

## Local Governments' Cultural Policies

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### ABSTRACT

Local governments' cultural policies play a strategic role in the social, economic, and cultural development of cities. These policies aim to preserve cultural diversity, support the arts, sustain cultural heritage, and strengthen social participation. Local governments support cultural life by establishing cultural infrastructure such as theaters, museums, and libraries, and encourage the participation of city residents through festivals and events. In this way, local governments become dynamic cultural actors that strengthen city identity and increase social solidarity. This study examines local government cultural policies as a strategic area that guides the cultural development of cities, enriches social life, and strengthens local identity. The study is generally qualitative in nature and is descriptive and critical. The method used in this study is document analysis. In this context, the study draws on the literature in the field. The findings of this study are that local governments play a major role in the implementation of cultural policies, that local government cultural policies are decisive, particularly in the preservation of cultural heritage and the creation of urban identity. In Turkey, local governments disseminate cultural policies to the public by organizing festivals, staging theater performances, opening museums, and establishing libraries. However, the priorities of political authorities, citizens' demands, and budgetary constraints have a major impact on the shaping of cultural policies. The conclusion of this study is that the success of local governments' cultural policies in Turkey and around the world is shaped by three fundamental axes: financing and resource diversity, sustainability, and participatory governance.

**Keywords:** Local Governments, Cultural Heritage, Urban Identity, Culture, Cultural Policies.

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### Yerel Yönetimlerin Kültür Politikaları

#### ÖZ

Yerel yönetimlerin kültür politikaları, kentlerin sosyal, ekonomik ve kültürel gelişiminde stratejik bir rol üstlenmektedir. Bu politikalar, kültürel çeşitliliğin korunması, sanatın desteklenmesi, kültürel mirasın yaşatılması ve toplumsal katılımın güçlendirilmesini hedeflemektedir. Yerel yönetimler; tiyatro, müze, kütüphane gibi kültürel altyapılar kurarak kültürel yaşamı desteklemekte, festivaller ve etkinliklerle kent sakinlerinin katılımını teşvik etmektedir. Böylece yerel yönetimler, kent kimliğini güçlendiren ve toplumsal dayanışmayı artıran dinamik kültür aktörleri haline gelmektedir. Bu çalışmada yerel yönetimlerin kültür politikaları, kentlerin kültürel gelişimini yönlendiren, toplumsal yaşamı zenginleştiren ve yerel kimliği güçlendiren stratejik bir alan olarak ele alınmaktadır. Çalışma genel olarak nitel bir çalışma olup, betimleyici ve kritik edici bir mahiyete sahiptir. Bu çalışmanın yöntemi, doküman analizidir. Bu kapsamda, çalışmada alandaki literatür bilgisinden yararlanılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları; kültür politikalarının hayata geçirilmesinde yerel yönetimlerin büyük bir rolü olduğu, özellikle kültürel mirasın korunması ve kent kimliği oluşturma noktasında yerel yönetimlerin kültür politikalarının belirleyici olduğu, Türkiye'de de yerel yönetimlerin festivaller düzenleyerek, tiyatro gösterileri yaparak, müzeler açarak ve kütüphaneler kurarak kültür politikalarını halka yaydığı ancak kültür politikalarının şekillenmesinde siyasal iktidarların önceliklerinin, vatandaşların taleplerinin ve bütçe imkânlarının etkisinin büyük olduğudur. Bu çalışmanın sonucu, Türkiye ve dünyadaki uygulamalar çerçevesinde yerel yönetimlerin kültür politikalarının

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yerel Yönetimler, Kültürel Miras, Kent Kimliği, Kültür, Kültür Politikaları.

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## INTRODUCTION

Culture refers to the entirety of values, norms, symbols, modes of production, and lifestyles developed by human communities throughout history (Çağlar 2001: 128; Daslak 2019: 83-84). In modern societies, culture is not only an aesthetic domain or a matter of individual preference, but also a public policy area with economic, social, and political dimensions. In this context, local governments stand out as key actors in shaping and implementing cultural policies. Particularly in today's world, where urbanization is accelerating, the effects of globalization are intensifying, and social diversity is increasing, cultural policies are implemented not only through the guidance of central government but also through practices carried out directly at the local level (Yıldız 2020). Local governments are developing institutional capacity to both preserve cultural heritage and support new cultural production through the roles they assume in the cultural sphere. In this context, municipalities undertake tasks such as opening cultural centers, establishing libraries, operating theaters and concert halls, organizing festivals, supporting local artists, and opening museums and exhibition spaces. Furthermore, cultural policies play a critical role in the construction of urban identity (Öztaş & Zengin 2011: 155-158).

Today, cities are both physical spaces and social entities that produce identity and belonging. Cultural activities and heritage reinforce the sense of "us" in cities, while also increasing their recognition on a national and international scale (Castells 2010). The importance of this role is also highlighted at the international level. For example, Agenda 21 for Culture emphasizes that culture is the fourth pillar of sustainable development and states that cities should build their cultural policies with a democratic, inclusive, and long-term perspective (UCLG 2015). UNESCO also acknowledges that local governments can play a leading role in preserving cultural diversity, sustaining cultural heritage, and guaranteeing cultural rights (UNESCO 2018). On the other hand, cultural policies also create new areas for democratic participation. Access to cultural activities determines how citizens engage with city life. In this context, local governments are not only service providers but also actors that enable citizens to participate in cultural production processes. Participatory cultural policies strengthen

social cohesion by allowing different identities and groups to express themselves (Harvey 2012).

In Turkey, the task of providing cultural services is assigned to municipalities by the Municipalities Law No. 5393 and the Metropolitan Municipalities Law No. 5216. According to these legal regulations, municipalities are responsible for meeting the cultural needs of the public, protecting cultural and natural assets, and organizing social and cultural events (Municipalities Law No. 5393 and Metropolitan Municipalities Law No. 5216). However, in practice, the cultural role of municipalities is shaped by the priorities of political powers, the demands of local communities, budgetary constraints, and the influence of global dynamics, beyond their legal duties (Erder & İncioğlu 2017). This article examines local governments' cultural policies in all their dimensions: services provided to local communities through cultural and artistic activities, the role of culture in constructing urban identity, the function of municipalities in preserving cultural heritage, and the importance of cultural policies in social participation and democratization.

In recent years, the rise of the cultural economy and the role of creative industries in urban development have further strengthened the strategic position of municipalities in the cultural sphere. Local governments are now not only providers of cultural services but also planners and facilitators of culture-based development. As stated in the Council of Europe's "Local Authorities for Culture" declaration, cultural planning has become one of the fundamental tools for increasing economic competitiveness, diversifying tourism, and strengthening social cohesion (Council of Europe 2019). In this context, culture is seen as the key to both economic growth and social inclusion at the local level. Furthermore, the acceleration of digital transformation has transformed the forms of cultural production and sharing, prompting municipalities to develop digital cultural policies. Digital archives, online exhibitions, virtual museums, and social media-based cultural campaigns offer new opportunities to make cities' cultural assets visible. The pandemic period has been a turning point in terms of the digitization of cultural activities, the emergence of new forms of participation, and the reassessment of spatial inequalities (UN-Habitat 2021). In this context, local governments' cultural policies encompass not only the management of cultural services but also the construction of urban identity, the preservation of cultural heritage, the support of creative industries, and the safeguarding of citizens' cultural rights. Therefore, culture should be at the center of local governments' institutional visions; cultural policies should be considered one of the fundamental strategic tools shaping the sustainable future of cities.

## Literature Review

The Turkish and English literature review conducted as part of this study revealed that there are not enough studies addressing the subject, and that most of the existing studies only superficially address some aspects of local governments' cultural policies on a province-by-province basis. The book "Cultural Policies in Local Governments" by Faruk Yasıçimen (2018) outlines the general framework of the difficulties experienced by local governments in terms of cultural policies and offers some solutions to the problematic issues. The article titled "Local Governments and Cultural Services" by Cemal Öztaş and Eyüp Sezgin (2008) discusses the importance of cultural services in social life and the organizations established to provide these services. It examines the organizational structures at the central and local levels aimed at providing cultural services, The difficulties experienced in the cultural field and the duties and work of local governments in this area are also discussed and evaluated. Özlem Karakul and Tuna Yıldız's (2020) book, "The Role of Local Governments in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Turkey," first touches on the intertwined and inseparable nature of tangible (historical structures and areas) and intangible (cultural practices, arts) cultural heritage, and then discusses the work of local governments in Turkey in this regard. Aynur Can's (2014) article, "Sustainable Solution Proposals for the Urban Conservation Problem in Istanbul in the Context of Local Governments and Cultural Policies," focuses on the urban conservation problem in Istanbul. Urban conservation is addressed in the context of sustainability. Ahmet Mutlu's (2007) article, "Emphasis on Local Culture and Ethnic Identities in Governance and Turkey," discusses the issue of local culture and ethnic identities in the governance process in Turkey. The report titled "Local Culture Ecosystem in Turkey" prepared by IKSİV (2024) provides an overview of the cultural ecosystem in Turkey, which encompasses different actors and profiles. It seeks answers to questions such as: "What kinds of actions, mechanisms, and initiatives are needed to jointly establish a participatory, inclusive, egalitarian, rights-based cultural ecosystem? Who plays a role in developing cultural policies? What are the constraints, opportunities, and challenges in this process? What are the needs of cultural professionals working locally?" The handbook titled "Local Cultural Policies" by Ülkü Zümray Kutlu (2019) includes examples of projects carried out by local governments in cities and the work they observed in these cities. The article titled "Reflection of Policies Aimed at Protecting Cultural Heritage in Turkey on Public Administration: The Application of Area Presidency" prepared by Batuhan Mumcu and Nazlı Yücel Batmaz (2023) examines the application of Area

Presidency, which is significant in terms of expressing a new understanding in the Turkish administrative organization in the context of protecting cultural heritage.

Looking at the English literature, the article “Society and Culture: Cultural Policies Driven by Local Authorities as a Factor in Local Development-The Example of the Municipality of Xanthi-Greece,” examines cultural policies designed by local governments and their impact on social and regional development in the municipality of Xanthi in Thrace. The article “Cultural Policy Governance, Sub-State Actors, and Nationalism: a Comparative Analysis Based on the Spanish Case” by Mariano Martín Zamorano (2017) presents a comparative analysis of the autonomous cultural policies of Catalonia, Madrid, and Andalusia.

A literature review shows that the academic literature on cultural policies is new. It is thought that the literature gap will be filled as cultural policies become more widespread in the future.

### **Local Government Cultural Policies: Theoretical Framework and Practices**

Local government cultural policies are an important area that shapes the multidimensional dynamics of social life, offering a broad field of study at both the theoretical and practical levels. Culture is a phenomenon that encompasses not only artistic production and aesthetic values but also elements such as identity, belonging, social memory, and democratic participation (Aktan & Tutar 2007: 1-5). Therefore, when developing their cultural policies, local governments do not limit themselves to the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of the arts; they also take into account the dimensions of social integration, economic development, and international interaction (Yaslıçimen 2018: 1-3). In the theoretical framework, concepts such as governance, participation, sustainability, and cultural diversity come to the fore; while in the field of application, cultural centers, festivals, museums, creative industries, and projects that increase the participation of the local community play a decisive role. Therefore, the cultural policies of local governments are a multifaceted policy area based on theoretical foundations and directly affecting social life in practice.

### **Conceptual Framework of Cultural Policies**

Cultural policies are a policy area that is becoming increasingly important in today's societies and is the subject of comprehensive discussions at both theoretical and practical levels (Kutlu 2019: 5). Culture is a multidimensional concept that is not limited to artistic activities; it also encompasses social values, identities, ways of life, historical memory, and forms of interaction between individuals (Williams 1983). From this broad perspective, cultural policies refer to the

set of strategies, norms, and practices developed by states, local governments, and international organizations to regulate cultural production, distribution, consumption, and preservation (Miller & Yúdice 2002). Therefore, cultural policies are not only considered as an area that supports art or protects cultural heritage, but also as a tool that influences social integration, economic development, and democratization processes. The most fundamental purpose of cultural policies is to regulate the cultural life of society, guarantee cultural rights, and encourage cultural production and participation (Sunar et al. 2022a: 4). UNESCO's (2005) "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" is a guiding text in this context, emphasizing that culture is not only an economic commodity but also a value that expresses the identity and diversity of societies. Therefore, cultural policies include functions such as protecting cultural diversity, recognizing cultural rights, supporting artistic production, and transferring cultural heritage to future generations (Bennett 2001).

The content of cultural policies has changed throughout history. In the mid-20th century, cultural policies were shaped more by a protective approach; states invested in cultural institutions such as theaters, museums, and libraries for the construction of national identity (Mulcahy 2006). During this period, cultural policies were seen as a tool for making culture accessible to the elite, and the central role of the state came to the fore. Starting in the 1960s, participatory cultural policies came to the fore under the influence of democratization processes and social movements; it was accepted that culture was not limited to areas such as high art and classical music, but that folk culture, popular culture, and local cultural practices also needed to be supported (Jordan 1998). Since the 1990s, with globalization and the rise of the knowledge economy, creative industry-focused cultural policies have gained importance; culture has begun to be seen as a strategic element in terms of economic growth and the competitiveness of cities (Florida 2002; Hesmondhalgh 2013). In today's world, the fundamental orientation of cultural policies is to safeguard the economic value of culture while also protecting social benefit, equality, and diversity. Therefore, cultural policies continue to be a key area in the governance, development, and identity-building processes of contemporary societies, both in terms of their definition and content.

### **The Theoretical Foundations of Local Governments' Cultural Role**

The cultural role of local governments is explained through theoretical approaches that position culture both as a public service and as a vehicle for social transformation and democratic participation. The first theoretical foundation of the cultural role of local governments is the public service approach. In this approach, culture is seen as a public service, just like education

or health, and the role of local governments is defined as providing equal access to cultural resources (Holden 2008). In this context, local governments increase cultural participation and facilitate the implementation of cultural rights through cultural centers, libraries, museums, and artistic events (Gray 2010). The second theoretical foundation is the participatory democracy and governance approach. It emphasizes that cultural policies cannot be defined solely in a top-down manner; citizens and civil society organizations must be included in decision-making processes (Arnstein 1969; Fung & Wright 2003). This approach increases the legitimacy of cultural policies and defines the cultural role of local governments as facilitators of social participation (Harvey 2012). Cultural councils, advisory boards, and participatory budgeting practices established at the local level are practical examples of this theoretical approach. The third theoretical foundation is the creative economy and cultural industries approach. Richard Florida's (2002) "creative class" theory and Scott's (2000) conceptualization of "cultural economy" reveal that culture is a strategic area in terms of economic growth and urban competitiveness. This approach emphasizes the cultural role of local governments, not only in supporting the arts, but also in accelerating urban development, creating employment, and promoting tourism. Fourth, the approach of urban identity and collective memory is one of the theoretical foundations of the cultural role of local governments. Harvey (2001) emphasizes that cities are not only economic spaces but also areas of historical and cultural memory. In this context, the role of local governments is to preserve the city's cultural heritage, strengthen local identity, and develop a sense of belonging among city residents. This theoretical perspective treats cultural policies as tools that support social solidarity and the construction of a shared identity. Finally, the sustainable development approach provides an important theoretical basis for the cultural role of local governments to gain legitimacy on a global scale. UNESCO's 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasize that culture is an integral part of sustainable development (UNESCO 2003). This approach defines the cultural role of local governments not only as a task serving the present but also as a responsibility towards future generations. Consequently, the theoretical foundations of the cultural role of local governments are based on multidimensional approaches that position culture as a public service, a vehicle for democratic participation, a source of economic development, a bearer of urban identity, and a guarantor of sustainability.

### **The Legal and Institutional Framework of Local Governments' Cultural Policies**

The legal and theoretical framework of local governments' cultural policies is based on both constitutionally defined administrative powers and theoretical approaches developed in the literature on cultural policies. From a legal perspective, the cultural role of local governments is guaranteed by the constitution and local government legislation. In Turkey, Article 127 of the 1982 Constitution regulates the duty of local governments to carry out services of a local and communal nature, and cultural services fall within the remit of local governments (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey Article 127). Furthermore, Article 14 of the Municipalities Law No. 5393 imposes an obligation on municipalities to carry out cultural, artistic, tourism, youth, and sports services (Municipalities Law No. 5393 Art. 14). Similarly, the Metropolitan Municipalities Law No. 5216 also lists the provision of cultural services, the protection of cultural heritage, and the establishment and operation of social and cultural facilities among the responsibilities of local governments (Metropolitan Municipalities Law No. 5216). Furthermore, Law No. 2863 on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets also imposes responsibilities on municipalities for the protection of cultural heritage (Law No. 2863 on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets). At the international level, the 1985 European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe addresses the support of cultural life as a dimension of local democracy, while the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasizes the role of local actors in the protection of cultural heritage (UNESCO 2003). Therefore, the legal framework defines local governments' cultural policies as a requirement of constitutional and international obligations.

The theoretical framework, on the other hand, is shaped by different approaches that explain the function of cultural policies. Raymond Williams' (1981) conceptualization of culture emphasizes that culture is not limited to high art or elite activities, but also includes everyday life practices and social relations, thereby broadening the scope of cultural policies at the local level. Miller and Yúdice (2002) relate cultural policies to the processes of identity construction, economic development, and social integration; in this context, they view the cultural role of local governments as a strategic public policy area. Participatory democracy literature also supports this framework. Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of citizen participation" model argues that the legitimacy of cultural policies is strengthened by citizen participation in decision-making processes, positioning the cultural role of local governments as actors that facilitate participation. As mentioned above, Florida's (2002) "creative class" theory emphasizes the economic dimension of culture, evaluating local governments' cultural policies

in the context of urban competition, innovation, and tourism. Urban theorists such as Harvey (2001) and Scott (2000) point out that cultural policies are a critical tool in terms of urban identity, collective memory, and spatial justice. In this context, local governments' cultural policies become part of a holistic vision that preserves the historical heritage of cities while also supporting social integration and economic vitality. On the other hand, from an institutional perspective, it is seen that departments such as Culture and Social Affairs Directorates, Culture Directorates, or similar units within municipalities are active in the production of local governments' cultural policies. These units undertake tasks such as planning cultural events, operating cultural centers, organizing theater, concert, and exhibition events, and supporting local artists. While these tasks are carried out with more comprehensive institutional structures in metropolitan municipalities, they are implemented on a more limited scale in district municipalities (Beriş 2024).

### **Purpose and Methodology**

In recent years, the growing importance of the cultural industry and the resulting increase in urban population have led to a rise in demand for high-quality artistic and cultural events, highlighting the importance of cultural policies today. Local governments in Turkey are placing increasing importance on culture and the arts. Each cultural event creates its own demand. Some cultural events even transcend the local context in a short time and take on an international dimension. Cultural and artistic events are now among the basic services that local governments offer to the public (Yaslıçimen 2018: 2-3). The aim of this study is to reveal that local governments are as effective as central governments in shaping cultural policies. It also aims to highlight the important role local governments play in preserving cultural heritage, shaping urban identity, developing cultural infrastructure, managing spaces, and organizing cultural and artistic events through the cultural policies they implement. The study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the role of local governments in shaping cultural policies in the country?
- What are the areas of application of local governments' cultural policies?
- Have local governments' cultural policies become an increasingly decisive factor in the social, economic, and political structure of modern cities?

Qualitative analysis was used as the research method to address these questions. Qualitative analysis is a research method that follows a qualitative process aimed at presenting perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in their natural environments, using

qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and document analysis (Baltacı 2019: 369). In this context, the method used in this study is document analysis. Document analysis is a qualitative research method used to analyze all printed or electronic written documents (Sak et al. 230). The study is generally descriptive and critical in nature. The study also draws on existing literature in the field. The study is enriched by including examples of the implementation of cultural policies by local governments. The contribution of this study to the literature is the role of local governments in determining and implementing cultural policies that have profoundly affected societies in recent years. The study is also important in that it addresses the issue of local governments and cultural policies in a holistic manner.

### **Areas of Application for Local Government Cultural Policies**

Local government cultural policies play an increasingly important role in the social, economic, and cultural development of modern cities (Garcia 2004). In this context, the areas of application of local governments' cultural policies are not limited to organizing artistic events or providing cultural infrastructure, but include multidimensional activities that increase social participation, preserve cultural heritage, support economic development, and strengthen urban identity. In this context, one of the priority areas of application of local governments' cultural policies is the preservation and perpetuation of cultural heritage. UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasizes that local governments are important actors in the preservation of local communities' traditions, rituals, and oral cultural products (UNESCO 2003). In this context, municipalities also carry out activities such as restoration projects, the preservation of historical sites, the support of local festivals, and the documentation of intangible cultural values (Alptürkler et al. 2021). Another area of application for cultural policies is the support of art and cultural production. Local governments contribute to the diversification of cultural production by providing spatial and financial support for theater, cinema, concerts, exhibitions, and literary activities. In this regard, local governments create various funds and incentives for cultural centers, art workshops, and independent cultural initiatives. Cultural participation and access are also at the forefront of local governments' cultural policy implementation areas (Sunar et al. 2022b: 17-18). Citizens' active participation in cultural life is considered an indicator of democratization. In this context, local governments organize free events, mobile libraries, neighborhood-based cultural centers, and culture and art courses to increase disadvantaged groups' access to cultural activities. Such practices aim to ensure that culture is accessible to all segments of society, not just certain social classes. Another area of application for local governments' cultural policies is the construction of urban

identity and social memory. Cities are also the stage for collective memory and identity. In this context, local governments reinforce local identity and strengthen the sense of belonging among city residents through city museums, monuments, memory spaces, and city festivals. Such projects, especially in multicultural cities, contribute to the preservation of cultural diversity within a democratic framework (UCLG 2015).

The economic dimension of culture is also an important part of local governments' areas of application. It shows that cultural industries and creative sectors are a fundamental dynamic in the economic development of cities (Scott 2000). In this regard, local governments develop projects that support cultural tourism, establish entrepreneurship centers for creative industries, and implement culture-based branding strategies. For example, the Olympics facilitate the promotion of cities internationally and boost their economic vitality (Bianchini & Parkinson 1993). The areas of application of local governments' cultural policies are considered a strategic tool for social integration, economic development, and democratic participation. Thus, local governments' cultural policies strengthen the historical and social fabric of cities while also offering a sustainable vision for the future.

### **Cultural Infrastructure, Management of Spaces, and Cultural-Artistic Events**

Cultural-artistic events play an important role in the social life of cities. For local governments, these events are seen as tools that both strengthen social participation and reinforce urban identity. Furthermore, cultural and artistic events contribute to tourism revenues by increasing the visibility of cities on a national and international scale (Bianchini & Parkinson 1993). For this reason, municipalities and other local government units consider cultural and artistic activities not only as entertainment or leisure activities, but also as public services with economic, social, and political functions. The cultural and artistic events organized by local governments vary from municipality to municipality. These include music, cinema, theater, literature, festivals, municipal orchestras, public concerts, summer cinema screenings, theater plays, painting, photography, and sculpture exhibitions; presenting the works of local artists to the public, poetry recitals, writer-reader meetings, book fairs, puppet theater, children's workshops, youth festivals, neighborhood celebrations, open-air performances, and local folk dances. These events are generally spread across different venues throughout the city to prevent cultural life from becoming concentrated in the center (Kükçü 2024).

Cultural and artistic events represent an important area that enriches the social life of cities, encourages social participation, and strengthens urban identity. Local governments are

critical actors in the planning, support, and dissemination of these events. This is because culture and arts directly affect not only individual aesthetic experiences but also democratic participation, social integration, and economic development (Bianchini 1999). In this context, local governments approach cultural and artistic activities both as a public service and as part of their urban development strategy. One of the most prominent aspects of local governments' role in cultural and artistic activities is the provision of cultural infrastructure. Municipalities prepare the ground necessary for events to take place by constructing venues such as theaters, concert halls, cultural centers, art galleries, and libraries, or by restoring existing venues. This makes the spatial dimension of culture visible and increases city residents' access to art. Gaziantep follows a strategy that integrates cultural infrastructure with tourism through its mosaic museum, gastronomy centers, and cultural route projects. European cities have many years of experience in the effective management of cultural infrastructure. Cities such as Berlin, Barcelona, and London use cultural spaces not only for art production but also as a tool for urban transformation. The conversion of old industrial buildings into cultural centers in the Kreuzberg and Prenzlauer Berg districts of Berlin is one of the most striking examples of "creative space transformation" (Landry 2000).

Another important area of application for local governments' cultural and artistic activities is the promotion of cultural production and support for artists. Local governments implement policies such as workshop allocation, funding, organizing competitions, and raising the profile of local artists to support artists' production processes. Supporting cultural production contributes to cities becoming centers of attraction on a global scale. For this reason, many municipalities support local artists and promote the city nationally and internationally through contemporary art festivals, biennials, or street art projects. Cultural and artistic activities are also important in terms of increasing social participation and inclusiveness. Local governments' provision of access to cultural activities for large audiences is considered an indicator of democratization (Evans 2001). Municipalities' organization of neighborhood festivals, art workshops for children and young people, free concerts, and open-air film screenings serves to spread cultural and artistic activities not only to the elite but to all segments of society. This strengthens the perception of culture as a public right (Kong 2000). The "Festival in My Neighborhood" project organized by municipalities in cities such as Giresun, Gaziantep, and Mersin aims to spread culture to the grassroots by ensuring that events are held not only in central halls but also in neighborhood parks or streets.

Another function of local governments regarding cultural and artistic events is to contribute to urban identity and branding processes. Cultural and artistic events are a powerful tool for promoting cities nationally and internationally. In this context, it can be seen that Eskişehir has reinforced its image as a “student city” through its cultural and artistic events; Gaziantep has joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network with its gastronomy festivals; and Konya has become an international cultural tourism destination with its Mevlâna commemoration ceremonies (Çam 2021). Furthermore, cultural and artistic events constitute a strategic area for local governments in terms of economic development and the growth of creative industries. The cultural economy is a fundamental element in cities gaining innovative and competitive structures. Within this framework, local governments organize festivals, fairs, and biennials, thereby supporting cultural tourism and contributing to the local economy. For example, the Adana, Denizli, and Antalya Film Festivals attract thousands of visitors to the city each year and make significant contributions to the regional economy (Sarı 2016: 95). In conclusion, cultural and artistic events are not only a cultural service for local governments but also a fundamental tool for social integration, democratic participation, economic development, and the construction of urban identity. Local governments' policies in this area contribute to both strengthening social cohesion within cities and increasing their competitiveness externally. Therefore, cultural and artistic events are also a strategic governance tool in contemporary city management.

### **Creating City Identity**

City identity refers to the unique character perceived by both city residents and outsiders, which is formed by the integration of a city's historical, cultural, social, and spatial characteristics (Oktay 2011: 9-10). This identity is a product not only of the physical environment but also of cultural practices, collective memory, and social relations. Cultural policies stand out as one of the fundamental tools that shape, preserve, and transform this identity. Lefebvre's (1991) approach to the social production of space emphasizes that cities are not merely physical spaces but gain meaning through cultural and symbolic productions. Therefore, cultural policies play a strategic role in constructing urban identity by reconfiguring the urban space in its aesthetic, historical, and social dimensions. Cultural policies developed at the local and national levels strengthen the unique images of cities and keep the urban memory alive. According to Ashworth and Graham (2018), urban identity is directly related to the preservation and reuse of cultural heritage. Through cultural heritage policies, traces of the past are made visible in today's urban fabric, thereby strengthening collective belonging. Restoration projects, festivals,

and commemorative events, especially in historic city centers, preserve the city's historical identity while also contributing to the formation of contemporary social identities.

Cultural policies also define urban identity on an international scale by managing the dynamics between globalization and localization. Zukin's (1995) concept of cultural strategies reveals how cities use cultural and artistic events, creative industries, and tourism to stand out in global competition. Indeed, cities such as Barcelona, Berlin, and Istanbul have redefined themselves as cultural centers of attraction through biennials, festivals, and cultural capital programs (Richards & Palme 2010). Such policies increase the brand value of cities and ensure economic vitality; however, they also carry the risk of commodification and homogenization of identities. Another important dimension at the intersection of city identity and cultural policies is social inclusiveness. When cultural policies focus solely on elitist activities, city identity is constructed through symbols representing a narrow segment of society, which can lead to social exclusion. Hall's (1997) approach to cultural identity emphasizes that identity is not fixed but rather a constantly negotiated process. Therefore, inclusive cultural policies transform urban identity into a pluralistic and dynamic structure by encouraging the cultural participation of different social groups such as immigrants, young people, and disadvantaged groups. On the other hand, there are many international examples of strengthening urban identity through cultural policies. Barcelona, which shaped its modern identity through post-Olympic urban transformation and cultural investments (Evans 2003), Copenhagen, which enabled the development of creative industries and international recognition through investments in culture and the arts, and Vienna, which increased social participation by preserving the city's historical identity through the protection of cultural heritage and numerous festivals, are examples of this. (Bianchini & Ghilardi 2007) These examples demonstrate that cultural policies can also be used as a strategic urban management tool. Ultimately, the relationship between urban identity and cultural policies clearly reveals the strategic role of culture in urban life. Cultural policies keep urban memory alive by building bridges between the past and the future, increase the visibility of cities in a global competitive environment, and promote social inclusion. However, this process is only possible through policies that ensure democratic participation, represent different identities, and observe sustainability principles, not just through spatial arrangements and cultural events. Urban identity is a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon that is constantly reproduced through the administrative vision of cultural policies.

### Preservation and Revitalization of Cultural Heritage

One of the most important areas of application for local governments' cultural policies is the preservation of cultural heritage. The historical fabric of cities, their monumental structures, museums, archaeological sites, intangible cultural values, and local governments' preservation and restoration projects are kept alive (Smith 2006). In this context, cultural heritage refers to the entirety of tangible and intangible values produced by a society throughout its historical process and passed down through generations (Halaç & Bademci 2021: 173). This heritage is not only an aesthetic or archaeological wealth, but also the cornerstone of identity, belonging, and social memory. As emphasized in UNESCO's (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the protection of cultural heritage is not only the responsibility of states but also of local governments and communities. In this context, local governments play a strategic role in the process of protecting, preserving, and transmitting cultural heritage to future generations. One of the most important tasks of local governments in the field of cultural heritage is to carry out conservation and restoration work. Historic buildings, monuments, street fabric, and cultural landscapes in cities are protected through municipal planning and zoning policies. For example, Lefebvre's (1991) approach of "the social production of space" emphasizes that urban spaces are constructed not only physically but also with cultural meanings; therefore, the preservation of heritage in local governments' spatial arrangements is critical for the continuity of social identity. However, restoration is not merely a physical activity; it must also be based on scientific principles that preserve the authenticity and meaning of cultural values (Jokilehto 2007). Another important function is the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Local governments organize events, festivals, and educational programs to keep elements such as folk dances, handicrafts, regional food culture, traditional festivals, and oral narratives alive. As Smith (2006) points out, the concept of heritage is not limited to monumental structures; everyday life practices and social experiences are also integral parts of cultural heritage. Therefore, local government policies focus on the comprehensive protection of both tangible and intangible heritage.

In Turkey, the protection of cultural heritage is regulated by Law No. 2863 on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets. According to this law:

- The protection and restoration of cultural and natural assets can be planned and carried out by municipalities.

- The determination of protection areas and the implementation of restoration projects fall within the authority of municipalities, but are subject to central control (Republic of Türkiye Official Journal 1983).

- Municipalities can organize educational programs, exhibitions, and cultural events to raise public awareness for the purpose of protecting heritage.

Furthermore, the Municipalities Law No. 5393 and the Metropolitan Municipalities Law No. 5216 assign municipalities the task of protecting and developing cultural and natural assets (Republic of Türkiye Official Journal 2005). UNESCO and the Council of Europe encourage local governments to play an independent and active role in protecting cultural heritage, independent of central government (UNESCO 2018). Municipalities in European cities have established special units for the preservation of heritage, the revitalization of cultural areas, and their integration with urban identity. For example, in Florence, the restoration of historic buildings is supported by special funds managed by the municipality. Edinburgh's identity as a festival city is strengthened by the preservation of historic buildings and the integration of cultural events. In Safranbolu, Turkey, the municipality contributes to both tourism and local identity by restoring historic mansions listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The preservation of archaeological sites in Bergama is carried out in cooperation between the municipality and the Ministry of Culture. In Istanbul, the restoration of mansions and mosques on the historic peninsula is carried out in cooperation between the municipality and foundations (Çelik 2018). These examples show that local governments play an active role in the preservation of cultural heritage, both directly and indirectly.

### **Financing, Sustainability, and International Perspectives in Local Government Cultural Policies**

Financing, sustainability, and international perspectives in local governments' cultural policies have gained importance as an area where culture is integrated with its economic, social, and political dimensions in today's urbanization process. The financing of cultural policies is not limited to local budget allocations but is also shaped by contributions from central government, private sector partnerships, European Union funds, and support from international organizations such as UNESCO (Gibson & Stevenson 2004). The role of local governments in this area goes beyond the direct transfer of financial resources to cultural projects and includes a regulatory and facilitating position that brings together different actors for the sustainability of cultural life. Ensuring sustainability, particularly in areas of application such as cultural and

artistic activities, museums, libraries, cultural centers, and festivals, depends on the development of long-term financing models (Bianchini & Parkinson 1993). The concept of sustainability has strategic significance not only in an environmental context but also in terms of preserving cultural diversity, supporting urban identity, and ensuring the continuity of cultural industries. In this context, cultural sustainability involves both the efficient use of economic resources and the participation of broad segments of society (Throsby 2001). Ensuring sustainability in the cultural policies of local governments is possible, on the one hand, through the diversification of financial mechanisms and, on the other hand, through long-term strategic planning for the preservation of cultural heritage and the support of cultural production. At this point, methods such as public-private partnerships, sponsorships, crowdfunding, and local tax regulations emerge as important tools that strengthen the financial base of cultural policies (Evans 2009).

From an international perspective, local governments' cultural policies have taken on a multidimensional character in line with globalization and the European Union's framework programs in the field of culture. Documents such as UNESCO's "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" (2003) and the Council of Europe's "European Cultural Convention" require local governments to comply with international standards in their cultural policies (UNESCO 2003). In this context, local governments have become actors in cultural policies not only at the national level but also at the global level. Cities' participation in international cultural networks, sister city protocols, European Capital of Culture projects, and international festivals increase the visibility of local cultural policies on a global scale and are also used as tools of cultural diplomacy (Sassatelli 2009). In conclusion, financing, sustainability, and international perspectives form three complementary dimensions in local governments' cultural policies. Financing determines the feasibility of cultural policies, while sustainability stands out as the guarantee of long-term cultural development. International perspectives position local cultural policies within a global context, contributing to both the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of cultural industries. Addressing these three dimensions together enables local governments to design their cultural policies in a more effective, inclusive, and forward-looking manner.

The financing and sustainability of local governments' cultural policies in Turkey are shaped within the framework of financial relations with the central government, the limits of local budgets, private sector support, and the use of international funds. Municipal Law No. 5393 and Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216 explicitly assign local governments the

tasks of providing cultural and artistic services and preserving and developing cultural heritage (Municipal Law No. 5393; Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216). However, in practice, the budget that municipalities can allocate for cultural activities constitutes only a small portion of their total budgets. Cultural services generally lag behind infrastructure, transportation, and environmental services, which directly affects the sustainability of local cultural policies (Erder & İncioğlu 2008). Diversifying funding sources is one of the most critical issues in the cultural policies of local governments in Turkey. Municipalities try to support their cultural projects through their own revenues, as well as through shares from the central government, sponsorship agreements, revenues from cultural events, and international funds. For example, metropolitan municipalities such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara benefit from the European Union's "Creative Europe" program, UNESCO cultural heritage funds, and support provided by various cultural attaché offices (UNESCO 2018). Such international funding sources offer significant opportunities, particularly in terms of preserving cultural heritage, increasing the international visibility of cultural and artistic events, and supporting creative industries. From a sustainability perspective, local governments' cultural policies in Turkey are often shaped by short-term projects and changes in administration. This situation hinders the institutionalization of cultural policies and makes it difficult to develop a long-term cultural strategy (Çolak 2015). However, cultural sustainability means not only the continuity of financial resources but also ensuring social participation, preserving local cultural values, and supporting cultural industries as an economic sector. When local governments can ensure continuity in organizing events such as festivals, concerts, theater performances, and exhibitions, the city's identity and sense of social belonging are strengthened (Kongar 1989).

In Turkey, the interaction of local governments with international cultural policies is particularly noteworthy in the preservation of cultural assets included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. In the process of protecting heritage sites such as the Historic Areas of Istanbul, Safranbolu, and the Walls of Diyarbakır, municipalities collaborate with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism at the national level and benefit from UNESCO's technical and financial support (Akça 2017: 579-580). Furthermore, projects such as the "Turkic World Cultural Capital (Kastamonu 2018)" and the "Islamic Countries Sports Capital (Konya 2022)" have provided local governments with the opportunity to establish new partnerships for both international recognition and the financing of cultural policies. In conclusion, despite structural problems, the financing and sustainability of local governments' cultural policies in Turkey are increasingly supported by diverse sources; international funds and participation in cultural

networks enhance the effectiveness of local cultural policies. However, for lasting sustainability, cultural activities must be a fundamental component of municipalities' strategic plans, financial relations with the central government must be organized in a way that strengthens cultural services, and local communities must be effectively involved in decision-making processes. Steps taken in this direction will strengthen local governments' cultural policies in Turkey at the financial, social, and international levels.

### Discussions

As a result of the evaluations made within the scope of the research questions stated in the purpose and method section of this study, the following findings were reached:

- Cultural policies are implemented not only through the guidance of the central government, but also through initiatives carried out directly at the local level.
- Local governments are developing institutional capacity to both preserve cultural heritage and support new cultural production through the roles they assume in the cultural sphere.
- Municipalities undertake tasks such as opening cultural centers, establishing libraries, operating theaters and concert halls, organizing festivals, supporting local artists, and opening museums and exhibition spaces.
- Municipalities also play a critical role in cultural policies in the construction of urban identity.
- Local governments are also actors that enable citizens to participate in cultural production processes.
- In Turkey, the task of providing cultural services is primarily assigned to local governments.
- In Turkey, the priorities of political powers, the demands of local communities, budgetary constraints, and the influence of global dynamics have a significant impact on the process of determining the cultural policies of local governments.

### CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Local governments' cultural policies have become an increasingly decisive factor in the social, economic, and political structure of modern cities. In this context, it is evident that culture does not merely represent an aesthetic or artistic domain, but is also a multidimensional element that

shapes urban identity, strengthens social belonging, supports economic dynamism, and enhances international visibility (Bianchini & Parkinson 1993; Throsby 2001). Through cultural policies, local governments can preserve the city's past and heritage while also encouraging new areas of cultural production for the future; in this process, cultural and artistic events, museums, festivals, libraries, cultural heritage projects, and creative industries serve as the main tools for cultural development (Evans 2009).

Practices in Turkey and around the world show that the success of local governments' cultural policies is shaped by three key axes: financing and resource diversity, sustainability, and participatory governance. Financing is one of the most critical factors determining the feasibility of cultural policies. Allocations from the central government, local taxes, sponsorship agreements, private sector partnerships, revenues from cultural events, and international funds form the financial base of cultural projects (Gibson & Stevenson 2004). However, directing these resources only to short-term and periodic projects poses a significant obstacle to cultural sustainability (Çolak 2015). Therefore, it is crucial that cultural policies are supported by long-term planning, strategic vision, and an institutionalized financial management approach. The dimension of sustainability is not limited to the continuity of financial resources, but also encompasses elements such as ensuring social participation, preserving local cultural values, promoting cultural diversity, and providing stable support to cultural industries (Throsby 2010). Local governments must strike a balance between the preservation of cultural heritage and contemporary cultural production in order to ensure sustainability in cultural policies. For example, the status of Istanbul's Historic Areas on the UNESCO World Heritage List imposes on local governments not only a duty to protect but also a responsibility to ensure that this heritage is integrated into contemporary life (Aksoy & Enlil 2011). Therefore, unless cultural policies are based on long-term cultural strategies rather than short-term projects, the balance between social memory and cultural dynamism may be disrupted.

Social participation and governance are another decisive axis in terms of the democratization of cultural policies. The shaping of local governments' cultural policies solely by management staff can lead to the public becoming alienated from cultural life. However, the contemporary approach to cultural policies requires the inclusion of civil society organizations, artists, academics, and citizens in decision-making processes (Flew & Cunningham 2010). The cultural councils, arts and culture committees, and thematic workshops established in some metropolitan municipalities in Turkey offer positive examples of participatory governance.

Institutionalizing participatory processes contributes to making cultural policies both more inclusive and more legitimate.

International perspectives reflect the global interaction dimension of local governments' cultural policies. UNESCO's "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" (2003) and the Council of Europe's cultural diversity policies require local governments to comply not only with national but also with international standards. In Turkey, large cities in particular make their cultural policies visible at the global level through European Capital of Culture projects, sister city protocols, and international cultural festivals (Sassatelli 2009). Such international collaborations create important opportunities in terms of cultural diplomacy and enable the use of new sources of funding for cultural policies. When evaluated in the context of Turkey, one of the fundamental problems in the cultural policies of local governments is that cultural services mostly create a gray area in the division of authority between the central government and local governments. This situation both hinders the effective use of resources and limits the localization of cultural policies. Furthermore, the fact that the cultural sphere is often seen as an element of political competition undermines the principles of continuity and impartiality in cultural services (Erder & İncioğlu 2008). However, in recent years, the increased capacity of municipalities to benefit from international cultural funds, the proliferation of cultural heritage projects, and the diversification of cultural and artistic activities indicate a positive trend of transformation in the cultural policies of local governments in Turkey. Consequently, the cultural policies of local governments are becoming increasingly important as a strategic area that shapes the social fabric, economic dynamism, and international visibility of cities. The effectiveness of these policies is directly related to the diversity of financial resources, the adoption of sustainability principles, and the institutionalization of participatory governance mechanisms. Local governments will achieve success to the extent that they approach cultural policies not merely as part of service delivery, but also as a vision that shapes the future of cities. Positioning culture at the center of economic development, social solidarity, and international diplomacy tools will make local governments' cultural policies stronger, more inclusive, and more sustainable in the 21st century.

Finally, the effectiveness of local governments' cultural policies depends not only on administrative capacity but also on the ability to understand the social function of culture and the arts. Therefore, the following policy recommendations have been developed to ensure that cultural policies are sustainable, participatory, and reflect local uniqueness:

1. Creation of Local Cultural Strategies: Municipalities should prepare cultural strategy documents appropriate to their regional identities. These documents should include the cultural needs of the local population, the preservation of cultural heritage, support for creative industries, and the sustainability of cultural tourism. Cultural strategies should be consistent with national cultural policies but sensitive to local dynamics.

2. Development of Participatory Cultural Management Models: Continuous dialogue mechanisms should be established with civil society organizations, artists, academics, and neighborhood organizations in the preparation and implementation of cultural policies. Citizen participation in decision-making processes should be ensured by establishing cultural advisory boards in municipal councils. This approach will contribute to the dissemination of cultural policies and increase their legitimacy.

3. Integrative Protection of Cultural Heritage: The protection of cultural heritage should not be limited to physical restoration; intangible cultural values, local traditions, and oral history studies should also be included in the scope of protection. Municipalities should develop joint projects with universities and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in this process. Furthermore, local governments should take on more effective coordination roles in areas listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

4. Strengthening Cultural Financing and Incentive Mechanisms: The budget allocation for cultural investments by local governments should be increased. The financing of cultural centers, art galleries, and local festivals should be supported within the framework of public-private partnerships. Furthermore, grant programs and micro-funding mechanisms should be developed to encourage local artists' production.

5. Increasing Cultural Access and Inclusion: Cultural policies should reach all neighborhoods of the city equally, not just central areas. Practices such as mobile cultural centers, traveling theaters, open-air cinemas, and neighborhood workshops promote cultural participation. Planning accessible cultural spaces, especially for children, women, and individuals with disabilities, should be a priority.

6. Developing Digital Cultural Policies: Local governments should develop strategies to transfer cultural production to digital environments. Municipal digital archives, virtual museums, digital libraries, and online event platforms should be created to ensure that cultural heritage and artistic events reach a wide audience. This will also increase the national and international visibility of local culture.

## Local Governments' Cultural Policies

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7. **Education and Capacity Building:** Personnel working in municipal cultural departments should be trained in cultural management, project preparation, sponsorship, and communication. Certificate programs should be organized in collaboration with universities. In addition, continuous education programs and workshops should be held to increase the cultural awareness of the local population.

8. **Collaboration with Creative Industries:** Cultural policies should not be limited to public cultural services but should also support creative industries. Municipalities should strengthen the cultural economy by developing joint projects with sectors such as design, film, music, gastronomy, and handicrafts. This will both create employment and encourage the culture-based development of the local economy.

9. **Strengthening the Relationship Between Urban Space and Culture:** The planning of cultural spaces should be integrated with urban aesthetics and public space policies. New squares, parks, and public space designs should include infrastructure suitable for cultural activities. Furthermore, the preservation of cultural identity in urban transformation processes should be ensured through legal and administrative safeguards.

10. **Establishing Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Performance indicators related to local governments' cultural policies should be determined, and regular reporting should be conducted. These reports should include indicators such as the number of participants in cultural events, budget efficiency, social impact, and sustainability criteria. This will enable the effectiveness of cultural policies to be monitored objectively.

These policy recommendations aim to strengthen the institutional capacity of local governments in the field of culture and to establish cultural policies on a more democratic and sustainable basis. When culture is considered an integral part of local development, cities will develop not only economically but also socially and culturally.

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