

## Value Perception of Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements from Local People's Perspective: The Nevşehir Example

*Yerel Halkın Bakış Açısından Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras Unsurları Değer Algısı: Nevşehir Örneği*

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### Abstract

This study aims to determine the local population's perception of the value of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements in Nevşehir. The local population's perception plays a crucial role in policies regarding the preservation, transmission, and utilization of ICH elements in tourism. A qualitative approach was adopted in the research; structured interviews were conducted with 20 residents of Nevşehir, and the data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis. According to the research findings, the local community exhibits positive emotional and cognitive attitudes toward ICH elements. Emotionally, these elements help establish a connection with the past, reinforce a sense of belonging, and strengthen positive emotions such as pride and happiness. Cognitively, it was noted that ICH elements contribute to the formation of cultural identity, the development of creativity, and the strengthening of social bonds. These elements, which positively influence mental processes, help individuals find calm and gain awareness. From an economic perspective, heritage elements such as pottery making and carpet weaving serve as a significant source of income for the local population. These traditional crafts, which provide income for the local community, also attract attention as tourist products. Additionally, these activities increase women's employment and support the promotion of the region.

**Keywords:** Nevşehir, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Local People, Perception of Value

### Özet

Bu çalışma, Nevşehir'deki yerel halkın Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras (SOKÜM) unsurlarına yönelik değer algısını belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. SOKÜM unsurlarının korunması, aktarılması ve turizmde kullanılmasına yönelik politikalarda yerel halkın algısı büyük önem taşımaktadır. Araştırmada nitel yöntem benimsenmiş, Nevşehir'de yaşayan 20 kişiyle yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiş ve elde edilen veriler tematik analiz yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Araştırma bulgularına göre, yerel halk SOKÜM unsurlarına karşı olumlu duygusal ve bilişsel yaklaşımlar sergilemektedir. Duygusal açıdan bu unsurlar; geçmişle bağ kurmayı, aidiyet hissini ve gurur, mutluluk gibi olumlu duyguları pekiştirmektedir. Bilişsel boyutta ise SOKÜM unsurlarının kültürel kimliğin oluşumuna, yaratıcılığın gelişimine ve sosyal bağların güçlenmesine katkı sağladığı belirtilmiştir. Zihinsel süreçleri olumlu yönde etkileyen bu unsurlar, bireylerin sakinleşmesine ve farkındalık kazanmasına yardımcı olmaktadır. Ekonomik açıdan bakıldığında, çanak çömlek yapımı ve halı dokumacılığı gibi miras unsurları bölge halkı için önemli bir gelir kaynağı oluşturmaktadır. Bölgedeki yerel halkın gelir elde etmesini sağlayan bu el sanatları, turistik birer ürün olarak da dikkat çekmektedir. Ayrıca, bu faaliyetler kadın istihdamını artırmakta ve bölgenin tanıtımına destek olmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Nevşehir, Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras, Yerel Halk, Değer Algısı

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) persists across time and generations through cultural transmission (Fu, 2023). ICH knowledge and skills are deeply embedded within this process of cultural transmission (Petronela, 2016). Cultural transmission is of utmost importance for the successful preservation of ICH elements over long periods (Lenzerini, 2011). Through cultural transmission, a sense of cultural identity and emotional connection to ICH elements develops among local communities (Xia et al., 2020). In fact, it is not merely a matter of identity and emotion. The local community's perception of the value of ICH elements also develops (Vázquez-Atochero, 2024). With the increasing perception of the value of ICH elements, the local community becomes more active in the processes of ICH preservation, development, and transmission (Yu, 2015).

Two reasons stand out regarding the growing importance of value perception in the field of ICH. First, without the local community's perception of the value of ICH elements, cultural transmission may not occur successfully (Bakar et al., 2014). The second reason is the use of ICH elements as an important resource for tourism (Qiu et al., 2019). Various policies must be developed to facilitate both the cultural transmission and the tourism-related use of ICH elements. In these policies, the value perception held by the local community is particularly significant. This is because the local community is recognized as the practitioners of ICH (Kim et al., 2021). Lan et al. (2021) note that the local community's perception of values contributes to the sustainability and development of ICH. Xiao (2022), meanwhile, highlights the importance of identifying and determining individuals' perceptions of ICH values.

Su et al. (2020a), on the other hand, approach the local population's perception of ICH values from a different perspective. Su et al. (2020a) state that the local population does not actively participate in ICH elements. Furthermore, it is noted that the local community does not sufficiently utilize ICH elements in their daily lives. In this context, it is emphasized that the local community's value perception regarding ICH elements must be investigated and discussed (Su et al., 2020a). This is because an individual's value perception of something determines their behavior (Yi et al., 2018). Similarly, the perception of ICH values also determines the local population's behaviors and their approach toward ICH elements (Su et al., 2020b).

In recent years, the sustainability of ICH has become largely dependent on the perceptions and attitudes of the local communities that carry and transmit this heritage. Nevertheless, the role of local communities' perceptions of value in the processes of preserving, transmitting, and leveraging ICH for tourism has not been sufficiently examined, particularly in the national literature. It is observed that while existing studies largely focus on international examples (Aguado et al., 2021; Heredia-Carroza et al., 2021; Su et al., 2020b; Qiu et al., 2019) there are only a limited number of studies in the national context that address the emotional, cognitive, cultural, and economic dimensions of the value that local communities attribute to ICH elements. However, understanding the meaning and value that local communities ascribe to ICH elements is of critical importance both for the effective preservation and transmission of this heritage to future generations and for the development of sustainable tourism policies aligned with local values. Policies developed without considering the local community's perception of value may prove inadequate in practice and fail to achieve the desired impact. In this regard, the aim of this study is to determine the local community's perception of value regarding intangible cultural heritage elements in Nevşehir. The research aims to present the local community's perceptions of ICH in a multidimensional manner, taking into account emotional, cognitive, cultural, and economic dimensions.

## **2. LITERATURE**

A value is the importance and respect that people attribute to something (Schwartz, 2012). Values are important in that they determine individuals' behaviors, preferences, and beliefs (Roccas and Sagiv, 2010). From this perspective, values influence people's lives. Therefore, it is meaningful for individuals to hold a value regarding a particular matter or to place value on something.

Having positive attitudes toward any object or situation is considered to be attributing value (Anderson, 1995). The process of attributing value is a conscious event. The individual undergoes an evaluation process regarding the object to which they will attribute value. As a result of this evaluation process, the act of valuing is completed, and the individual develops a value perception (Klamer, 2003). The ICH value perception, on the other hand, encompasses the local community's thoughts and feelings toward ICH elements across various dimensions such as economic, cognitive, cultural, and emotional (Heredia-Carroza et al., 2021). Su et al. (2020b) define value perception as detailed and general judgments regarding ICH. There are differing views regarding the dimensions of value perception.

Throsby (2010) categorizes the perception of value into two groups: economic and cultural value. In determining economic value, it is important whether the destination derives financial gain from ICH elements and whether ICH creates employment opportunities (Sotiriadis, 2017). In terms of cultural value, the contributions that ICH elements offer to the local community from historical and social perspectives are decisive (Ahmad, 2006). Aguado et al. (2021) address the value of activities within ICH elements in three categories: economic, cultural, and social values. Economic value includes income and employment opportunities, as well as positive contributions to the city's brand and image. Cultural value encompasses individuals' cultural richness and the concept of ICH preservation. Social value, meanwhile, consists of quality of life and positive cultural interactions (Aguado et al., 2021). Su et al. (2020b), on the other hand, examine the perception of ICH values from five distinct perspectives beyond economic value. These are: social, aesthetic, historical, symbolic, and spiritual values. However, these values are considered as a unified whole within the broader category of cultural value (Throsby, 2010).

Heritage is a fundamental element that shapes a destination's cultural identity and image (Petronela, 2016). Heritage elements are significant because they establish a connection between a destination's and an individual's past and future (Poria et al., 2006). Heritage elements are divided into two groups: tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Artese and Gagliardi, 2022). Tangible cultural heritage consists of elements that possess a specific structure and have physically persisted over the years (Oğuz, 2013). Intangible cultural heritage, on the other hand, is a field whose conceptual framework is defined by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Efforts to protect cultural heritage, which began with the "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" in 1972, continued with the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" in 2003 (Oğuz, 2013). According to the provisions of this convention, ICH consists of elements that have been passed down through generations and face the threat of disappearing if not maintained (Teke, 2013). ICH encompasses a very broad scope (Pang and Wu, 2023). Elements such as oral traditions, regional languages, performances, traditional practices, events, and handicraft products are considered part of ICH (Kurin, 2004; Qiu et al., 2022).

There are various definitions of ICH. These definitions explain the elements of ICH from different perspectives. ICH constitutes an important part of humanity, regardless of individual or societal distinctions (Su et al., 2020a). These are elements that embody the region's characteristics and possess a distinct cultural identity and richness (Sawagvudcharee et al., 2020). ICH is the living heritage of the local people. At the same time, they represent the cultural diversity of the local population (Lenzerini, 2011). They are valuable treasures that reflect people's pasts (Zainab et al., 2022).

It is necessary to discuss the ICH elements of Nevşehir, the destination where this research was conducted. Handicrafts are widespread in Nevşehir. Carpet and kilim weaving in Ürgüp and Avanos, pottery in Avanos, stone carving in Hacı Bektaş, and Soğanlı dolls in Soğanlı are among the prominent elements within the scope of ICH (Yolcu, 2014). However, pottery is the primary production activity in the region and is in high demand in the tourism sector.

Various studies have been conducted in the international literature to determine the perception of value regarding intangible cultural heritage. Aguado et al. (2021) sought to determine the perception of value associated with a music festival held in Colombia. The study identified three categories of value associated with the music festival: cultural, economic, and social value. Cultural value focuses on the past, viewing the music festival as an element of heritage. Economic value reflects the festival's current material contributions. Social value, meanwhile, emphasizes the relationships fostered by the music festival.

A study was conducted in Spain as part of the ICH project to determine perceptions of the value of flamenco (Heredia-Carroza et al., 2021). As a result of this study, perceptions of value were categorized into three groups: emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic value. These three value elements are all part of cultural value. Emotional value consists of individuals' feelings. Cognitive value encompasses performance and technique. Aesthetic value, on the other hand, includes elements such as harmony and rhythm.

In a study conducted in China on the impact of local residents' perceptions of ICH values on their attitudes and intentions, these perceptions were examined across four groups (Qiu et al., 2019). In the study, value perceptions were examined across four categories: social and economic, aesthetic, historical, and spiritual values. Social and economic value encompasses employment opportunities and local community participation. Aesthetic value encompasses artistic originality and form. Historical value refers to the historical fame and past of the ICH element. Spiritual value, on the other hand, refers to the spiritual impact it creates in individuals.

A scale has been developed to measure the perception of ICH (Su et al., 2020b). In this scale, ICH value perception is explained across six dimensions. These dimensions are: economic, social, spiritual, aesthetic, symbolic, and historical value. Here, the dimensions other than economic value constitute part of the cultural dimension. Economic value consists of the material gain aspects of ICH elements. Social value emphasizes the cultural diversity of ICH elements. Spiritual value is oriented toward strengthening individuals' emotions from a spiritual perspective. Aesthetic value involves ICH elements providing individuals with entertainment and an aesthetic perspective. Symbolic value refers to the diversity of ICH elements in a way that highlights cultural differences between societies. Historical value pertains to ICH elements possessing a specific history and cultural heritage.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Since this study was designed using a qualitative approach, it focuses on seeking answers to a specific research question rather than testing hypotheses. Accordingly, the main research question of this study is to reveal how the local community's perception of the value of ICH elements is shaped. Within the framework of this main research question, interview questions were developed to uncover the local community's emotional, cognitive, economic, and cultural assessments of ICH elements. For this reason, it was decided to employ a qualitative research method. In this context, the study has been classified as a qualitative and cross-sectional study, both because it involves qualitative data and because it was conducted over a specific time period. In qualitative research, individuals' thoughts on a subject, situation, or event are comprehensively explored (Creswell, 2013). In this study, structured interviews were conducted as part of the qualitative research method to uncover the local population's thoughts. In structured interviews, responses from individuals and interactive conversations guided by the researcher's questions are recorded.

The interview form used in the study contains four questions. These questions were developed by the author with support from the literature. Emotional responses and states influence the formation of individuals' value perceptions (Yoshikawa, 2019). Therefore, to determine value perceptions, it is first necessary to identify individuals' emotional feelings regarding ICH. Individuals' emotional states, in turn, influence their cognitive evaluations (Yaegashi, 2019). In classifications of ICH value perceptions, economic and cultural value perceptions are found to be

prominent (Aguado et al., 2021; Su et al., 2020b; Throsby, 2010). For this reason, this study also places importance on determining the economic and cultural value perceptions within the local population's perception of ICH. The questions in the interview form were determined based on this information. These are:

1. What do you feel emotionally about the elements of intangible cultural heritage in Nevşehir?
2. How do you cognitively evaluate the intangible cultural heritage elements in Nevşehir?
3. What economic values do the intangible cultural heritage elements in Nevşehir provide to the local community?
4. What cultural values do the intangible cultural heritage elements in Nevşehir provide to the local community?

The study sample consists of local residents living in Nevşehir. Accordingly, interviews were conducted with 20 local residents. Prior to the commencement of the interviews, ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University via Decision No. 442 dated December 28, 2021. It is stated that there is no need to increase the number of participants once similar responses begin to be repeated and the data reaches a sufficient level (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Creswell (2013), on the other hand, explains that a sample size of between 5 and 25 participants is sufficient. Marshall (1996) points out that interviews can be concluded once the data reaches saturation and begins to repeat. In line with these explanations, the study was completed with 20 participants. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The number of female and male participants is equal; their age range is 24–54, and their educational levels vary from elementary school to doctoral degrees. Interviews were conducted with participants from 11 different occupational fields. The length of time participants have lived in Nevşehir ranges from 4 to 52 years.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Length of Life in Nevşehir
P1	Female	36	Undergraduate	Teacher	15 years
P2	Male	47	High school	Tradesman	45 years
P3	Female	29	Master's degree	Archaeologist	5 years
P4	Male	33	Undergraduate	Tourist Guide	10 years
P5	Female	41	High school	Housewife	39 years
P6	Male	52	Elementary school	Farmer	50 years
P7	Female	24	Undergraduate	Student	4 years
P8	Male	42	Undergraduate	Tourist Guide	12 years
P9	Male	36	Undergraduate	Teacher	8 years
P10	Female	43	Elementary school	Housewife	41 years
P11	Male	31	High school	Tradesman	15 years
P12	Male	35	Undergraduate	Driver	25 years
P13	Male	30	Undergraduate	Sales Consultant	28 years
P14	Female	32	Undergraduate	Teacher	20 years
P15	Female	31	Doctoral	Student	29 years
P16	Female	43	Undergraduate	Agricultural Engineer	15 years
P17	Male	54	High school	Tradesman	52 years
P18	Female	35	Undergraduate	Tourist Guide	10 years
P19	Female	40	Undergraduate	Teacher	12 years
P20	Male	48	Elementary school	Potter	46 years

The interviews were conducted between November 1, 2024, and December 1, 2024. The interviews lasted between 22 minutes. The interviews were conducted by the author on a voluntary basis. Audio recordings were made with the participants' consent. After the audio recordings were transcribed, they were listened to again and compared with the text to verify their accuracy.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis requires researchers to conduct a detailed review of the literature and identify data related to different themes. In this study, themes and subthemes were identified using the methods of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Gavin (2008). The data were analyzed by following the established steps (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These steps include understanding the data, identifying preliminary codes to uncover the content derived from the data, identifying themes that frequently recur in the content, verifying the themes, defining and naming the themes, and finalizing the analysis to prepare the report.

Certain factors were taken into account in ensuring the reliability and validity of the data. Conducting interviews with individuals from diverse backgrounds is one of the key factors (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In this study, interviews were conducted with local residents from various backgrounds. After the author reviewed and analyzed the data, a final review was conducted by two academics with expertise in the research topic.

#### **4. RESULTS**

The data collected from participants was analyzed using thematic analysis. As part of this analysis, each question was evaluated individually, and themes were identified. In this way, the participants' perceptions of ICH's values were determined.

Participants were first asked, "What do you feel emotionally about the elements of intangible cultural heritage in Nevşehir?" This question was used to determine whether participants' emotional feelings regarding ICH were positive or negative, and the reasons behind these feelings were categorized. Detailed information is provided in Table 2. All participants harbor positive, or in other words, favorable feelings toward ICH elements. The reasons behind these positive feelings were identified through thematic analysis.

One of the factors contributing to participants' positive emotions is that ICH elements provide them with an opportunity to connect with the past. Since ICH elements have been passed down from the past to the present, they remind individuals of memories from the past and ensure that these memories are not forgotten. For example, P6 mentions that he has not forgotten his mother's work while making pottery and weaving rugs, and that this memory has emotionally strengthened his connection to ICH elements. *"The patterns my mother made on the loom at home are filled with motifs that tell stories. Although I didn't realize how valuable this process was at the time, looking back today, I better understand how precious the emotional bond these old traditions offer me is. It helps me connect with the past."* (P6).

Similarly, she says that through her experience with ICH elements in P5, she was able to connect with the past and that this was emotionally significant to her. *"When I was a child, watching my mother and aunts weave patterns on their looms, I didn't fully realize it at the time, but today I understand better just how valuable those memories are to me."* (P5). It is noteworthy that ICH elements symbolize family elders and evoke positive emotions. *"I feel a positive emotion. It takes me back to the past, to our ancestors and grandparents. Our ancestors and grandparents used to make a living from this craft, and the fact that it continues today makes me very happy."* (P14). *"Every pattern holds a meaning, a piece of the past. That's why it reminds me of those old days every time; it's as if I can hear the voice of the past."* (P16).

The continuity and preservation of ICH elements also contribute to participants developing positive emotions. *"Pottery is a way of life for us. As one touches the clay and shapes it, it's as if one is uniting the past with the present."* (P20). *"These crafts hold an important place in our lives as a legacy from the past."* (P11). *"The clay spinning on that potter's wheel seems to remind one of life's experiences."* (P19). The continuation of ICH elements in the region, passed down through generations since ancient times, contributes to individuals feeling more emotionally positive and resilient.

ICH elements help individuals experience positive emotions by fostering specific positive feelings. Through ICH elements, individuals can feel proud, fortunate, and happy. This is because these elements represent the essence of both the region and themselves. For these reasons, individuals have a positive emotional connection to ICH elements. Various examples from

participants illustrate this situation: *“Pottery-making gives me a deep sense of peace.”* (P4), *“Carrying on this heritage gives me great peace.”* (P2), *“Shaping the clay with my hands, seeing a piece of it transformed into a work of art with such skill, holds a very deep meaning for me. “When I see these crafts, I feel a great sense of pride and happiness.”* (P10).

Positive emotions are also increasing because ICH elements contribute to the development of individuals’ sense of community belonging and identity. Through ICH elements, individuals are able to feel a sense of belonging to the community in which they live. Furthermore, ICH elements are one of the key factors in the formation of social identity. *“Traditional crafts like pottery and rugs give me a sense of belonging and continuity.”* (P5). *“These elements make me feel how strong the bond is between the people of Nevşehir and their land, culture, and traditions.”* (P15).

**Table 2.** Emotional feelings towards ICH

Main theme	Sub-themes
Emotional feelings towards ICH elements	Connecting ICH elements with the past
	Continuity of ICH elements
	Generating specific positive emotions through ICH elements
	Creating community belonging through ICH elements

Second, participants were asked, *“How do you cognitively evaluate the intangible cultural heritage elements in Nevşehir?”* This question was used to identify participants’ positive or negative perceptions of ICH elements. Furthermore, the reasons behind these perceptions were categorized into themes. Table 3 provides information on the themes and subthemes. All participants have a positive cognitive approach toward ICH elements. The reasons for this positive cognitive approach were revealed through thematic analysis.

The first of the factors influencing the demonstration of a positive cognitive approach toward ICH elements is cultural identity. The wealth of accumulated knowledge and experience embodied by ICH elements in the region influences the shaping of the cultural identity of both individuals and society. In addition, it helps individuals become more aware. Thus, individuals demonstrate a positive cognitive approach toward ICH elements. The impact of ICH elements on cultural identity is highlighted by various participants. *“Traditional handicrafts such as pottery are very important elements that distinguish the people from others. Such arts form a people’s cultural consciousness.”* (P1). *“Pottery and other elements play a significant role in forming and preserving a people’s cultural identity.”* (P3). P16, meanwhile, notes that awareness and diverse perspectives have developed due to the influence of ICH elements. *“As I’ve grown up in these lands, I’ve come to better understand just how valuable pottery and carpet weaving are. These crafts are not only art forms but also reveal a completely different worldview. In other words, they are activities that engage both the mind and the body, prompting thought and fostering growth.”* (K16).

Participants argue that ICH elements foster individuals’ creativity. A positive cognitive attitude toward ICH elements is observed due to their contribution to creativity. *“These traditional handicrafts not only foster individuals’ creativity but also continue to preserve the region’s cultural identity and history.”* (P5). P9 notes that, in addition to creativity, ICH elements are also important for understanding the region’s development. *“These elements not only help individuals develop their creativity but also assist communities in understanding their historical and cultural contexts.”* (P9). A similar perspective regarding creativity is put forward by P10. *“In pottery-making, the hands shaping the clay is more than a physical process; it also reflects a process of creativity and patience.”* (P10).

The positive impact of ICH elements on individuals’ mental states also underscores their importance for a positive cognitive approach. When individuals experience ICH elements, they mentally rejuvenate and find calm. Therefore, it makes sense for individuals to adopt a positive cognitive approach toward ICH elements. *“Intangible cultural heritage elements can be viewed as an*

educational tool that instills important skills such as patience, care, and attention in people. For example, when making pottery, shaping the clay is both a physical and a mental process." (P6). "By reminding us of our history, it stimulates our mental processes." (P12).

The role of ICH elements in strengthening social bonds is also a key factor in fostering a positive cognitive approach. Since individuals preserve and sustain shared ICH elements over long periods, thereby passing them down across generations, the strengthening of social bonds becomes inevitable. This is because ICH elements constitute a set of values that evoke a shared sense of sensitivity. "There is also an important aspect of this that strengthens and holds together social bonds." (P2). P3 emphasizes that ICH elements should not be considered merely as art. "Beyond being a form of art, it is a very important tool for building cultural connections." (P3).

**Table 3.** Cognitive approach towards ICH

Main Theme	Sub-themes
Reasons for a positive cognitive approach towards ICH elements	The contribution of ICH elements to cultural identity
	The contribution of ICH elements to awareness
	The contribution of ICH elements to mental state
	The contribution of ICH elements to social bonds
	The contribution of ICH elements to cultural identity

Third, participants were asked, "What economic values do the intangible cultural heritage elements in Nevşehir provide to the local community?" This question was used to determine what economic value ICH elements generate for a destination and the local community. Table 4 provides information on the themes and subthemes. All participants stated that ICH elements support the local community by creating significant and diverse economic values.

The primary economic impact of ICH elements is the increase in local residents' incomes. The frequent purchase of ICH items by tourists as souvenirs and products enables local residents to earn income. In particular, ICH elements that have become symbolic of the region are among the products that tourists are eager to purchase. Participants are in agreement regarding the economic contribution generated by ICH elements. "Pottery workshops serve as a major attraction for tourists. Tourists visiting these workshops not only witness the production process but also contribute to the local economy by purchasing handmade products." (P11). "These handmade products, used both as souvenirs and for home decor, make a significant contribution to the local population's income." (P7). "The production of items like pottery and rugs provides a steady source of income for many families in the region. These handmade products, which particularly attract tourists' interest, are one of the local artisans' means of livelihood." (P6). "Pottery workshops in Avanos, in particular, attract significant tourist interest, and this generates revenue for the entire regional economy." (P8).

In addition to boosting economic gains, another economic impact of ICH items is their ability to increase and expand employment. In particular, the fact that women play a role both in the production of ICH items and in their sale at shops and stalls is significant in terms of employment. For the people of the region, ICH items are seen as a source of livelihood. "Especially in Avanos, these items have become a source of income for women working in pottery workshops and carpet weaving. Women are able to earn money by practicing these handicrafts and contribute to their family budgets." (P10). "Now, in Nevşehir, pottery and carpet weaving serve as a major source of support for both families and women." (P19). "It can be said that they play a significant role both in strengthening the local economy and in creating employment." (P9).

In addition to their direct economic impacts, such as increasing revenue and creating jobs, ICH elements are also important for promoting and marketing the region. Increased awareness of ICH elements, both nationally and internationally, motivates individuals to visit the region. "At the same time, these traditional crafts promote Nevşehir's culture, increase the number of tourists visiting the region,

and provide a significant economic contribution to the city.” (P2). “When tourists promote Nevşehir through these elements and share them on social media, it not only positions us as a destination worth visiting but also enables local businesses to generate income.” (P12).

**Table 4.** ICH's economic contributions

Main Theme	Sub-themes
Economic values created by ICH elements	Increasing the income of the local people Creating employment Creating job opportunities for women Promoting and marketing the region

Finally, participants were asked, “What cultural values do the intangible cultural heritage elements in Nevşehir provide to the local community?” This question was used to identify the cultural values created by ICH elements for the local community. Table 5 presents information regarding the themes and subthemes. Participants noted that ICH elements create cultural values such as strengthening social bonds, fostering cultural identity, preserving spiritual memories, enhancing aesthetics and creativity, and building collective memory.

Because ICH elements represent the region’s shared values, they foster a sense of shared emotions among individuals. Within this framework of shared emotions, individuals both create ICH elements and share memories of the past. Through the demonstration of social solidarity, ICH elements are preserved and sustained. This process supports the strengthening of social bonds. “The people’s preservation of these traditions strengthens social bonds.” (P11). “It keeps us together as a community.” (P17). In addition to strengthening social bonds, ICH elements are also important in terms of shaping cultural identity. The long-term continuity of ICH elements contributes to the formation of the region’s cultural identity. “Pottery making is a matter of cultural identity. This tradition, which has continued for centuries, is effective in ensuring social belonging and cultural continuity.” (P4).

As social bonds strengthen and cultural identity is formed, the community’s cultural memory emerges. Along with this cultural memory, the historical and cultural development of the region is closely witnessed within the framework of ICH elements. “In particular, the motifs of carpets and the decorative elements of pottery keep social memory alive.” (P9). “The local people ensure that memories remain vivid by teaching skills such as pottery making or weaving to their children and young people.” (P13).

Individuals recall their spiritual memories through ICH elements. In particular, those who remember their elders creating ICH elements do not forget these memories and identify them with these elements. “Both pottery and carpets connect people to the past.” (P18). ICH elements are effective in fostering aesthetic appreciation and creativity. Particularly in elements where motifs, patterns, and shaping such as in pottery and rugs are significant, individuals’ sense of aesthetics and creativity develops. “At the same time, they highlight the public’s creative potential through their aesthetic values.” (P5).

**Table 5.** Cultural values created by ICH

Main Theme	Sub-themes
Cultural values created by ICH elements	Strengthening social ties Forming cultural identity Keeping memories alive Creating cultural memory Developing aesthetics and creativity

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examines the perception of ICH values from the perspective of individuals living in Nevşehir, that is, the local population. To this end, structured interviews were conducted with 20 individuals from different age and occupational groups. Participants were asked four questions

during the interviews. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes and subthemes. Four main themes were identified in the study. These are: positive emotional feelings toward ICH elements, a positive cognitive approach toward ICH elements, the economic values created by ICH elements, and the cultural values created by ICH elements.

Individuals have positive emotional feelings toward ICH elements. There are various reasons for these feelings. The continuous presence of ICH elements between the past and the present enables individuals to connect with the past. Memories of ICH both those of their own elders and their own past experiences facilitate individuals' connection with the past. Çapar and Yenipınar (2016) support this view. According to the authors, ICH elements, such as local foods, help individuals understand their past and their current context, thereby enabling them to connect with the past (Çapar and Yenipınar, 2016). In this regard, the continuity of ICH elements is also a significant factor. ICH elements have been sustained for a long time, sometimes undergoing minor changes according to current conditions, and demonstrate a unity with the general culture of society. For this reason, individuals embrace and take ownership of ICH elements. According to Çakır (2010), the continuity of heritage elements and their transmission across generations creates meaning.

The fact that ICH elements evoke specific positive emotions such as happiness and a sense of meaning in individuals influences the development of positive emotional feelings toward these elements. As shared values of the region, ICH elements have a positive impact on the local community's sentiments, aesthetics, and emotions (Arioğlu and Aydoğdu Atasoy, 2015). Finally, the fact that ICH elements foster a sense of community belonging among individuals also influences the creation of positive emotional feelings. Karabaşa (2014) notes that ICH elements create a sense of belonging in individuals and that this is important for the preservation of ICH elements. This idea is also advanced by Tekin (2017). Tekin (2017) states that ICH elements foster a sense of belonging among individuals, particularly among children in society. In summary, individuals who develop a sense of belonging toward ICH elements can cultivate positive emotional feelings toward these elements.

Individuals exhibit not only positive emotional feelings but also a positive cognitive attitude toward ICH elements. The fact that ICH elements contribute to cultural identity and strengthen social bonds positively influences individuals' cognitive attitudes. It is an expected outcome that individuals who have lived in the destination for a long time and are interested in ICH elements have a positive cognitive approach. Yaşar and Yayla (2023) note that individuals who have been familiar with ICH elements since childhood and sustain their lives through the production of these elements have a positive cognitive approach toward them. Other factors contributing to a positive cognitive approach toward ICH elements include their role in enhancing individuals' awareness, fostering creativity, and contributing to their mental well-being. Su et al. (2020b) evaluate the contribution of ICH elements to creativity and mental well-being within the framework of aesthetic and symbolic value.

ICH elements represent a significant alternative for a destination in terms of economic value. Thanks to ICH elements, the local population can increase their income and gain access to new job opportunities. The economic impact of ICH elements that are synonymous with the destination is even greater. Some individuals choose to produce ICH elements, while others choose to sell them as a profession. In this way, they earn an income and sustain their livelihoods entirely through ICH elements (Yaşar and Yayla, 2023). This situation is not limited to Nevşehir. On an international scale as well, ICH elements generate similar economic impacts for the local communities where they are found (Aguado et al., 2021; Qiu et al., 2019).

In addition to economic value, ICH elements also create cultural value for the local population. The cultural values identified in this study include: strengthening social bonds, fostering cultural identity, preserving memories, creating cultural memory, and fostering aesthetics and creativity. These findings align with the research by Qui et al. (2019) and Su et al. (2020b). Qui et al. (2019)

explain contributions such as cultural identity, creativity, and social bonds under the headings of aesthetic, spiritual, and historical values. Su et al. (2020), on the other hand, address the preservation of memories within the scope of aesthetic, symbolic, and spiritual values, and touch upon memory within the context of aesthetic and cultural differences.

This study contributes to the literature on ICH in various ways. First, by examining local communities' perceptions of the value of ICH elements in the national context, the study fills a significant gap in the national literature. Given that existing studies have largely focused on international examples (Aguado et al., 2021; Qiu et al., 2019), this research provides a contextual contribution. Second, the study reveals that the perception of ICH value exhibits a multidimensional structure comprising emotional, cognitive, cultural, and economic dimensions, rather than a unidimensional one. This finding supports and expands upon approaches that address value perception within economic and cultural frameworks (Throsby, 2010) and multidimensional scale studies (Su et al., 2020b). Third, the research findings indicate that emotional and cognitive dimensions play a fundamental role in the formation of cultural and economic value perceptions. In this regard, the study contributes to the literature on cultural heritage and value theory by addressing the formation process of value perceptions through a more holistic approach.

The study findings also offer important insights for practitioners and policymakers. First, it is evident that the local community attributes multifaceted value to ICH elements. Accordingly, local governments and relevant institutions must prioritize policies aimed at the preservation and sustainability of ICH elements. Second, it has been determined that ICH elements provide significant economic contributions, particularly in terms of generating income and creating employment. Therefore, it is important to support local producers and artisans through financial assistance, educational programs, and marketing activities. Thirdly, considering the impact of ICH elements on cultural identity and social bonds, community-based approaches must be adopted in heritage management processes. The active participation of the local community will both strengthen conservation efforts and enhance a sense of belonging. Finally, in the process of evaluating ICH elements within the context of tourism, it is crucial to prevent excessive commercialization and develop balanced policies aimed at preserving cultural authenticity.

Based on the study findings, it is possible to make specific suggestions. First and foremost, it is evident how important ICH elements are to the local community and the value they create. In this regard, it is essential that destination stakeholders particularly local governments undertake planning efforts and give due priority to the preservation, sustainability, and support of ICH elements. It is also important to support individuals who strive to make a living by engaging in the production of ICH elements. This is because such support can both ensure that those currently engaged in this work continue their activities and serve as an incentive for their numbers to grow. However, at this point, the commodification of ICH elements within the scope of tourism activities must be prevented, and clear boundaries must be established.

A key limitation of this study is that the research data was collected from the local population residing in Nevşehir. Future studies should be conducted on local populations and ICH elements in different destinations. Additionally, data in this study were obtained through structured interviews. Therefore, the perception of ICH values could be measured using quantitative methods. However, there is no suitable scale in the national literature to measure the perception of ICH values. This gap could be addressed through adaptation studies.

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