021) found that members act as inventors of new symbols on the site and become enjoyable co-creators of destination spaces by sharing individual experiences on a community basis. Furthermore, tribe members who perform their rituals in physical spaces attach meaning to these places, transforming them into anchoring places that foster a sense of belonging (Cova & Cova 2002; Lv & Qian 2018; Wang & Xie, 2021). Thus, anchoring places can be considered as attractive destinations for tribal members.

Based on the literature discussion, we assume that recreational neo-tribes have production functions, in a sectoral and social sense, rather than just consumption. We therefore focus on exploring the productive functions of neo-tribes.

### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

Based on the neo-tribal theoretical framework, the study questions the conceptualisation of recreational communities as prosumers and aims to explore the productive functions of tribes in the case of recreational cycling communities. In this regard, an ethnographic approach was used to study the two recreational cycling neo-tribes in Türkiye. Ethnography is a convenient method to obtain information about tribal rituals and tribal values (Creswell, 2015). Ethnography can capture multifaceted sentiments and reveal the values at the core of neo-tribalism (Vorobjovas-Pinta 2018). In addition, ethnographic

methods are often used in neo-tribal studies (Hardy, Bennett, and Robards, 2018), so the present study follows this approach.

The data was collected by one of the researchers who was a member of these groups, both physically and through social media. In person, she attended events organised by the cycling communities. She also frequently interacted with members by following their social media pages. In this way, the researcher built trust and learned about the neo-tribal culture through long-term interactions.

### **3.2. Research Site**

The growth of cycling tourism in Türkiye has been actively influenced by cycling communities (Çelik Uğuz, 2018). The vast majority of tourism events, tours and festivals have been planned by cycling communities in Türkiye (Bisiklopedi, 2023). In this regard, two different cycling communities that represent the sociality of cyclists in Türkiye at the national level were included in the study.

The first is the Izmir Ancient Cities Cycling Tour Community (ABAK), which started organising cycling tours in 2012 and holds them every year in April. With a group of 100 bikes, the five-day tour follows a path through the ruins of ancient cities around İzmir. The event is advertised on Facebook. Participants pay a fee to cover the cost of food and drink, camping and guides. The tour itself is an addition that mixes cycling, nature, historical sites and cultural elements. The tour also includes social responsibility initiatives. For example, during the 2015 edition, free bicycles were distributed to needy children in the villages along the route. Cycling fans come together physically during the ABAK Tour, but they also stay in touch online via the ABAK Facebook page.

The second is the Eskisehir Bicycle Association (Velesbid), which was founded in 2014 as a non-profit organisation. The organisation arranges seminars, workshops, events/activities that focus on social responsibility, local night tours, tours within and outside the city, camping tours and more. The group hosts participants from many cities during its nationwide "Eskisehir Bicycle Festival" and "Eskisehir Bicycle Gatherings" events. Individuals can apply for formal membership. Members pay a nominal annual fee of \$10. Facebook is used for communication between members and followers. Any Facebook user who is not a member can participate in the association's activities as membership is not required. All activities and meetings are voluntary and open to all.

### **3.3. Data Collection**

Data was collected through participant observation. The study data consists of observation notes and data from the communities' social media pages. The study used theoretical sampling, which involves selecting participants, cases or contexts based on their potential to contribute to the development and refinement of theoretical concepts. When the emerging concepts and processes began to recur, the observations were completed.

In the case of Velesbid, the researcher conducted participant observations as an active member for 16 months between September 2016 and December 2017. Similarly, participant observation was conducted during the ABAK tour, which took place from 22 to 25 April 2017. The researcher took observation notes by cycling to the events several times during the weeks. At the community events she attended, the researcher recorded short observation notes and audio notes in her own voice due to time constraints. After the events, she expanded on these notes to form the observation data file.

The content of the Facebook pages of the two communities was also captured using the NCapture programme. The groups' social media pages provided a rich source of data for the study, containing members' expressions of their experiences, as well as photos and videos. 6,652 Velesbid posts and 5,344 ABAK posts were made since the pages were created. A total of 11,995 posts were collected over a period of about five years. In this way, the triangulation required by qualitative research was achieved, and a holistic view was adopted, in keeping with the nature of ethnography. The permission of the community managers allowed the data to be collected.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

The data were processed using thematic analysis. A three-stage coding procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used using NVivo software, including open, axial and selective coding. Similarities and differences and cutting and sorting techniques were used to identify themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Themes were labelled based on the literature review. The coding of themes was repeated by two tourism academics until a consensus was reached. The initial coding had an interrater reliability of 81% according to Miles and Huberman's (1994) interrater reliability formula.

## **4. RESULTS**

The analysis explained the productive functions of tribes through five themes: event development, experience development, developing destinations, economic benefit and social benefit.

### **4.1 Event Development**

The results of the study showed that cycling neo-tribes organise tourist events that include food and drink, accommodation and guide services. ABAK is already a community formed around a touring event. Every year in April, 100 domestic and foreign participants who are waiting to visit the ancient cities in and around Izmir come together with this organisation. The organisation does not allow the same person to participate two years in a row in order to ensure the circulation of participation. The core team of volunteers is responsible for organising the event. During the event, many services are volunteered by the participants, such as food service, guide service or bike maintenance and repair. Sample photos of ABAK events obtained from online data provide evidence of the themes discussed, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. ABAK tour photos



a) Community banner; b) 23rd of April, National Sovereignty and Children's Day in Köselier Village; c) Gift bikes for kids; d) Food service by local business; e) Cycling in nature; f) Visiting attractions

Source: (ABAK Facebook Page, n.d.)

Velesbid also organises two national events: Eskisehir Bicycle Festival and Eskisehir Bicycle Meetings. In addition, Velesbid organises recreational events: out-of-town tours with camping, overnight camping tours, day tours, night tours, activist tours (cycle paths, end violence against women or International Day of People with Disabilities), national festival tours (Republic Day on 29 October and 19th May the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day) and other events (cultural events,



hiking, social responsibility events). Examples of event photos taken from the Facebook page of this community are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Velesbid tour photos



a) March 8 international women's day tour; b) The Velesbid Bicycle House; c) International guests at the Velesbid Bicycle House; d) EU project meeting "Cycling for all" with other NGOs; e) Co-pedal cycling with visually impaired on 19th May the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day; f) Bicycle maintenance and repair workshop ;g)Eskisehir Bicycle Gatherings

**Source:** (Velesbid Facebook Page, n.d.)

## 4.2. Experience Development

In the cycling tribes studied, members have a variety of experiences during social interactions. After coding, the experiences observed in the cycling tribes are presented in Table 1. The Recreation Experience Preference Theory (REP) (Driver & Tocker, 1971), which is widely cited in the leisure literature, was used to determine the sub-themes of experiences. In addition to these experiences, 'belonging', 'collective enthusiasm', 'solidarity' and 'lifestyle' experiences are identified based on neo-tribe theory (Maffesoli, 1996).

**Table 1.** Experiences in cycling neo-tribes

Experience sub-theme	Original statement example
Belonging	I am in the joy of completing a beautiful event without any problems. What I really felt was a sense of belonging to the group. We went to a pub after the tour. Actually, this venue was not a place I go to very often. But now it felt like a more familiar place than ever before. I enjoyed the togetherness with the positive emotions radiated by the people around me. (Observation, Velesbid, 18.12.2016).
Collective enthusiasm	After registration and introduction in the city square, the tour will begin. The registered participants started to cycle around the Izmir Clock Tower, an iconic structure in the area. This is a kind of ritual. By the time of departure, people are warming up. Thus, they initiate a stream of energy. They attract the attention of other people around and everyone is already starting to smile. (Observation, ABAK, 21.04.2017).
Solidarity	“We are proud to be a part of this event . . . We stand in awe of the ABAK team, their solidarity and great effort.” (Online, ABAK, 26.04.2013)
Lifestyle	(After I started cycling) I try to drink more water and eat fruit. I think I should take care of myself. (Observation, Velesbid, 12.12.2017).
Entertainment	“The Phrygian valley tour, in Yazılıkaya. We had a lot of fun; we were not bothered by the rain. We kept cool and had a blast...” (Online, Velesbid, 07.08.2017).
Enjoy nature	“It is such a wonderful feeling to be among these beautiful people with the lyrical sound of pedals and sweet smells of spring flowers” (Online, ABAK, 25.04.2015)
Physical fitness	“Even though our bodies are aching now... our soul is looking forward to the next year’s tour.” (Online, Velesbid, 27.04.2015).
Physical rest	One of the cyclists says that ‘Cycling is like yoga for me... The wheels are starting to turn, you don't hear the sounds outside... You start to relax’. (Observation, ABAK, 22.04.2017).
Escape	“You can relax. You can stay away from very troubled and stressful environments.” (Online, Velesbid, 12.04.2017).
Learning	Participants not only discover nature, but they also learn how to spend the night in nature. They get to know about camping and equipment use. (Observation, Velesbid, 23.09.2016).
Meet new people	In the beginning, the new participants are silent... but there is no exclusion. As time passes, the conversation begins. A small talk begins about a bike brand or a piece of equipment... Biscuits are shared during the break. (Observation, Velesbid, 20.09.2017).
Share similar values	Many people participate in tours to find new friends and socialize. In time, they share leisure time with these new friends outside of cycling in other ways (for example going out, going to the cinema or theatre, or going on holiday). (Observation, Velesbid, 23.09.2016).

*Table 1 (Cont.)*

<b>Experience sub-theme</b>	<b>Original statement example</b>
Independence	One of the participants explained this independence as the biggest contribution of festivals and tour engagement. It gives self-confidence to those who want to make long journeys by bike.” (Observation, ABAK, 21.04.2017).
Introspection	A participant says that ‘cycling... to take time for yourself, to be alone with yourself, even if you are in a group, you can be alone with yourself’. (Observation, Velesbid 23.07.2016).
Achievement	“Even though it looks like we've been eating all day... we've done great, meaningful work together (a comment to photos).” (Online, Velesbid, 05.09.2015).
Risk reduction	“It feels safe to cycle de in heavy traffic with a group. Tour attendants check all participants on the ride. Moreover, everyone is watching each other.” (Observation, Velesbid, 27.06.2017).
Be with considerate people (social security)	Especially women who participate in group activities feel socially safe as well as physically secure. They want to be with people they know and like. (Observation, Velesbid, 12.02.2017).

According to the results, some of the experiences observed, such as physical relaxation or independence, escape, are a natural consequence of the act of cycling. Other experiences, such as meeting new people, collective enthusiasm or solidarity, are a result of collectivity. In this context, both individualistic and collective experiences can be seen simultaneously in cycling tribes. This finding suggests that tribes have a rich spectrum as an experience platform.

#### **4.3. Destination Development**

Another notable finding relates to the production space function of cycling tribes. In both cases, the routes and arrival points that are frequently visited in cycling tour programmes have, over time, turns into common tourist or recreational destinations. In ABAK, there are two tour routes to the south and north of Izmir. These routes are planned to include the historical, cultural and archaeological attractions of the region. One of the pioneers of ABAK expressed this situation in a contribution as follows:

*“We have worked with the foresight that the ABAK Tour could form a base for possible bicycle projects while determining its routes from the very beginning”* (Online, ABAK, 31.07.2017).

In fact, the bicycle routes in the İzmir Peninsula project implemented by Izmir Metropolitan Municipality were created with reference to ABAK routes (Yarimadaizmir, 2023). This finding shows that although ABAK is an informal group, it plays an active role in developing destinations in cooperation with the local government.

In the case of Velesbid, Kızılınler Village, which is 13 km from the city centre, is often a stopover or arrival point for cycling activities due to the suitability of the terrain, low traffic and nature. The village has become a recreational destination with the demand for cyclists. Every year, Velesbid organises a "Pumpkin Tour" in the village of Kızılınler, which is famous for its pumpkins. The

volunteers decorate the village square, the villagers offer the cyclists the pumpkin dessert they have made and sell their homemade products. The event's Facebook statement reads as follows:

*“We cyclists wanted to contribute to Kızılınler where we pedal for a long time in the hope of making the pumpkin value, a brand”* (Online, Velesbid, 3.11.2017).

In addition, Velesbid has converted an unused farmhouse into the Velesbid Bicycle House with sections such as a guest house, camping area, hobby garden, workshop studio and activity hall (Figure 2a, 2f & 2g). National and international travellers can stay at the house free of charge (image 2c). Velesbid Bicycle House has become an important attraction for the town in terms of national bicycle tourism.

#### **4.4. Economic Benefit**

According to the observations, the tribes surveyed demand a certain participation fee or donation from the tourist events. This fee is used to cover tourist expenses such as food and drink, camping sites, or bicycle or bag transport. In the case of ABAK, the participation fee is calculated by dividing the total expenditure by the number of participants. A participant in the ABAK organising committee stated the following:

*“We try to prioritize local values. We try to cooperate with local producers. For example, we purchase our meals from a family business that caters to village weddings.”* (Observation, ABAK, 23.04.2017).

Figure 1d shows the local food provider and some volunteer participants serving food together. This result shows that a co-creation value process has occurred between service providers and participants.

Similarly, Velesbid provides services from tourism companies for the Eskisehir Bicycle Festival in camping and out-of-town tours. The organising committees buy food and drink, accommodation or transport services directly from service providers (e.g. bus company, restaurant) and prepare a package tour. As Velesbid is an association with fixed and variable costs, the participation fee includes the cost of the tour as well as donations.

This means that the tribes are economically active on a small and local scale. Thus, tribes can benefit economically from their events in order to continue their existence. They also generate economic benefits through purchases from the tourism industry.

#### **4.4. Social Benefit**

As a further result, the study found that cycling tribes create social benefits within the sub-themes of advocacy for cyclists' rights, social responsibility and participation. Accordingly, both tribes advocate for cyclists' rights in the name of social welfare. While Velesbid organises activities for the

development of bicycle lanes and raising awareness of cyclists in traffic, ABAK shares news and information about bicycle lanes on its Facebook page.

The tribes carry out various social responsibility projects that are either directly or indirectly related to their objectives. Firstly, in the case of ABAK, the tour is organised every year on 23 April, National Sovereignty and Children's Day. As part of the tour programme, this important day is celebrated with the children in a village along the route. For example, children in the village of Manisa Köselier were given bicycles during the 2015 ABAK tour (Figure 1b). Gifts are given to the children or activities are carried out to help them, such as painting their schools. Not only during the tour, but throughout the year, ABAK's social responsibility awareness continues with online communication throughout the year. Looking at the Facebook pages, there are many posts about the development of bicycle transport. They have also organised activities for children with autism. For example, one Facebook post reads as follows:

*“On Wednesday, January 13, between 13.00-15.00, we started cycling and photography trainings for our autistic children, together with a group of volunteers with a big, willing and self-sacrificing heart.”* (Online, ABAK, 13.01.2016)

As a non-governmental and formal organisation, Velesbid has more frequent and relatively organised activities for social benefit. The community participates in platforms and organises awareness-raising events for the development of cycling in the city. Co-pedal events are organised, i.e. cycling on tandem bicycles used by two people (sighted and visually impaired). To raise awareness on important days such as Violence against Women or International Day of Persons with Disabilities, social tours with broad participation are organised in the city (Figure 2e).

In addition to social responsibility, both tribes attach great importance to participation in their practices and discourses. For example, one member explains how they followed a democratic path in organising the ABAK tours:

*“Before deciding on the gifts, samples were shown and we discussed which could be. Voting was held... We made our decision with the majority of votes... Food menus, banner design... such a process worked in all of them.”* (Observation, ABAK, 23.04.2017).

Thus, tribes that expand their domains with social responsibility projects idealise the generation of social benefits. Similarly, they contribute to the development of a culture of democracy in society through the principle of participation.

## **5. CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION**

Recreational communities as neo-tribes are receiving increasing attention in the hospitality and leisure literature (Hardy et al., 2018; Pforr et al., 2021). In general, neo-tribal research explains communities as consumption networks, starting from the idea of Maffesoli's (1996) heterogeneous

consumption patterns (Cova & Cova, 2001; Goulding et al., 2013; Hardy, 2021). Although some studies suggest that tribes have a co-creative nature (Canniford, 2011; Cova & Dalli, 2018), the production function of tribes as an entrepreneurial structure remains understudied. Based on the prosumer concept, which refers to the intertwining of production and consumption domains, the main objective of the current study was to investigate the production functions of recreational neo-tribes. As a result of the ethnographic study of the two cycling neo-tribes, the study concluded that the cycling neo-tribes have productive functions, including event organisation, experience development, destination development, economic benefits and social benefits.

Firstly, in terms of sectoral production, the tribes organise tourist and leisure events. According to the segments of bicycle tourism proposed by Lamont and Buultjens (2011, p. 60), the ABAK tour can be identified as a participatory event, defined as 'commercially organised, non-competitive events of one or more days; profit or charitable objectives'. Similarly, Velesbid organises recreational and participatory events based on this segmentation. Both non-commercial tribes have asked participants to pay a fee or make a donation to the events and activities they organise. The collected money was mainly used to cover the costs of food, accommodation and entertainment. As a result, cycling tribes combine different services and produce event services. This finding supports the literature on tourism and leisure tribes by showing that tribes organise events themselves (Bertella, 2018; Dolles et al., 2018; Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018). Similarly, cycling festivals, which are an important part of the supply of cycling tourism in Türkiye, are mostly organised by cycling communities (Bisiklopedi, 2023). In addition to the fact that these activities are non-commercial as they are based on volunteer work, these activities fill a sectoral gap. Therefore, it was concluded that cycling neo-tribes could play the role of event producers from a sectoral perspective.

Secondly, the study concluded that members had a wide range of experiences of tribal interactions. Many of these experiences have been identified in studies of tourism and leisure tribes. For example, belonging (Robards, 2018), sharing similar values (Bertella, 2018; Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018) or lifestyles (Bennett, 1999; Hardy et al., 2012) have been identified in previous studies. In this regard, leisure experiences emerge with the social interactions provided by the tribal atmosphere. Building on the findings supporting the literature, we take the discussion one step further. The results suggest that the group atmosphere not only creates experiences, but also promotes these experiences. For example, as ABAK states its purpose as 'to strengthen the love of history and nature through cycling culture' (ABAK Facebook page), it promises experiences such as enjoying nature, entertainment, learning and sharing similar values. Similarly, Velesbid's aim is to "support the cycling movement, which includes forms of transport, sport and leisure" (Velesbid Facebook page), and this promises experiences such as physical fitness, entertainment and physical rest. Studies focusing on tribal practices have shown that the tribe is represented through symbols and rituals (Hardy et al. 2013; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Lewis, 2021). Furthermore, tribal practices and their symbolic world are based on communal ethics (Cova and

Cova, 2001) or shared and negotiated norms and rules (Goulding et al., 2013). In this respect, tribal experiences can be seen as an individual reflection or outcome of tribal practices. Thus, experiences are not only created, but also encouraged and facilitated by tribal codes of ethics and norms. Consequently, we concluded that the neo-tribe is a corporate body that develops experiences collectively.

Thirdly, it was observed that cycling tribes have a destination development function. In both tribes, the routes and locations commonly used in touring programmes have developed over time into popular tourist or leisure destinations. Previous studies have examined the space and/or place production of tribal relationships (Canosa & Bennet, 2021; Hayday et al. 2021; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Lewis, 2021). In particular, the anchoring of places where tribal rituals are performed to develop a sense of belonging implies the tribe's place production function (Cova & Cova 2002; Lv & Qian 2018; Wang & Xie, 2021). In this regard, the study revealed that recreational cycling tribes serve to produce destinations and recreational areas that correspond to 'place' in the hospitality and leisure literature. For example, the Velesbid Bicycle House has become a destination in Eskisehir bicycle tourism through the interaction of tribe members and travellers. In addition, ABAK routes are now included in İzmir's tourism inventory (Yarimadaizmir, 2023). In addition, tribes are used to disseminate information about existing destinations and to create new cycling destinations. As a result, tribes are not only a demand for visiting an attraction, but can also serve as a supply partner in the creation and development of recreational areas and destinations.

Fourthly, the study concluded that tribes are involved in small and local economic activities. Tribes organise events by purchasing services such as transport, food and accommodation from hospitality businesses. In this way, tribes can have an economic impact on the tourism industry by assuming the role of retailers. At the same time, these activities are seen as co-creation value processes. Neo-tribes are by nature co-creative structures (Canniford, 2011; Cova & Dalli, 2018). Thus, tribes create an economic benefit based on co-creation for local and small businesses. On the other hand, prosumerism does not necessarily end in co-creation that requires a second party (Toffler, 1981; Cova & Dalli, 2018). Events can be organised through interactions between members and sometimes even without the need to purchase from a service provider company (Sykes, 2021). The results of this study show that tribes can carry out some of their activities without a second actor or purchase. Furthermore, one of the tribes (Velesbid) sustains itself by covering its expenses with the income it earns from the events. Therefore, the tribal events are not for commercial purposes, but provide direct economic benefits to the tribes.

Finally, the study concluded that cycling tribes generate social benefits in terms of promoting participation in society and social responsibility. Previous studies draw attention to the social aspect of tribes on various issues such as social well-being (Moutinho et al., 2007; Cova and Dalli, 2018), representation of social identities (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018; Sykes, 2021), and contested spaces against hegemony (Hayday et al., 2021; Hughson, 1999). This study also showed that members with a cycling

identity defended their rights in the public space provided by the tribes. Furthermore, cycling tribes can act with social responsibility in matters not directly related to their purpose of existence. In addition, the development of democratic culture is vital in developing countries with over-centralised administration, including Türkiye (Tosun, 2000). Therefore, cycling tribes that act according to the principle of participation contribute to the development of the culture of democracy, which is an important social benefit.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS & LIMITATIONS**

### **6.1. Theoretical Implications**

Neo-tribal studies provide a powerful theoretical framework for understanding communal leisure behaviour and individual behaviour within groups. In this respect, this study has made three main contributions to the leisure and neo-tribal literature. First, the study has opened up discussion about the assumption that neo-tribes are consumer-based structures. Typically, neo-tribes are seen as consumption networks that form around experiences (Cova & Cova 2002; Kozinets, 1999; Hardy, 2021). On the other hand, this study shows that neo-tribes have production functions in sectoral (event organisation, experience development, destination development) and social terms (economic and social benefits).

Secondly, the study presents the suggestion that neo-tribes can be defined as prosumers, based on the cycling tribes studied. Although there are studies that talk about the co-creative nature of neo-tribes (Canniford, 2011; Cova & Dalli, 2018), this study is the first to investigate prosumer tribes with empirical evidence. In both tribes studied, there are examples of co-creation in collaboration with hospitality companies, as well as productive actions in the form of developing experiences, events or destinations without a producer role. By revealing the productive functions of tribes, the study suggests that they can be recognised as prosumers

### **6.2. Practical Implications**

The findings of the study have important implications for both hospitality businesses and policy makers. Firstly, neo-tribes, with their prosumer identities, are both a target group and a business partner for hospitality and leisure stakeholders. In this respect, tribes should be supported to organise events that generate economic and social benefits. The destination development capacities of locally influential neo-tribes can be utilised. In addition, as tribes are based on volunteerism, many destination applications can be carried out in cooperation with tribes.

The fact that cycling tribes organise their own events may at first appear to be a threat to the hospitality industry (especially tour operators and travel agents). According to Toffler (1981), the increasing prosumerism may lead to the self-sufficiency of consumers and thus to the end of the market for goods and services. For cycling tourism in Türkiye, the organisers of cycling events are usually associations, sports clubs and cycling groups (Bisiklopedi, 2023). For Türkiye, the number of agencies operating in this market is still very limited. Therefore, cycling tribes are more of a market opportunity



for agencies than a threat. Tribes allow tourism and leisure companies to be aware of new markets. In addition, the knowledge of the market is hidden in the tribes as a constituent element of this market. Companies specialised in cycling activities should play a facilitating role for tribes and enable tribes to self-fulfil the prosumer process. Considering the low economic contribution of cycling tribes, especially at the local level, agencies should not expect high profits from this market segment. In this respect, companies should aim for social sustainability rather than profitability. Developing relationships with tribes will create a very good cross-selling opportunity for companies. Due to the network structural characteristics of tribes, it is recommended that businesses use relational marketing methods.

All types of leisure activities in the form of recreation or tourism provide individual contributions such as well-being, self-renewal and fulfilment. In this respect, cycling neo-tribes also create alternative living spaces that give meaning to individuals' existence and increase their quality of life. Individuals feel happier by developing a sense of belonging and trust within tribes. The results of the study show that tribes also create value in terms of social welfare by generating social benefits and serving the developing community. Therefore, supporting and encouraging prosumer tribes, which are among the most important actors for sustainability, can also have a positive impact on social welfare.

### **6.3. Limitations & Future Research**

The study is limited to the cycling communities studied. The study focused on exploring only the productive functions of tribes, as the literature already agrees on their consumer functions. Future studies investigating tribes in different sectors will strengthen the conceptualisation of prosumer tribes by investigating producer and consumer functions together. Furthermore, the sectoral functions of tribes in this study were limited to the hospitality sector. Expenditures by members, such as cycling equipment and clothing, can also be estimated to have indirect impacts in relevant sectors. Future studies should therefore also consider the indirect economic impact of tribes.

This study focuses on the face-to-face production of the tribes studied. Although social media data is also used, online content produced by these tribes (e.g. route information, destination reviews, etc.) is excluded from the scope of the study. The role of cycling prosumer tribes as online content producers can be investigated. Finally, the results of the study offer a positive interpretation of tribes as prosumers. The question of whether exploitative capitalist prosumerism applies to entertainment communities remains to be answered.

The study does not necessitate Ethics Committee permission.

The study has been crafted in adherence to the principles of research and publication ethics.

The authors declare that there exists no financial conflict of interest involving any institution, organization, or individual(s) associated with the article. Furthermore, there are no conflicts of interest among the authors themselves.

**Contribution:** Kübra Aşan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft. Medet Yolal: Conceptualization, Supervision.

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