

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITIES IN THE PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: THE CASE OF THE DISTRICT GOVERNORSHIPS OF MALAZGIRT AND AHLAT

Asst. Prof. Mehmet Şirin ÇETİN (Ph.D.)^{*} 

ABSTRACT

As societies experience the present and envision the future, they draw inspiration from the legacy left by their ancestors. The preservation of values defined as cultural heritage, which constitute a form of collective memory, is therefore of significant importance. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of provincial administrative authorities (key institutions within the Turkish administrative system) in safeguarding cultural heritage. To this end, the district governorships of Malazgirt and Ahlat, two localities of critical importance in Turkish history due to the Battle of Malazgirt, were selected as the research sites. The study employed case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. Findings indicate that the provincial administrative authorities in Malazgirt and Ahlat are not sufficiently effective in preserving cultural heritage, and that achieving the desired outcomes requires addressing deficiencies related to budget, equipment, and qualified personnel, among others.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Provincial Administrative Authorities, Malazgirt, Ahlat.

JEL Codes: H83, Z18, R58.

1. INTRODUCTION

The world, with its vast territory, billions of inhabitants, and millennia-long history, possesses significant cultural assets that enrich the present and illuminate the future. The preservation and transmission of these cultural assets—regarded as cultural heritage—to future generations is therefore a matter of considerable importance. The close relationship between cultural heritage and human rights further underscores the significance of this issue (Türkbay, 2021, p. 1450). For this reason, the involvement of public authority in the preservation of cultural heritage is considered a necessary condition for achieving the desired outcomes, as the protection of cultural heritage is perceived as serving the public interest. As a mechanism responsible for safeguarding the public interest, public authority must take action to preserve cultural heritage and carry out this responsibility within its hierarchical administrative structure.

^{*} Muş Alparslan University, Muş/ Türkiye, E-mail: ms.cetin@alparslan.edu.tr.

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Provincial administrative authorities, which constitute an extension of the central organization within the Turkish administrative structure, play a crucial role in the preservation of cultural heritage, as they do in many other domains. The long-standing tradition of these authorities, coupled with their appointment through bureaucratic rather than political mechanisms, is believed to ensure that policies developed in this field are more sustainable and function more effectively. For this reason, municipalities—local government units—were not selected as the focus of this study. The principal rationale is the assumption that the municipalities in the districts under investigation, owing to governance by different political parties across electoral periods, do not exhibit a consistent approach to the preservation of cultural heritage.

This study aims to examine, through an applied perspective, the activities of the project units within the district governorships of two districts—Muş’s Malazgirt and Bitlis’s Ahlat—which are home to important cultural heritage assets. Ahlat was selected as a research site due to its rich historical background, having at various times been under the rule of the Umayyads, Abbasids, Qaysids (Süleymoğulları), Marwanids, Ahlatshahs, Ayyubids, Seljuks, Mongols, Rüzegis (Bidlis dynasty), Aq Qoyunlu, Safavids, and Ottomans (Sümer, 1986, p. 447), and therefore possessing significant cultural heritage artifacts. Malazgirt, on the other hand, is the site of the pivotal 1071 Battle of Malazgirt, a decisive event that opened the gates of Anatolia to the Turks and concluded with the victory of the army commanded by Sultan Alparslan (Cahen and Kerman, 1972, p. 77). According to available historical accounts, preparations for the Battle of Malazgirt began in Ahlat, while the battle itself took place on the Malazgirt plain (Aycil, 2024, p. 3). This historical connection necessitated the inclusion of both settlements in the scope of the study.

By analyzing the information obtained from the study and supported by field data, the effectiveness of provincial administrative authorities in the preservation of cultural heritage will be revealed, and recommendations will be offered to enhance their effectiveness. The examination of provincial administrative authorities, one of the key institutions of Turkish public administration, in relation to the equally significant issue of cultural heritage renders the study valuable and is expected to contribute meaningfully to the field.

2. CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

In the conceptual perspective section, the theoretical foundations necessary for the application phase will be provided, specifically regarding cultural heritage and the role of provincial administrative authorities in its preservation.

2.1. Cultural Heritage

In Turkish, the term *kültür* (culture), much like *medeniyet* (civilization), was first used by Ziya Gökalp (Arslanoğlu, 2013). Although no consensus exists regarding its definition, culture is generally understood as the artistic, architectural, musical, theatrical, literary, and other creative products generated by a society. The word derives from the Latin concept culture (Çeçen, 1996, p. 11) and is often associated with *edere-cultura*, meaning “cultivation of the land” (Oğuz, 2011, p. 125). Its Ottoman Turkish equivalent is *hars* (Kocadaş, 2005, p. 2). According to the Turkish Language Society, culture refers to the totality of material and immaterial values created through historical and social development, transmitted to future generations, and reflecting humanity’s mastery over the natural and social environment (TDK, 2025).

The term *heritage*, in its legal sense, broadly refers to all resources, movable and immovable property, capital, and any assets that constitute a direct or indirect means of livelihood and are transferred through inheritance (Becerra, 1999, p. 107). Although challenging to define due to its complexity and multidimensionality (Krol, 2021, p. 1), cultural heritage can be described as the collection of values that represent a society’s shared past, strengthen solidarity and unity among its members, ensure the continuity of accumulated traditions and experiences, and shape the future (Kuşçuoğlu and Taş, 2017, p. 60). Cultural heritage, enriched and developed over time, consists of beliefs and practices transmitted to future generations and, in doing so, reinforces social cohesion (Gümüşçü, 2018, p. 108). Cultural heritage is composed of cultural assets. According to the Law on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets (Law No. 2863, Art. 1), cultural assets are defined as “all movable and immovable assets located above ground, underground, or underwater, belonging to prehistoric or historical periods, and relevant to science, culture, religion, or the fine arts.”

Cultural heritage is recognized as such because human communities seek to transmit their collective experiences to future generations (Halaç and Bademci, 2021, p. 173). The first legal regulation concerning the protection of cultural heritage is known to have been enacted in 1872 for Yellowstone National Park in the United States (Feary et al., 2000, p. 83). Nonetheless, it is widely believed that humanity has shown continuous sensitivity toward the preservation of cultural heritage throughout history, as cultural heritage functions as a locomotive for societal development and has therefore received due regard in every historical era.

A wide range of elements fall under the concept of cultural heritage. For example (Aird, 2005, p. 593): traditions; customs; language; folklore; literature; art; sculptures; theater; music; handicrafts; archaeological sites; sacred places; cemeteries; museum collections; quarries; buildings; ruins; tools; machines; roads; pathways; fields; fences; gates; gardens; wells; dams; bridges; symbolic structures; historical events; introduced or domesticated plants, animals, and microorganisms, among many others.

2.2. Provincial Administrative Authorities and Their Role in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

The system of provincial administration forms the foundation of territorial governance in Turkey and emerged and developed in response to societal conditions (Çapar, 2011, p. 75). The institution of provincial administrative authority, inherited from the Ottoman Empire by the Republic of Turkey (Kartal, 2013, p. 1), organizes territorial administration into provinces and districts. In accordance with the unitary structure of the state, the country is divided into 81 provinces and 922 districts (Çapar and Koca, 2023, p. 90). Article 126 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey (1982) stipulates the establishment of provincial administrative units by stating: “*Turkey, in terms of central administrative organization, is divided into provinces based on geographical conditions, economic requirements, and the needs of public services; provinces are further subdivided into other administrative tiers.*” The provincial authorities of provinces and districts are the governor (vali) and the district governor (kaymakam), respectively (Özkan, 2019, p. 80). Unlike municipalities, which function as urban governance units, provincial administrative authorities emerged as territorial management entities (Öçal, 2018, p. 73) and are a direct outcome of Turkey’s unitary state structure (Çolak and Çolak, 2023, p. 3).

With the enactment of Law No. 5226 in 2004, significant amendments were introduced regarding the repair of cultural assets, contribution shares, site management, and the establishment of Conservation Implementation and Control Bureaus within governorates and municipalities (Akgün, 2011, p. 192). These developments expanded the responsibilities of provincial administrative authorities in this area. The preservation and revitalization of cultural heritage within national borders is important for citizens of the country; however, the protection of cultural heritage beyond national borders is also seen as an indicator of respect for human rights (Vadi, 2024, p. 391). Within the framework of cultural heritage management, the specialized nature of archaeological excavations affects public perception of these activities (Reher, 2020, p. 430). Consequently, the public often does not demonstrate the expected level of interest in archaeological excavations.

The purpose of Law No. 5225 on the Promotion of Cultural Investments and Enterprises is articulated in its first article as follows (5225 Sayılı Kültür Yatırımları ve Girişimlerini Teşvik Kanunu, 2004): “The purpose of this Law is to meet the cultural needs of individuals and society; to ensure the protection of cultural assets and intangible cultural heritage and their incorporation into sustainable cultural practices; to enhance cultural communication and interaction; to support the production of artistic and cultural values and facilitate public access to them; to preserve the cultural assets of the country and utilize them as elements contributing to the national economy; and to promote cultural investments and enterprises related to the construction and operation of cultural centers.”

This section has briefly outlined the nature of provincial administrative authorities and their role in the protection of cultural heritage. The effectiveness of these authorities in safeguarding cultural

heritage will be examined in the subsequent section through the analysis of data obtained from the applied phase of the study.

3. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MALAZGİRT AND AHLAT DISTRICT GOVERNORSHIPS IN THE PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

3.1. Purpose, Significance, and Research Questions of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which provincial administrative authorities—state institutions organized throughout the entire country (Demir, 2018, p. 200)—are effective in fulfilling the responsibilities they assume, or are expected to assume, in the preservation of cultural heritage. In this context, the hypothesis of the study is as follows: *“The efforts carried out by provincial administrative authorities to preserve cultural heritage are moderately effective in raising awareness and ensuring the participation of local communities; however, administrative, legal, and technical deficiencies, along with the limited use of digital technologies, significantly reduce this effectiveness.”*

The study is considered significant as it examines the effectiveness of provincial administrative authorities—public units often perceived as solely responsible for coordination and administrative control—in safeguarding cultural heritage, a vital societal asset. Within this framework, the following demographic information and qualitative questions were posed to the personnel responsible for cultural heritage preservation in the District Governorates of Malazgirt and Ahlat, which constitute the sample group:

Demographic Information

1. *Gender,*
2. *Age,*
3. *Educational Background,*
4. *Position,*
5. *Length of service.*

Qualitative Questions

1. *What types of activities do you carry out to preserve cultural heritage? Do you have completed or ongoing projects?*
2. *What can you say about the cultural heritage sites in your district, and how do you evaluate the current approach to their protection?*
3. *How do you conduct awareness-raising activities within the community to ensure the participation of local residents in the preservation of cultural heritage?*

4. *What administrative, legal, or technical obstacles do you encounter in your efforts to preserve cultural heritage? Could you provide information on these barriers?*
5. *What are your views on the use of digital technologies or modern methods in the preservation of cultural heritage? Do you currently use any of these technologies?*

In preparing the qualitative questions, the aim of the first question was to determine the activities undertaken by the District Governorate within the scope of cultural heritage preservation. The second question, which is linked to the first, sought to measure the administrative personnel's knowledge of the cultural heritage sites in the district and their perspective on the issue. Based on the idea that cultural heritage preservation requires the inclusion of social stakeholders due to its broad societal impact, the third question was posed to identify the types of community engagement efforts undertaken. The fourth question aimed to identify the challenges encountered by the District Governorates in their preservation efforts and, if necessary, to explore potential solutions. The final question sought to determine whether digital technologies—an essential component of contemporary practice—are used in cultural heritage preservation, and if so, to what extent they are utilized.

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Research Method

This study employed a case study design, which is one of the qualitative research methods. A case study involves an in-depth examination of a single case or phenomenon. Owing to its flexible nature, case studies do not require the investigation of a limited set of variables or adherence to rigid rules. Instead, the main purpose is to understand what occurs within a particular context, to collect data systematically, to analyze them, and to present the findings in a coherent manner (Gökçek and Davey, 2009: 1).

For this study, the case was defined as the *effectiveness of the District Governorships of Malazgirt and Ahlat in the protection of cultural heritage*. In conducting a case study, it is essential to develop appropriate research questions, collect data in the natural setting, and evaluate the data obtained from the field (Yin, 2017: 4–5). Accordingly, prior to developing the interview questions, an extensive literature review was conducted and expert opinions were obtained. After securing the necessary permissions, the researchers contacted the District Governorships of Ahlat and Malazgirt, collected the data, and then analyzed them in detail.

3.2.2. Participants

The study was carried out with personnel involved in the cultural heritage protection teams established by the District Governorships of Malazgirt and Ahlat. According to information received from both governorships, each district had three personnel actively engaged in these efforts, and all were interviewed. Additionally, interviews revealed the involvement of two teachers who supported the teams due to their strong familiarity with the region—one retired teacher in Malazgirt who continued to volunteer, and another actively serving teacher in Ahlat. Thus, a total of eight participants (four from Malazgirt and four from Ahlat) who supported the cultural heritage protection efforts were interviewed, and both district administrations confirmed that no additional eligible participants were available. Indeed, it was found that these eight individuals were sufficient for collecting the desired data, as it became apparent that the existing participants were repeating themselves at a certain point. In qualitative research, when the researcher begins to hear the same comments repeatedly, it means that data saturation has been reached (Yağar, 2023: 138).

A purposeful sampling strategy was used. Purposeful sampling enables the selection of individuals who can provide rich, in-depth information in qualitative research (Büyüköztürk et al., 2020: 257). The inclusion criterion was active involvement in cultural heritage protection activities conducted by the district governorships. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participants	Gender	Education	Age	Position	Years of Service
A1	Male	Bachelor's	56	Project Unit Officer	36
A2	Male	Bachelor's	59	Teacher	37
A3	Male	Bachelor's	25	Project Unit Officer	2
A4	Female	Bachelor's	38	Project Unit Officer	10
M5	Male	Bachelor's	41	Civil Servant	17
M6	Male	Bachelor's.	37	Civil Servant	15
M7	Male	Master's.	34	Civil Servant.	12
M8	Male	Bachelor's	73	Teacher Retired)	25

An examination of the table shows that all but one participant were male. This was explained by the fact that the majority of staff working in both district governorships were men and that the fieldwork sometimes required on-site visits. The preference for personnel with undergraduate degrees was justified by the knowledge-intensive nature of the work.

3.2.3. Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection tool. The interview questions were prepared in advance by the researcher, and follow-up probes were used when necessary. At the end of the study, the initial semi-structured form was finalized and transformed into a structured form.

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, which is a commonly used technique in qualitative research. In this method, data are obtained through direct interaction between the researcher and the participant (Yıkımsı, 2020: 187). A total of 10 questions (5 demographic and 5 semi-structured) were posed to each participant. The questions focused on the cultural heritage protection activities carried out by the Ahlat and Malazgirt District Governorships, public participation in these activities, the use of digital technologies, challenges encountered, and the administrative staff's level of knowledge and interest regarding the cultural assets in their districts.

3.2.4. Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval and institutional permissions, the data collection process began. The administrative personnel of the Malazgirt and Ahlat District Governorships were contacted, informed about the study, and provided with the semi-structured interview form. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded. Probing questions were asked when needed to obtain more detailed information. Interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants and lasted approximately 30–50 minutes. The data collection process concluded once all scheduled interviews had been completed.

3.2.5. Data Analysis

Before being transferred to the MAXQDA 2020 Pro software, the interview recordings were transcribed. The transcribed data were then imported into the software and analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is a technique that involves the systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of textual data, allowing themes and categories to emerge from the data (Assarroudi et al., 2018). In this study, the findings were organized and presented through themes, categories, and codes.

3.2.6. Research Ethics

Prior to commencing the study, an application for ethical approval was submitted to the Ethics Committee of Muş Alparslan University. The committee, in its decision dated 11.04.2025 and numbered 84, approved the study titled “*The Role of District Governorships in the Protection of Cultural Heritage: The Cases of Malazgirt and Ahlat*”. All research procedures and citations adhered to scientific and ethical principles. Participation was voluntary, and personal information remained confidential. Participants were coded as A1–A4 for Ahlat and M1–M4 for Malazgirt to ensure anonymity.

4. FINDINGS

This section of the study addresses the word cloud, research findings, and the codes, categories, and themes developed in accordance with the research objectives and questions.

4.1. Word Cloud

Following the interviews, the collected data were uploaded to MAXQDA Pro 2020, and a word cloud was generated. A word cloud is a visual representation of frequently used words (Atenstaedt, 2012: 148). Words appearing more frequently in the study are displayed near the center of the cloud and in larger font sizes.

Figure 1. Word Cloud



4.2. Theme: Effectiveness in Protecting Cultural Heritage

Within the scope of the study, participants were asked five questions. Based on their responses, one theme, five categories, and nine subcategories were developed.

Table 2 presents the theme, categories, subcategories, and example codes. Two sample codes are provided for each subcategory.

Table 2. Theme, Categories, Subcategories, and Codes

Theme–Category.	Subcategory	Codes
Theme: Effectiveness in Protecting Cultural Heritage.		
Category 1: Activities Carried Out for Cultural Heritage Protection		Completed Projects Ongoing Projects
Category 2: Perceptions Toward Cultural Heritage		Insufficient attention is given
Category 3: Methods of Raising Social Awareness		Mass media Other tools

Category 4: Challenges Encountered in Cultural Heritage Protection	Administrative Legal Technical	Budget Constraints Legislation Qualified Personnel
Category 5: Use of Digital Technologies in Protecting Cultural Heritage	Sufficient	Insufficient

4.2.1. Category 1: Activities Carried Out for Cultural Heritage Protection

In this category, participants were asked about both completed and ongoing projects. Since a single participant could report multiple projects, the frequency exceeds the number of participants. Accordingly, the two subcategories for this question were completed projects and ongoing projects.

Table 3. Activities Carried Out for Cultural Heritage Protection

Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage	Participants
Completed Projects	8	100,00	A1,A2,A3,A4,M1,M2,M3,M4
Ongoing Projects	8	100,00	A1,A2,A3,A4,M1,M2,M3,M4
Total	16	100,00	8

Completed Projects

A1: Our completed projects include organizing the Ahlat Workshop with the participation of 15 rectors and 300 academics; carrying out cemetery and Ahlat Castle restoration activities within the Eastern Anatolia Project; and preparing two books—600 and 300 pages in Turkish and English, respectively—promoting Seljuk cemeteries and domed tombs with support from the Prime Ministry’s Promotion Fund. We also prepared a short promotional booklet introducing Ahlat with support from the Eastern Anatolia Development Agency and distribute it to visitors. We built 10 fountains from Ahlat stone, carried out activities to promote tile art, and established a tile–ceramic workshop. In addition, we registered ‘Traditional Ahlat Stone Craftsmanship’ on UNESCO’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. To strengthen this craft, we organized stone-carving courses for both women and men. We also obtained a geographical indication for the Ahlat walking stick and compiled the city’s historical narratives. Miniatures of historical artifacts were prepared and placed in the Miniaturk open-air museum. Finally, security camera systems were installed in several historical areas to ensure protection.

A4: We compiled Ahlat’s city narratives to document the region’s cultural memory.

M1: We completed the work carried out around the Kız Bridge, and the area was designated as a historical national park. We published a book introducing Malazgirt and prepared oil-paint artworks depicting the region, which were exhibited publicly. We also produced short promotional films on Malazgirt and distributed them to national media outlets.

M2: We prepared a children’s book about the Battle of Malazgirt to support the development of historical awareness among children. We visit schools, meet with students, gift them the book, and hold informative conversations about the topic.

The findings indicate that both the Malazgirt and Ahlat District Governorships have successfully completed numerous significant projects aimed at protecting cultural heritage. In Ahlat, for example, the District Governorship was a stakeholder in the Workshop on Investment, Employment, and Innovative Business Development, which brought together approximately 70 public representatives, academics, sector specialists, and civil society organizations (Bitlis Eren University, 2025). Similarly, the Malazgirt: Today and Tomorrow workshop, conducted in partnership with the Malazgirt District Governorship, represented a major initiative aimed at identifying key issues in the district and developing solutions (Muş Alparslan University, 2023).

Ongoing Projects

A1: Within the scope of European Union projects, we are carrying out excavation and restoration work at the Seljuk Cemetery. This includes lichen cleaning on gravestones and ensuring the inscriptions can be read. When the work is completed, it will be compiled and published as a book. Other ongoing projects include the Harabe Şehir Eco-Tourism Project, the Madavans Valley Eco-Tourism Project, and the Ahlat Urban Design Project. The Ahlat Urban Design Project covers three areas: Ahlat Castle, the Mausoleums Area, and the Harabe Şehir Area. Additionally, the stories on gravestones will be written on informative panels in Turkish, English, and Persian and placed next to the gravestones for visitors to read. We have prepared an urban signage project for Ahlat and submitted it to the Eastern Anatolia Development Agency. We have also initiated the preparation of a ten-volume corpus on Ahlat culture. In cooperation with Bitlis Eren University, we continue project preparations for the establishment of a Seljuk Institute. Furthermore, in Ahlat—which historically served as a center for the production of herbal medicines—we are carrying out efforts to revive this tradition. Lastly, restoration and conservation work at Ahlat Castle continues under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic.

A2: Work is ongoing to establish a Museum of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Although the project has been completed, a final decision on the location of the museum has not yet been made. The museum is planned to include areas where local dances, traditions, and cultural activities can be performed. Our Library Project has been finalized and its location has been identified; however, construction has not yet started. The establishment of an Ahlat Science and Art Center is also planned. This center, which will operate year-round, will include an observatory. Given that Ahlat lies on important bird migration routes, the inclusion of an observatory is seen as necessary. Within the Abdurrahman Gazi area, a Viewing Hill Project is being carried out in cooperation with the District Governor's Office and the Municipality, and it will include worship, recreation, and social facilities. Other ongoing projects include: Identifying the graves of ancestors from the Kayı Tribe through the Ottoman era, Excavation and research in the wider Bayındır Mausoleum area, Establishing a market area for the promotion and sale of local plants, Efforts to have Ahlat gravestones included on the UNESCO Permanent Protection List, Landscaping work within the Harabe Şehir Project to create living and social spaces, The Madavans Valley Walking Route Project, A film festival planned to become a traditional event with the participation of Turkic republics, The Kale Mahallesi Cultural Park Project, which will include shopping areas, playgrounds, and educational sections featuring prominent figures of Turkish history, and The preparation of biographies of significant historical figures from Ahlat.

M1: A project is being developed to produce souvenirs, objects, and thematic items representing Malazgirt. This initiative aims to preserve the district's cultural identity through tangible artifacts while also supporting local artisans economically. A dig house project is also underway to display artifacts uncovered at excavation sites. With a budget of approximately 13 million TL, this center will allow visitors to directly experience the region's historical heritage once completed. Work continues to identify historical burial sites in the region, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Malazgirt's archaeological legacy. Similar to Ahlat stone, Malazgirt stone is also considered culturally significant. Efforts are being made to research its original form and reintroduce its production. The museum project conducted by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is ongoing. This museum will provide digital exhibitions and interactive services, creating a modern and engaging visitor experience.

M4: There are remains of the Urartian civilization, a Roman-era fortress, and a mound located in Dolabaş Village. Efforts are underway, in cooperation with relevant institutions, to identify, protect, and open these areas to scientific excavation.

It is evident from the statements of participants that there is a wealth of ongoing projects. It can be seen that the Ahlat District Governor's Office is slightly ahead in terms of both completed and ongoing projects. There are thought to be several fundamental reasons for this. Firstly, there is a reater amount of cultural heritage identified in the district of Ahlat. On the other hand, it is nderstood that bureaucracy and politics are more harmonious in Ahlat and that it has gained relative experience in project development. Furthermore, it is seen that transportation facilities are more developed in Ahlat compared to Malazgirt.

4.2.2. Opinions on Cultural Heritage Sites

Participants were asked whether adequate attention is given to cultural heritage areas. Since all participants stated that the necessary level of attention is not being shown, only one subcategory was created.

Table 4. Opinions on Cultural Heritage Areas

Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage	Participants
Inadequate attention is given	8	100,00	A1,A2,A3,A4,M1,M2,M3,M4
Total	8	100,00	8

Insufficient Attention to the Protection of Cultural Heritage

A1: We occasionally observe that cultural heritage sites are damaged. For example, some inscriptions are broken or painted over with oil paint. The cultural heritage areas in Ahlat are among the most valuable assets of the region, and I believe their importance should be better recognized. Thanks to ongoing efforts, the local community has become aware of the value of these historical assets and the potential economic benefits they may bring, which has increased public awareness of preservation. However, in my opinion, the level of attention is still not sufficient.

A2: There are significant difficulties in preserving Ahlat's historical identity; irregular urbanization and certain constructions cause damage to historical areas. Ahlat receives attention only during specific times of the year, whereas it deserves interest throughout the entire year. There are still many undiscovered historical artifacts and sites in Ahlat. Furthermore, treasure hunting activities have led to the destruction of numerous historical areas, and the misinterpretation of Ahlat's history by various groups has resulted in the distortion of historical facts.

M1: Malazgirt has not received the attention it deserves for many years. However, recent promotional and restoration activities have led to a noticeable increase in interest. Still, several factors continue to prevent the region from attracting the attention it merits. These include the destruction of some structures such as churches and baths known from historical sources, and the fact that the 1071 Battle of Malazgirt took place on a battlefield, which makes it quite difficult to find physical remains.

M3: A museum should be built in the district because the number of places available for visitors to see is very limited. Additionally, transportation opportunities to Malazgirt should be improved. More comprehensive promotional activities should be carried out at national and international levels. Therefore, I believe that sufficient importance is still not being given to the issue.

All participants in the study stated that insufficient attention is given to the protection of cultural heritage, indicating a strong consensus on this issue. For example, the destruction of cultural heritage sites by treasure hunters and others is blamed primarily on local residents, whereas problems such as irregular urbanization and seasonal rather than year-round attention are attributed to administrative shortcomings. As is well known, the Malazgirt Victory took place on 26 August 1071, and thus both Malazgirt and Ahlat receive intense public interest annually on this date. However, this interest does not continue throughout the rest of the year. Participant M3 suggests constructing a museum in Malazgirt and improving transportation infrastructure to mitigate this issue. Moreover, the damage caused by treasure hunters is a widely recognized problem that significantly harms the region's cultural assets. In this regard, it is recommended that preservation measures be urgently strengthened.

4.2.3. Public Awareness Activities for the Protection of Cultural Heritage

In this section, participants were asked which channels they use to raise public awareness about cultural heritage preservation. They reported that awareness activities are conducted through mass media as well as various other methods.

Table 5. Public Awareness Activities in Cultural Heritage Protection

Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage	Participants
Mess Media	6	75,00	A1,A2,A4,M1,M3,M4
Other Tools	7	87,5	A1,A2,A3,A4,M1,M2,M3
Total	12	100,00	8

Mass Media

A1: We actively use local media and social media to reach the public, and a film promoting Ahlat was broadcast on TRT as a public spot.

A4: With the support of TRT, we prepared short promotional films about Ahlat and attempted to raise public awareness. Local and social media channels are effectively used to carry out promotional activities. In this way, Ahlat's historical, cultural, and touristic value is communicated to broad audiences.

M2: Local Press: We maintain constant communication with local journalists and regularly share completed and planned activities. We also provide detailed briefings to national press representatives visiting the region, which helps promote the work to wider audiences.

M3: During the Malazgirt Victory celebrations, when local and national media representatives visit the region, we provide necessary briefings to promote Malazgirt.

Mass media is used effectively within the available resources in the region. As a phenomenon closely related to social life (Çolak, 2013: 9), mass communication plays a crucial role in communicating social events and issues. With technological advancements, these tools have become even more influential (Dilber, 2014: 60). National media, in particular, shows increased interest in the region during

the 26 August Malazgirt Victory ceremonies, when high-level state officials attend the events. In addition, concerts by well-known artists during this period contribute significantly to promotional activities.

Other Tools

A1: We collaborate with various Non-Governmental Organization to inform the local public about cultural heritage sites and develop joint projects with Ahlat Municipality. Through the Ahlat-themed coloring book distributed to primary school students, we aim to cultivate historical awareness among children. We also organize history lessons for children at the Kümbets and the Seljuk Cemetery and conduct drawing competitions. In addition, within the protocol signed with the Söğüt Municipality of Bilecik, reciprocal student visits are organized. As part of the Guide Training Program, students who receive training are assigned to promote historical sites during holiday periods. Within the scope of the project “Eyewitnesses of History Rise Again,” carried out in cooperation with Van Yüzüncü Yıl University and Bitlis Eren University, we ensured the restoration of 150 tombstones with the support of Italian experts.

A3: Within the “Ahlat Meetings at Kubetü’l Islam” project, we have organized 11 events to date. In these events, expert speakers informed the public about the history, culture, and significance of Ahlat. A workshop was also held, bringing together universities, the public, businesspeople, and investors. Foreign investors and representatives from the advertising and promotion sector also participated. This initiative has been an important step for promoting Ahlat’s cultural heritage and evaluating its economic potential.

M1: Our initial contact with the public began by utilizing the knowledge and testimonies of elderly residents in the region. We also continue excavation activities in cooperation with Muş Alparslan University, jointly conducting scientific and technical processes.

M3: Our contact with the public intensifies especially before the 26 August celebrations of the Malazgirt Victory. The events held during this period significantly increase public interest in history.

Beyond mass media, other tools are also used effectively to involve the local community in cultural heritage protection efforts. Among these, the Guide Training Program, which involves children in the process, is an important step highlighted by A1 for raising cultural heritage awareness among younger generations. Likewise, awareness activities carried out during the Malazgirt Victory celebrations are noteworthy initiatives.

4.2.4. Challenges Encountered in the Protection of Cultural Heritage

This question aimed to identify the challenges faced by district governorships in conducting cultural heritage preservation activities. Three major areas of difficulty were identified: administrative, technical, and legal issues, which were considered as subcategories.

Table 6. Challenges Encountered in Cultural Heritage Protection

Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage	Participants
Administrative Challenges	8	100,00	A1,A2,A3,A4,M1,M2,M3,M4
Technical Challenges	8	100,00	A1,A2,A3,A4,M1,M2,M3,M4
Legal Challenges	5	62,5	A1,A2,M2,M3,M4
Total	21	100,00	8

Administrative Challenges

A1: Lengthy bureaucratic procedures, lack of inter-institutional cooperation regarding permits and land allocation, and insufficient budget allocation for restoration projects are major administrative challenges.

A4: Prolonged bureaucratic processes and budget constraints are the primary administrative obstacles we face.

M1: The most significant administrative challenge we encounter is insufficient funding. Additionally, the District Governorship must independently meet the accommodation and meal needs of the Malazgirt battlefield excavation team.

The most significant bureaucratic issues include prolonged administrative procedures and limitations related to insufficient project budgets. Historically, Turkish bureaucracy has produced structural issues such as *centralization, organizational expansion, administrative secrecy, lack of transparency, conservatism, and resistance to change* (Akçakaya, 2016: 684). Budget shortages stem from the fact that district governorships prioritize essential public services, leaving limited financial resources for cultural heritage protection, which has gained increased attention only in recent years.

Technical Challenges

A1: Insufficient qualified personnel, limited tools and equipment, and high costs of restoration activities are significant technical obstacles.

M1: Seasonal conditions, particularly long winter periods, negatively affect excavation and fieldwork.

Two major technical challenges stand out: the shortage of qualified personnel and difficulties in procuring necessary tools and equipment. Although demographic data show that both administrative units involved in the study have recruited highly trained staff to address this issue, the need for more specialized field personnel remains evident. Problems in procuring tools and equipment appear to result from budget constraints, as previously discussed under administrative challenges.

Legal Challenges

A1: Some aspects of the legislation remain insufficient, causing difficulties in information-sharing and cooperation among public institutions.

M3: Rigid legal provisions and lengthy bureaucratic procedures represent significant legal challenges.

M4: Prolonged legal processes related to protection and property issues in historical areas, along with bureaucratic delays, are among the legal obstacles we encounter.

Some participants (three individuals) stated that they do not face any legal challenges. This may be because legal issues are less tangible and therefore not as easily identifiable as administrative or technical problems. Participants who did report legal challenges primarily referred to limitations arising from the legislation.

4.2.5. Use of Digital Technologies in the Protection of Cultural Heritage

In today's world, digital technologies are essential tools for promoting (Ekinci, 2022: 164) or producing any product or service. In this context, this question sought to determine whether digital technologies are used in cultural heritage protection and, if so, whether their use is sufficient. Two subcategories emerged from the analysis.

Table 7. Use of Digital Technologies in Cultural Heritage Protection

Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage	Participants
Sufficient	4	50,00	A1,A2,A3,M1
Not Sufficient	4	50,00	A4,M2.M3.M4
Total	8	100,00	8

Sufficient

A1: A digital information system has been established in the Seljuk Cemetery. The installed camera system allows continuous monitoring of the entire area. Modern ground-surveying devices are used to detect new artifacts. These practices show that digital technologies are utilised sufficiently.

A2: Within the library project, the establishment of a digital library has been planned. Social media platforms are also actively used to promote Ahlat, and promotional films about Ahlat have been prepared and shared with public support from DAKA and DAP.

M1: With the completion of the museum, excavation house, and promotional objects projects that reflect Malazgirt's historical value, the aim is to enhance the region's cultural tourism potential. A digital promotion area will also be available here. Efforts are underway to increase public involvement and expand national promotional activities, supported by digital mass communication tools.

Not Sufficient

A4: To protect the Seljuk Cemetery, we installed a camera system for security and monitoring purposes. This system enables 24-hour surveillance to prevent potential damage. Modern search and ground-surveying devices are used to uncover and identify historical remains, making excavation and research activities more scientific and efficient. However, it is still difficult to say that sufficient technological resources are available.

M2: Modern technological devices are used by the excavation team for search and scanning activities, allowing more accurate and faster results and increasing the reliability of archaeological data. However, due to financial limitations, access to sufficient digital technologies remains problematic.

Responses to this question were divided evenly: half of the participants considered the digital technologies used to be sufficient, while the other half found them inadequate. Digital tools are used in both Malazgirt and Ahlat for promotional purposes. Moreover, digital technologies are utilized at various stages of the Malazgirt Battlefield Excavation Project—one of Turkey's significant archaeological initiatives—for both surveying and analyzing findings. Despite acknowledging the use of digital tools, participants who responded negatively still felt that the available technologies were insufficient.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preservation of cultural heritage values—which constitute the visual, auditory, linguistic, and sensory memory of a society and strengthen the connection between past and present generations—is of great importance. For this reason, such values must be safeguarded by public authorities. Examining the effectiveness of provincial administrative officers in preserving cultural heritage is a distinct area of inquiry, as these officials play a central role in the governance of national territories and possess a long-standing historical background.

Malazgirt and Ahlat have attracted considerable attention in recent years due to their location in the region where the Battle of Manzikert, which opened the gates of Anatolia to the Turks, took place. Although academic studies on these two regions have increased, the efforts of provincial administrative officers in preserving cultural heritage have not been sufficiently addressed from a public administration perspective. Aiming to fill this gap, the present study employs a qualitative case study approach. Interviews were conducted with personnel serving on the cultural heritage preservation teams established by the district governorships of Malazgirt and Ahlat. The participants provided assessments regarding ongoing projects, approaches to heritage preservation, tools used to involve the local population, encountered challenges, and the use of digital technologies.

Findings indicate that numerous projects have been completed in both regions, while others are still ongoing. Participants generally reported that cultural heritage does not receive sufficient attention, that the use of digital technologies is only partially adequate, and that various administrative, technical, and legal issues negatively affect their work. They also noted that, within existing means, information activities at both local and national levels are carried out through mass media and other communication channels.

The analyses reveal that the effectiveness of provincial administrative officers in preserving cultural heritage remains below the desired level. This situation necessitates the development of certain public policy recommendations. In this context, the following policy suggestions are considered important for enhancing the preservation of cultural heritage in the districts of Malazgirt and Ahlat:

- ✓ Allocating a special appropriation from the central budget for the preservation of cultural heritage, given the historical significance of Malazgirt and Ahlat,
- ✓ Employing specialists in relevant fields to work on cultural heritage preservation initiatives,
- ✓ Providing district governorships with qualified equipment and tools that can be used in heritage conservation efforts,
- ✓ Conducting promotional and awareness-raising activities that maintain year-round public interest in both regions,

- ✓ Strengthening security and monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective protection of cultural assets in Malazgirt and Ahlat and to prevent threats such as illegal treasure hunting,
- ✓ Assigning public broadcasting institutions a more active role in promoting Malazgirt and Ahlat.

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