

# THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON TURKISH BATH CULTURE\*

Kuzu Sinem<sup>1</sup>, Sarı Çallı Didar<sup>2\*\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sakarya University of Applied Sciences, Sakarya, Türkiye, 22502005002@subu.edu.tr

<sup>2</sup>Sakarya University of Applied Sciences, Sakarya, Türkiye, didarsari@subu.edu.tr

## Abstract

*This research aims to examine Turkish bath culture in depth within the context of cultural heritage, assessing the contemporary continuity and transformation of traditional bathing practices, spatial and symbolic objects, and ritual-based practices using a holistic approach. A semi-structured interview technique was carefully selected for this study, based on a qualitative method. Interviews were conducted in 20 active baths in the Fatih district of Istanbul, which are considered spatially and functionally representative and possess a strong historical context. The data obtained were analysed in detail through a descriptive analysis process. The findings clearly demonstrate a high degree of continuity in traditional bathing practices and professional roles such as “tellaklık” and “natırlık”, while bath objects continue to be used largely in their authentic form. However, it has been observed that culturally meaningful ritual practices such as the bridal bath, the groom’s bath, and the forty bath are becoming increasingly rare and, in some cases, have transformed into symbolic representations. This situation makes it urgently necessary to address Turkish bath culture comprehensively and to develop innovative strategies to ensure its sustainability.*

**Keywords:** tourism, cultural heritage, Turkish bath, Turkish bath culture

**JEL Classification:** Z1, Z32, L83

**DOI:** 10.24818/CTS/7/2025/2.06

## 1. Introduction

Physically existing cultural values are enduring historical elements produced or shaped by humanity. In Turkey, this concept is defined by Law No. 2863 on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets (Madran & Özgönül, 2005). According to the law, all movable and immovable works that have survived from the earliest periods of human history to the present and possess scientific, religious, artistic, or cultural originality are included within this scope. For example, manuscripts, archaeological finds, and works of art are classified as movable, while old settlements, historical structures, and monuments are considered immovable elements (Kutut et al., 2021). Internationally, UNESCO classifies physical cultural values under three main categories: monuments, groups of buildings, and cultural landscape areas (UNESCO, 2024). This distinction was developed to emphasise the universal importance of these assets. Monuments include individual architectural structures and archaeological remains; groups of buildings refer to architectural sequences that present a certain integrity; cultural landscapes encompass extensive areas of historical, visual, or archaeological value. Such cultural elements not only carry traces of past civilisations to the present but also play a key role in establishing historical continuity. The fact that Generation Z continues to visit cultural heritage sites to enrich their general knowledge and strengthen their ties with history (Diaconescu & Şchiopu, 2023) underscores the importance of

\* This article is produced from the master's thesis titled "A Study on the Turkish Bath Culture Within the Scope of Cultural Heritage Sustainability" which was accepted by the Graduate Education Institute of Sakarya University of Applied Sciences and published in the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education of the Republic of Turkey with the number 962195.

\*\* Corresponding author

**Authors' ORCID:**

Kuzu Sinem

Sarı Çallı Didar

preserving and protecting these structures for the sustainability of culture and history.

Baths, rooted in the historical and symbolic meanings of water culture and recognised as important elements of cultural heritage, have served not only as physical spaces for cleansing and hygiene but also as places of togetherness where rich social interactions occurred, significant rites of passage were performed, and artistic production was displayed. In Turkish-Islamic civilisation, this longstanding culture has developed a unique identity and evolved into a multifaceted tradition closely integrated with daily life. It is essential to connect the traditional bath experience more closely with cultural tourism, actively organise culturally themed events, revive fading bath stories, and enhance the visibility of cultural heritage through digital platforms. Such approaches are believed to raise awareness among the local population regarding cultural continuity and make significant contributions to cultural heritage-focused tourism policies.

Istanbul, particularly the Historical Peninsula with its multilayered historical fabric reflecting traces of various civilisations over the centuries, is one of Turkey's most remarkable cultural heritage sites. It offers a unique setting where architectural structures and daily life practices, passed down from past to present, are closely intertwined.

The traditional Turkish baths within these historical structures are not merely bathing areas; they also serve as carriers of cultural continuity, functioning as special spaces where social relationships are formed, rituals are practised, and collective memory is embodied (Akan et al., 2005; Kolb & Dumreicher, 2008). In this context, the research aims to examine Turkish bath culture with a holistic approach that includes both material and spiritual elements. The primary objective is to analyse the current state of traditional bathing practices, specific objects used, and cultural rituals, and to identify the transformations this heritage has undergone regarding its sustainability. Additionally, the research prioritises proposing strategies based on preservation, visibility, and implementation to help transfer this cultural heritage to future generations. The existing literature includes various studies on the architectural structures (Eyice, 1997; Goodwin, 2003; Kuban, 2021), historical development (Ünver, 1950; Ertuğrul, 2009), and sociocultural functions (Ergin, 2010; Karaca Aydın, 2025) of Turkish baths. Furthermore, the research aims to identify the roles of tourism activities in ensuring their sustainability.

The originality of this study lies in its evaluation of traditional Turkish bath culture through both its physical objects – such as metal items and tools (Tufan, 2006; Kalyoncu, 2021)—and its ritual practices (Savaşan, 1970; Yenice & Ararat, 2022). Furthermore, baths are considered not only as spatial heritage but also as a living cultural system, and the current visibility, transferability, and transformation of this system are examined within the tourism paradigm. This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature by pioneering the development of policy and practice recommendations to support cultural sustainability and by identifying the roles of tourism, particularly cultural tourism, in this context.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Culture and cultural heritage

The word “culture” originates from the Latin terms “cultura” and “colere”, meaning “care” and “cultivation” in relation to agriculture. This underscores the significant influence of agricultural life on the development of the concept of culture. The concept of culture in its modern sense first appeared in Germany in the mid-18th century and was systematically defined by Gustav Friedrich Klemm in 1843. Klemm regarded culture as the accumulation of human societies, reflected in their art, thought, and lifestyles (Baykan, 2007). In Turkey, Ziya Gökalp, an intellectual of the late Ottoman period, used the Arabic terms “hars” and “tehzib” to explain this concept. In the early years of the Republic, the Turkish Language Association proposed the word “ekin” as a substitute for “culture” (Turan, 1994). Today, culture is examined along two fundamental axes: material and spiritual, encompassing both physical and tangible elements, as well as intangible values and belief systems.

Culture is regarded as the sum of all material and spiritual elements manifested throughout human history. This phenomenon is generally examined under two main categories: tangible and intangible cultural elements. The physical culture of societies includes the tangible objects used and produced in daily life, such as kitchenware, clothing, tools, machinery, technological equipment, and industrial

products. These physical elements fall within the concept of “civilisation” and indicate that material culture reflects a society's technological level and industrial development. There is always a two-way interaction between these two cultural dimensions (Arslanoğlu, 2000). Culture provides a rich structure that gives societies their uniqueness through symbols, values, and norms. According to Fichter, culture reveals the symbols that distinguish societies, gives meaning to social values, supports cooperation among individuals, and acts as a factor guiding social progress (Fichter, 2002). Hofstede, meanwhile, analyses culture in four basic dimensions: individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and whether societies display masculine or feminine characteristics (Hofstede, 1984). These dimensions offer a functional framework for analysing cultural differences. In social sciences such as sociology and anthropology, culture is regarded as a comprehensive structure that human societies collectively adopt and transmit from generation to generation. Analysis of this structure generally focuses on two main elements: physical and intellectual culture.

Physical culture includes physical artefacts such as architectural structures, works of art, clothing styles, technological devices, and tangible objects used in daily life. These elements reflect a society's methods of adapting to environmental conditions, its aesthetic understanding, and its level of technological sophistication. They also include functional tools for meeting individuals' basic needs. Such cultural structures can be shaped by demographic characteristics, shared interests, or specific ideological orientations. Subcultures are not only distinct structures but also reflect social diversity, serve as tools for cultural transformation, and at times are part of marginalisation processes (Özkalp, 1994; Aktan & Tutar, 2007). These microcultural formations, in constant interaction with the general culture, are important analytical tools for understanding the dynamic nature of cultural structures.

Cultural heritage forms a whole that enables a connection with the past and embodies the values societies have developed over time. This heritage is generally classified into two groups: elements with physical qualities and traditional elements transmitted through oral or practical means. The concepts of cultural property and cultural heritage are regarded as multilayered constructs in both academic literature and national and international legal systems. In Turkish law, particularly under Law No. 2863 on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets, the definition of cultural property is considered within a very broad framework. It includes all movable and immovable elements with unique scientific, religious, aesthetic, and cultural qualities, dating from prehistoric times to the present, and encompasses all assets located on the surface, underground, or underwater. This definition both broadens the scope of physical cultural elements and emphasises authenticity and historical value (Madran & Özgönül, 2005; Şengel, 2020).

## *2.2 The historical development of bath culture*

The historical development of bath culture clearly reflects people's deep attachment to water. Throughout human history, water has been essential for meeting vital needs and for seeking spiritual and mental tranquillity. In this context, washing and cleansing have been fundamental requirements in many religions, with water playing an active role in worship rituals. Since ancient times, various civilisations have emphasised the sacredness of water and expressed these beliefs in their practices. For example, Indians bathed in the Ganges River, Assyrians in the Euphrates River, and Egyptians in the Nile River, aiming for both spiritual and physical purification (Bozok, 2005). These practices show that water was regarded as a means for both spiritual and physical cleansing. The “Kumbh Mela” ritual, which continues in India today, is a modern example of these sacred water practices. Kumbh Mela symbolises the sacredness of water in the Hindu religion, and large groups, especially at the confluence of three rivers, bathe for purification (Tepe, 2019).

The sanctity of water is also highly significant in the Islamic world. In Islamic societies, ablution performed before worship is regarded as both a physical and spiritual act of purification. Water and cleanliness (ablution) are so important in Islam that if these conditions are not met or are violated, worship is considered invalid or cannot commence. The sanctity of water is frequently emphasised in religions other than Hinduism and Islam (Erdem, 1993). Water stands out as a crucial element common to all these beliefs. While each belief attributes different meanings to water, a general unity is evident.

In addition to climatic and geographical conditions, the evolving understanding of privacy and the widespread adoption of sedentary lifestyles have significantly increased individuals' pursuit of physical

and mental purification, leading to the prominent role of baths in social life. Baths are important cultural structures that reflect the artistic and architectural influences of their respective regions. According to archaeological and historical sources, the first enclosed spaces built for cleansing purposes are found in the civilisations of Ancient Egypt, India, the Ancient Aegean, and Greece. Areas functioning as baths have been identified within the ruins of the city of Ras al-Ayn, near the Turkey-Syria border, dating back to the 3rd century BC. Remains from the Late Hittite period around Gaziantep, dating to around 1200 BC, and a bath belonging to the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III, who reigned between 859 and 824 BC on the banks of the Tigris River in Mesopotamia, reveal that a culture of cleanliness was adopted quite early in Anatolia and Mesopotamia (Ürük, 2016). During these periods, baths were built in the immediate vicinity of charitable foundations and institutions. Located within or near structures such as soup kitchens, caravanserais, and madrasahs, baths served the residents of these institutions. Baths built for public service were constructed by the sultans or authorised state authorities and were established as separate structures for male and female users or as double baths with detached sections (Avcı, 2020).

### *2.3 Sustainable tourism, cultural heritage and authenticity*

The concept of sustainability was first defined in the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In the context of cultural heritage, this concept extends beyond physical preservation to include maintaining social memory, transmitting cultural values, and ensuring uses that contribute to economic and social development (UNESCO, 2013). Strategies for sustaining bath culture should include preserving the architectural fabric, reviving bath rituals, supporting traditional professions (tellak, natır), offering courses on bath culture in public education, and integrating authentic experiences into tourism. Sustainable cultural heritage management should be supported by participatory, awareness-raising policies that encourage society to embrace these values (Hribar et al., 2015).

In this context, the concept of sustainable tourism emerges as an important tool. Sustainable tourism adopts an environmentally sensitive approach, respects local values, and prioritises the preservation of cultural assets (Çolak et al., 2025). Viewing baths as living cultural spaces, rather than merely tourist attractions, is essential for the continuity of culture. However, it is crucial to prevent the reduction of cultural values to commercial commodities and to preserve their original meanings and contexts (Kolb & Dumreicher, 2008). At this stage, cultural sustainability should not be confined to structural or economic aspects but should also be assessed within the framework of “authenticity”. Authenticity refers to the originality of a cultural element, consistent with its local historical context and unaltered for commercial purposes (Cohen, 1988). For the sustainability of bath culture, all components – such as rituals, objects, language, and professions – must be preserved not only physically but also in their semantic and contextual integrity. Otherwise, baths become merely “touristy decor” and lose their significance in the memory and daily life of local people. Authentic experience is also a fundamental element of sustainable tourism. Tourists who encounter authentic, unspoilt, and meaningful practices in cultural spaces experience greater satisfaction and contribute to cultural continuity (Taylor, 2001). Preserving baths not only physically but also with their authentic functionality – in other words, maintaining practices such as kese, peştemal, tellak, and natır as a “living culture” – is of paramount importance.

### *2.4 Turkish bath culture as cultural heritage and research questions*

Turkish baths are holistic entities that encompass not only physical structures but also intangible aspects of cultural heritage, such as bathing rituals, professional traditions, aesthetic values, and social lifestyles. However, the sustainability of Turkish bath culture is currently at risk due to rapid urbanisation, tourism pressures, the gradual decline of traditional practices, and the weakening connection of younger generations to this culture. Therefore, it is necessary to preserve not only the physical structures but also the cultural functions, narratives, professions, and social rituals. In this context, this study, which examines the role of tourism in sustaining baths as elements of cultural heritage, is based on the following three research questions:

**Q1:** *To what extent are the practices of traditional Turkish bath culture preserved in contemporary tourist bath establishments?*

**Q2:** *How do tourist bath establishments present traditional rituals and practices, and which elements shape the visitor experience?*

**Q3:** *What roles does tourism play in the sustainability of baths as elements of cultural heritage?*

### 3. Method

This research employed a qualitative methodology to evaluate the historical continuity of Turkish bath culture and its transformation in the contemporary context from a cultural heritage perspective. Qualitative methodology enables in-depth analysis to reveal the context-specific meanings of social and cultural phenomena (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The research aimed to obtain information directly from businesses regarded as living representatives of bath culture. Data were collected through the semi-structured interview technique, an effective tool for eliciting participant experiences in a non-directive manner (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The selection of businesses and participants followed a purposive sampling strategy. In this context, data were obtained from 20 bath managers who are still actively operating, maintain their historical identity, and preserve their traditional service practices to a certain extent.

Semi-structured interviews, by contrast, enable the researcher to collect data within a specific question framework while also clarifying the unique experiences of participants (Patton, 2002). The interview form was developed through a comprehensive literature review and expert opinions from various academic disciplines. Sources such as Can (2009) and Kaplan (2023) informed the development of the interview form, and data were also gathered from the opinions of four experts on the topic, resulting in a total of 16 questions. In summary, the question development process followed a two-stage system: the first stage was a literature review, and the second stage was expert consultation. Each interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes, included flexible questions aligned with the thematic framework of the study, and responses were recorded using tape recorders. Audio recording is one of the most important steps for ensuring the reliability of data obtained from field research. Additionally, detailed field notes were taken during the interviews to support the collected data.

Various measures were taken to ensure validity and reliability in this study. Care was taken to ensure content validity when developing the semi-structured interview form used as the data collection tool. Appropriate times and locations were chosen to allow participants to express their views freely; interviews were conducted with participants' consent and after explaining the research purpose. To enhance the reliability of the research, direct quotations related to the themes identified during the analysis were included, allowing readers to verify the researcher's interpretations. The diversity and adequacy of participant opinions contributed to a more consistent interpretation of the findings. These processes support both the internal validity and reliability of the study.

As the study aimed to reveal the structural and functional aspects of bath culture and its current reflections, the content analysis method was used in accordance with the research purpose (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Through the exploration method, six themes were identified: Sustainability of Intangible Culture, Education and Awareness-Raising, Sustainability of Authenticity, Media and Promotion, Shared Responsibility and Stakeholder Participation, and Sustainability of Social Memory. The data were reported according to these themes. Word cloud analysis was used to identify the themes, and NVivo software was employed to generate the word cloud. Participant statements are presented as direct quotations, the data are grouped holistically, and their meaning is interpreted using an interpretative approach. These quotations, consisting of field notes and collected data, contributed to the systematic organisation of the content analysis. Similar patterns and distinctive elements among the findings were identified and reported under the six themes.

### 4. Findings

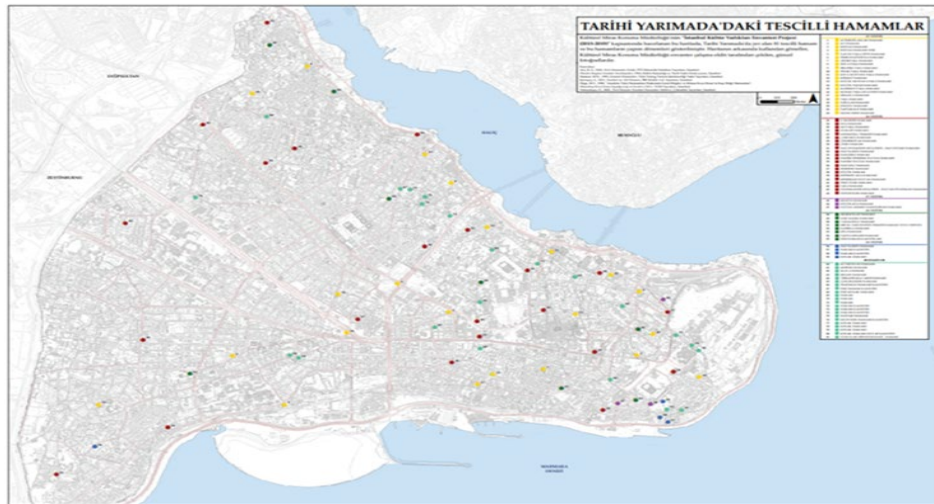
The Fatih district of Istanbul (Historical Peninsula) was chosen as the spatial boundary of the study because many historically and touristically significant baths in Turkey are concentrated in Istanbul, particularly around the Historical Peninsula. Information on the businesses included in the study was obtained from the Fatih Municipality and its local records, which were accessed during the fieldwork.

**Table 1. Types of baths and service status**

Turkish bath name	Turkish bath type	Service status	Turkish bath name	Turkish bath type	Service status
Ayasofya Hürrem Sultan	Male-Female	Open	Ağa	Male-Female	Open
Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa	Male-Female	Open	Sofular	Male-Female	Open
Mihrimah Sultan	Male-Female	Open	Tarihi Küçük	Male-Female	Open
Süleymaniye	Male-Female	Open	Tarihi Paşa	Male-Female	Open
Mehmed Ağa	Male-Female	Open	Nişanca	Male-Female	Open
Koca Mustafa Paşa	Male-Female	Open	Acemoğlu	Male-Female	Open
Cağaloğlu	Male-Female	Open	Hacı Kadın	Female	Open
Vezneciler	Male-Female	Open	Horhor	Male	Open
Sultan Ahmed	Male-Female	Open	Tahtaminare	Male	Open
Çemberlitaş	Male-Female	Open	Balat Çavuş	Male	Open

Source: Fatih Municipality (2024) and its local records

Data on the types and service structures of the 20 active historical baths included in the study are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1. Table 1 summarises these 20 active baths, while Figure 1 illustrates the broader distribution of registered baths in the Historical Peninsula from which these 20 were selected. This sampling method allowed for an in-depth and targeted analysis. According to the data in Table 1, a significant proportion (80%) of the 20 historical baths serve both male and female customers. However, a small number of facilities serve only women or only men. This diversity reflects trends in bath use among different segments of society. These 20 baths were registered as part of the "Istanbul Cultural Heritage Inventory Project," conducted by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Cultural Heritage Directorate between 2015 and 2019, and were selected for this study as they were deemed suitable.

**Figure 1. Registered baths in the Historical Peninsula**

Source: (İBB,2024)

Basic information about the interviewees and the businesses included in the study is presented in Table 2. Participants were designated as "P" and numbered throughout the interviews.

**Table 2. Basic information about participants**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Female	7	35
Male	13	65
<b>Age</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
35-39	4	20
39-49	10	50
50 and above	6	30
<b>Education</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary School	1	5
Secondary School	7	35
High School	7	35
Associate degree	3	15
Bachelor's Degree	2	10
<b>Working position in the business</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Business owner	9	45
Business partner	3	15
Business employee	8	40

Source: Authors' field data (2024)

According to the data in Table 2, more than half the participants were male. The age distribution indicates that most participants were between 35 and 50 years old, with the 39–49 age group particularly prominent. For educational background, there was at least one participant from each educational level, with high school graduates being the most common. The distribution of roles within businesses shows that nearly half the participants were business owners. Categories were identified through descriptive analysis, and evaluations were conducted within these categories. The first phase of the evaluations included the research team's conclusions, while the second phase included direct quotations, supporting the evaluations with participants' opinions. Relevant findings are presented under headings in the following section.

### ***Sustainability of intangible culture***

The bridal bath is regarded as one of the most significant examples of intangible cultural heritage and is an essential part of these events. It typically involves decorating the venue and performing traditional henna rituals. Music is generally optional at these gatherings. Live performances, such as fasıl groups or groups performing in various genres, may be arranged upon request, or ambient music with a pre-selected playlist may be provided. Some businesses offer assistance with the bride's special bathing process, as well as scrubbing, foam treatments, and massage as part of their entertainment services. In rare instances, some businesses provide a belly dance show following the fasıl music. Some participants' views on the subject are given below:

*P2: "We decorate the area and first hold the henna ceremony. We have a live music team or play requested songs. Our team assists the bride with the bathing process, offering scrubbing, foam, and massage. If guests have purchased a bathing package, we take care of them as well; otherwise, they wash themselves. After bathing, we offer refreshments in the cold room."*

*P9: "Following the live fasıl music, we have an oriental show. The henna ceremony then takes place, and we close with a special bathing event and service."*

*P13: "We have a fasıl team, and while they play music, the henna event takes place, followed by a special bathing service. After bathing, our refreshments begin. Finally, before leaving the bath, we present the guests with natural olive oil souvenir soaps bearing our bath logo and the bride's name."*

### ***Education and awareness-raising***

Many participant responses indicated that certain elements of Turkish bath culture are on the verge of disappearing, which is alarming. The most frequently expressed concerns are the younger generation's declining interest in this culture and their lack of knowledge. Participants offered various suggestions to ensure the continuity of Turkish bath culture. Many responses emphasised the need to raise public

awareness and educate the public, especially young people, about bath culture. Some participant views on the subject are given below:

*P4: "The bath is a culture, but it's disappearing day by day. Some baths and their traditions are in danger of disappearing completely. Therefore, raising awareness is essential."*

*P5: "All our bath-related traditions are important; we need to convey them to young people, otherwise they will disappear completely in a few years."*

*P9: "Educational programs on the subject should be organized in schools."*

*P8: "Courses should be opened in public education centres, and media campaigns should be conducted."*

### ***Sustainability of authenticity***

The research findings indicate that efforts are being made to preserve the architectural authenticity of many of Istanbul's active historical baths through physical restoration, while functional and cultural authenticity is gradually declining. Participants' statements suggest that traditional practices – such as the use of cleansing cloths, the natır service, and steam rituals – are largely shaped by tourist demand. Some bath operators view authentic elements merely as tools for creating aesthetics and atmosphere. In this context, while architectural and spatial authenticity can be maintained to some extent, functional authenticity – that is, the sustainability of traditional bath life – remains quite low. Therefore, the research demonstrates that cultural heritage should be considered not only through the preservation of physical structures but also through the meanings, rituals, and practices inherent in them. The most significant difference between historical and modern baths lies in their historical atmosphere and the authentic experience they provide. Participants stated that the connection between historical baths and the past, as well as their architecture, scent, and overall atmosphere, cannot be replicated in modern baths. In this sense, the authentic experience and historical atmosphere offered by historical baths are the most important features distinguishing them from modern baths. Some participant views on the subject are given below:

*P1: "Even the smell and atmosphere of these baths are completely different."*

*P16: "It's impossible to find this kind of intimacy and historical texture in modern baths."*

*P18: "This kind of atmosphere and intimacy are not found in modern baths."*

### ***Media and promotion***

Data highlights the need for more effective promotion and advertising of Turkish baths. However, opinions differ on how this promotion should be conducted. Some participants recommend making better use of media channels, particularly television commercials and social media promotions. They noted that bath scenes in television series can increase tourists' interest in these traditional venues. Based on this information, promoting and marketing bath culture has become a key focus. This reflects an awareness of the influence of popular culture and television series on audiences. Including bath scenes in television series can visually promote baths and spark curiosity, encouraging visits. The general consensus is the need for an effective promotional strategy to increase awareness of Turkish baths. Participants suggested different media channels and methods, offering various ideas on how this strategy could be implemented. Some participant views on the subject are given below:

*P6: "Television commercials and social media promotions are needed."*

*P13: "Advertisements can be made through social media."*

*P17: "Television series can be used as a promotional tool. I think television series have a great impact, and baths can be shown there."*

*P12: "Promotion is needed."*

### ***Shared responsibility and stakeholder participation***

All responses emphasised the need to increase public demand for Turkish baths and to embrace this culture. Both businesses and the public have significant responsibilities in ensuring the continuity of

Turkish bath culture. All stakeholders must collaborate to ensure its survival. Participants' opinions indicate that preserving Turkish bath culture requires a multifaceted effort, including raising public awareness, passing it on to younger generations, public support, and businesses taking responsibility. According to responses from historic baths in the Fatih district, while Turkish bath culture has rich traditions, some elements are at risk of being lost, particularly due to the younger generation's disinterest and lack of knowledge. The responses offer various suggestions for addressing this problem, including awareness-raising, promotion, the role of businesses, and public participation. All responses emphasise the importance of collaboration among stakeholders for the continuity of Turkish bath culture. One participant's view on the subject is given below:

*P18 "The bath culture is a whole and it is a great responsibility for both the public and us to keep it together."*

### ***Sustainability of social memory***

The term "bath", at the centre of the word cloud, was the most frequently mentioned concept in participants' narratives, as it was the central theme of our study. However, this refers not only to a physical structure but also to connections to the past, memories, and a tradition of social memory. Many participants described baths as "ritual spaces", "spaces of family memories", or "traditional meeting points", emphasising that these places hold a significant place in both individual and collective memory. The frequent use of the word "traditions" shows that bath culture is not only experienced but also intended to be passed on to future generations. Participants mentioned elements such as the bridal bath, the purse ritual, and the bath bowl, and stated that the effort to keep these rituals alive is felt as a cultural responsibility. In this respect, the bath is not merely a tradition from the past; it is also seen as a way of life worth continuing.

Another key theme that emerged during the interviews was the economic dimension. Many participants stated that baths hold a significant place not only culturally but also economically. The recurring use of terms such as "tourism", "promotion", "guests", and "organisation" suggests that this structure is also considered a source of income. The interest of foreign tourists, in particular, demonstrates the importance of baths to the local economy.

## **5. Conclusion and discussion**

This study examined the visibility and sustainability of the tangible and intangible elements of traditional Turkish bath culture, focusing on active baths in Istanbul's historic Fatih district. The aim was to understand how traditional bathing practices and related objects persist today, and how tourism contributes to this cultural continuity. The participants' professional experiences provided valuable insights into current practices and attitudes towards cultural heritage preservation.

Findings show that traditional items such as the peshtemal, loincloth, clogs, and metal bowls are still commonly used and generally retain their original characteristics. However, ceremonial practices like the bridal bath and forty-day bath have become rare, disappearing in some places or surviving only in simplified, commercialised forms. Ürük (2016) provides parameters that support these evaluations in the study. This indicates that both the physical objects and the symbolic, ritual aspects of bath culture are under threat. Basic practices, including warming on the heated stone, alternating between warm and cool spaces, and traditional washing methods, still continue and reflect the resilience of the core elements of bath culture. Yet modern lifestyles, time constraints, and changing social habits have reduced the prevalence of longer and more communal bathing traditions, making these practices harder to sustain.

Although baths continue to serve as places for social interaction and cultural exchange, they face significant challenges. Economic difficulties, rising maintenance costs, declining customer demand, and limited interest from younger generations undermine the transmission of knowledge and skills related to traditional practices and object production. This presents a real risk to the future continuity of this cultural heritage. Overall, the study demonstrates that historical baths, especially those in major urban centres, have strong potential for cultural tourism and for supporting the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage. Tourism, largely because of its economic benefits, appears to be one of the most important tools for ensuring the sustainability and intergenerational transmission of Turkish

bath culture. Savaşan (1970) explained in detail the changing elements discussed here, particularly the culture-ritual axis, and emphasised that baths play an important role in reflecting Turkish culture.

### *5.1 Practical implications*

To ensure the physical and cultural continuity of historic baths, public institutions must adopt a conservation and planning approach that recognises the structures as both physical heritage and sites of traditional rituals and objects. Restoration processes should preserve authentic materials and traditional architecture while supporting established usage patterns. Traditional artisans who produce bath objects should be recognised and supported as bearers of intangible cultural heritage. Financial incentives for micro-scale workshops, public procurement guarantees, and tax incentives are essential to sustain this production.

Awareness-raising activities organised by local governments, such as exhibitions, guided tours, and workshops, can strengthen the sense of social and cultural belonging. Incorporating cultural heritage education into school curricula, especially for younger generations through courses such as Social Studies and Visual Arts, can foster early awareness. These programmes should be supported with digital materials and made available by public institutions on open-access platforms. In addition to local governments, in-service training should be developed for bath personnel to convey the cultural meanings of rituals and objects. Certification upon completion of the training should enhance both professionalism and service quality.

The bath experience should be positioned within the tourism sector not merely as an aesthetic or nostalgic element, but as an experiential, participatory, and cultural learning space. In this context, promotional materials can deepen tourists' cultural engagement by including not only visual elements but also the history, usage, artisan labour, and symbolic meanings of bath objects. Digital guides, interactive applications, and augmented reality technologies designed for visitors can facilitate more effective communication of bath culture. The development of thematic experience programmes, such as “Bath Culture Tours”, can encourage tourists not only to observe this culture but also to participate directly in its rituals. These programmes should be implemented in collaboration with tour operators specialising in cultural heritage tourism.

Reproducing traditional bath objects with contemporary design approaches helps integrate cultural heritage into everyday life and supports the economic sustainability of local craftsmanship. Marketing these products in museum shops, boutique hotels, and online platforms can revitalise the cultural economy. Additionally, repurposing baths according to environmental sustainability principles can enhance the sector's commitment to social responsibility. Expanding environmentally friendly practices, such as using solar energy, water-saving systems, and natural materials, offers businesses both cost advantages and environmental prestige, such as the “Green Bath Certificate”. These practices ensure that the tourism product embodies both aesthetic and ethical value.

### *5.2 Limitations and future studies*

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it is geographically restricted to the historical baths of the Fatih district in Istanbul, an area with a particularly dense concentration of Ottoman heritage. Therefore, the findings are not statistically generalisable to all Turkish baths but instead offer an in-depth view of one heritage cluster. Second, the data are based solely on the perspectives of bath managers, who may emphasise certain economic or tourism-related aspects more than other stakeholders, such as local residents or visitors. Third, as with most qualitative studies, the analysis reflects the interpretive lens of the researchers, although efforts were made to enhance credibility through systematic coding and the use of direct quotations. Future research could build on this work by including multiple stakeholder groups, combining interviews with participant observation, and conducting comparative studies across different regions or countries to better understand the diverse ways in which bath culture is sustained through tourism.

## References

- Akan, P., Yıldız, T. and Yalçın, E. (2005). *Turizmde kültürel mirasın sürdürülebilirliği* [Sustainability of cultural heritage in tourism]. Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları.
- Aktan, C. C. and Tutar, H. (2007). Bir sosyal sermaye olarak kültür [Culture as social capital]. *Pazarlama ve İletişim Kültürü Dergisi*, 6(20), pp. 1-11.
- Arslandoğlu, İ. (2000). Kültür ve medeniyet kavramları [Concepts of culture and civilization]. *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*, 15, pp. 243-255. <https://hvbvdergisi.hacibayram.edu.tr/index.php/tkhhbv/article/view/378>.
- Avcı, O. (2020). Kütahya hamamları (12-19. yy) ve Türk hamamlarının özgünlüğü [Hamams in Kütahya (12th–19th century) and the originality of Turkish hamams] [Doctoral dissertation, Anadolu University]. (Publication No. 641900).
- Baykan, E. (2007). Kültür turizmi ve turizmin kültürel varlıklar üzerindeki etkileri [Effects of cultural tourism on cultural assets]. *Ticaret ve Turizm Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2, pp. 30-49. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/gaziticaretturizm/issue/49894/639550>.
- Bozok, D. (2005). Türk hamamı ve geleneklerinin turizmde uygulanışı [The application of the Turkish Bath and its traditions in tourism]. *Balıkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 8(13), pp. 62-86. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/baunsobed/issue/50339/651854>.
- Can, M. (2009). Kültürel miras ve müzecilik [Cultural heritage and museums]. *Çalışma raporu*. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, <https://teftis.ktb.gov.tr/Eklenti/1279,muserrefcanpdf.pdf>.
- Cohen, E. (1988). Authenticity and commoditization in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15(3), pp. 371-386. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(88\)90028-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(88)90028-X).
- Çolak, O., Şengel, Ü. and Kırır, S. (2025). Sustainable tourism development in destinations: costs, problem-solving strategies and planning vision in Sapanca, Türkiye. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, pp. 1-18. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-05-2025-0566>.
- Diaconescu, V. and Schiopu, A. F. (2023). Challenges and opportunities of heritage tourism for European youth - The role of memorial houses in promoting European destinations. In *23<sup>rd</sup> International Joint Conference Central and Eastern Europe in The Changing Business Environment*, 18 - 19 May 2023, Prague, Czech Republic, pp. 63-77. <https://ceeconference.vse.cz/wp-content/uploads/proceedings2023.pdf#page=64>.
- Erdem, M. (1993). Hristiyanlıktaki vaftiz anlayışı üzerine bir araştırma [A research on the understanding of baptism in Christianity]. *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 34(1), pp. 133-154. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/auifd/issue/71615/1152515>, [Accessed 26.11.2025].
- Ergin, N. (2010). İstanbul hamam kültüründe süreklilik ve değişim: Çemberlitaş hamamının öyküsü [Continuity and change in Turkish Bathing culture in Istanbul: The Life Story of the Çemberlitaş Hamam]. *Arkeoloji ve Sanat Dergisi*, 32(133), pp. 115-133, [online] Available at: <https://search.trdizin.gov.tr/tr/yayin/detay/103764/istanbul-hamam-kulturunde-sureklilik-ve-degisim-cemberlitas-hamaminin-oykusu>, [Accessed 27.11.2025].
- Ertuğrul, A. (2009). Hamam yapıları ve literatürü [Bath structures and literature]. *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, 7(13), pp. 241-266, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/653859>.
- Eyice, S. (1997). Hamam [Bath]. *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 15, pp. 402-430. Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları. <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hamam#1>.
- Fatih Municipality. (2024). *Hamamlar* (Baths). [online] Available at: <https://www.fatih.bel.tr/tr/main/rehber?Category=12&SubCategory=474>, [Accessed 01.08.2024].
- Fichter, J. (2002). *Sosyoloji nedir?* [What's Sociology]. (N. Çelebi, Çev.). Anı Yayıncılık.
- Goodwin, G. (2003). *A history of Ottoman architecture*. Thames and Hudson.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage publication.
- Hribar, M. Š., Bole, D. and Pipan, P. (2015). Sustainable heritage management: social, economic and other potentials of culture in local development. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 188, pp. 103-110.
- İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi (İBB). (2024). Tarihi Yarımada'daki Tescilli Hamamlar Haritası [Map of Registered Baths in the Historical Peninsula]. [online] Available at: <https://kulturelmiras.ibb.istanbul/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Hamamlar.pdf>, [Accessed 31.07.2024].
- Kalyoncu, H. (2021). Türk hamam kültüründe metal objeler ve objelerin form ve bezeme özellikleri [Metal objects in Turkish bath (hammam) culture and form and ornament characteristics of the objects]. *Akademik Hassasiyetler Dergisi*, 8(16), pp. 397-427, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1793776>.
- Kaplan, D. (2023). Geleneksel Roma Hamamları İçerisinde Smintheion Hamam Yapılarının Önemi (The Significance of Smintheion Bath Structures in Traditional Roman Baths). *Uluslararası Propontis Arkeolojisi Dergisi*, 1 (1), pp. 23-46. [online] Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/propontica/issue/76323/1195460>, [Accessed 26.11.2025].

- Karaca Aydın, S. (2025). The role of women in the transfer of Turkish bath where womens socialising domain and bath culture to the president of Turkish culture. *Baçini Sanat Dergisi*, 3(5), pp. 94-110, [online] Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/bacinisanat/issue/90401/1598622>, [Accessed 26.11.2025].
- Kolb, B., and Dumreicher, H. (2008). The hammam: A living cultural heritage. *Archnet-IJAR*. [online] Available at: <https://www.archnet.org/publications/5169>, [Accessed 25.11.2025].
- Kuban, D. (2021). *Osmanlı mimarisi [Ottoman Architecture]*. Yapı-Endüstri Merkezi Yayınları.
- Kutut, V., Lepkova, N. and Žróbek, S. (2021). Immovable cultural heritage usage modes: theoretical approach. *European Research Studies Journal*, 24(1), pp. 1136-115. <https://doi.org/10.35808/ersj/2092>.
- Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Madran, E. and Özgönül, N. (2005). *Kültürel ve doğal değerlerin korunması [Protection of cultural and natural values]*. TMMOB Mimarlar Odası Yayınları, Ankara.
- Özkalp, E. (1994). *Sosyolojiye giriş [Introduction to Sociology]*. Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim Fakültesi Yayınları, Eskişehir.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Savaşan, O. (1970). Hamam adetleri [Bath customs]. *Folklor Dergisi*, 16, 55.
- Şengel, Ü. (2020). Kültür ve etkinlik turizmi bağlamında şaman ritüelleri [Shaman Rituals in the Context of Culture and Event Tourism]. *Uluslararası Türk Dünyası Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 5(2), pp. 314-324. <https://doi.org/10.37847/ttdad.837297>.
- Taylor, J. P. (2001). Authenticity and sincerity in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28(1), pp. 7-26. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(00\)00004-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(00)00004-9).
- Tepe, G. (2019). *Türk hamam kültürü, hamamlarda kullanılan eşyalar ve çini sanatına uyarlanması [Wares in baths of Turkish culture and its adaptation to tile art]* (Yayın No. 552607) [Master's thesis, Uşak Üniversitesi].
- Tufan, Ö. (2006). Geleneksel Türk hamamı ve kullanım eşyaları. *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 70, 101-124.
- Turan, Ş. (1994). *Türk kültür tarihi: Türk kültüründen Türkiye kültürüne ve evrenselliğe [Turkish cultural history: From Turkish culture to Turkish culture and universality]* (2. Baskı). Bilgi Yayınevi.
- UNESCO. (2024). *Glossary: Cultural Heritage*. World Heritage Convention. [online] Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/glossary/224>, [Accessed 01.05.2024].
- UNESCO. (2013). *The Hangzhou Declaration: Placing culture at the heart of sustainable development policies*. [online] Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000221238>, [Accessed 26.11.2025].
- Ünver, S. (1950). Türk hamamları [Turkish Baths]. *Tarih Dünyası Dergisi*, 5, pp. 223-225.
- Ürük, Z. F. (2016). Medeniyetler içinde hamamın gelişimi ve kültürel mekân analizleri [Civilization in the bath and cultural development of the space analysis]. *The Journal of Academic Social Science*, 4(28), pp. 185-209. <http://dx.doi.org/10.16992/ASOS.1239>.
- World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our common future*. Oxford University Press. [online] Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>, [Accessed 27.11.2025].
- Yenice, T. K., and Ararat, M. (2022). Turkish bath tradition: The example of Gaziantep, Turkey. *The International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 17, pp. 198-210. [online] Available at: <https://www.ijih.org/volumes/17/ENG?nowDate=Sat+Dec+06+17%3A06%3A39+KST+2025>, [Accessed 27.11.2025].
- Yıldırım, A. and Şimşek, H. (2021). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri [Qualitative research methods in social sciences]* (12. Baskı). Seçkin Yayıncılık.