

Immigrant Cultural Assimilation: Analyzing Cultural Heritage and its Intergenerational Transmission among Türkiye's Bosnian Population

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Abstract

This research examines the intangible cultural heritage of Türkiye's Bosnian population to determine the extent to which it has sought to render that cultural legacy sustainable. The study uses a qualitative approach by analyzing data secured via interviews with the leadership of 22 Bosnian associations in Türkiye. Interviews were evaluated using content analysis facilitated by MAXQDA software, with 4 themes, 16 categories and 100 subcategories included within the scope of the study. The research findings are grouped under the following four themes: Bosnian culture, Bosnian traditions, lost Bosnian cultural values and the sustainability of cultural heritage. In general, the study found that Bosnians living in Türkiye have a rich food and beverage culture and see these as indispensable elements of their daily lives. Although Bosnian clothing culture includes a quite variety of articles, their use in daily life has decreased considerably. Bosnian custom includes very colorful traditions that take place on special occasions, like weddings, celebrations, funerals and the sending-off of soldiers. Although some of these traditions continue to be practiced today, a significant number are on the verge of disappearing. Those who try to preserve the Bosnian language seek to do so by organizing language courses, speaking it at home and providing opportunities for social interactions in Bosnian. Bosnians who organize festivals, celebrations and scientific events to ensure the sustainability of their culture have not lost hope of keeping their rich cultural heritage alive.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage of Bosnians, Bosnian traditions, sustainability of Bosnian cultural heritage.

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Understanding Assimilation and Cultural Transmission

Throughout history, migration—whether compulsory or voluntary, caused by war, famine, economic or environmental difficulty—has been accompanied by cultural change. One such change, often determined by migrants’ relations with their host society, is ‘assimilation’. Assimilation is defined as the process by which a migrating individual or group becomes indistinguishable from the dominant culture into which they integrate (Şengül, 2021: 415). It can stem from a voluntary desire to conform to the majority, or from pressures exerted by mainstream society on members of a minority community. According to Berry et al. (2006), the exclusionary and assimilationist pressures exerted by mainstream society can, albeit rarely, result in marginality within a minority group. Berry argues that when minority group members perceive discrimination, they tend to avoid engaging with mainstream society and become more inclined to turn toward their roots. Conversely, when they do not perceive discrimination, they are more likely to exhibit a willingness to integrate into mainstream society. Minority communities can thus adopt assimilation as an acculturation orientation. Indeed, in denoting a process by which migrants become indistinguishable from the dominant culture, assimilation is also used synonymously with terms like acculturation and cultural convergence (Marshall, 2005: 42).

Assimilation into the dominant culture is one of the most significant cultural changes or challenges associated with migration. Sam and Berry (2010) assert that intercultural contact leads to cultural and psychological changes, and that the varying pathways of acculturation have become recognized through terms like integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Their study emphasizes “the relationship between how individuals achieve cultural adaptation and the extent to which they successfully adapt”, highlighting that those who integrate tend to adapt more effectively than those who align themselves exclusively with one culture or the other (via assimilation or separation) or with no culture at all (leading to marginalization). Thus, while assimilation represents a unidirectional absorptive process,

integration reflects the degree to which the receiving society is willing to engage with immigrants, accept them and provide equal opportunities for them to express their behaviors and preferences alongside those of the native population (Facchini et al., 2015:620).

From the perspective of sociological migration theory, assimilation as a paradigm traces its origins to the Chicago School. In studies aimed at understanding the experiences of those migrating to urban areas, Park and Burgess (2017) have offered the first widely recognized definition of assimilation, describing it as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which individuals and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other individuals and groups, sharing their experiences and histories to unite in a common cultural life.” A central policy debate surrounding migration revolves around cultural assimilation. Abramitzky et al. (2017:5) highlight the difficulty of measuring this phenomenon, pointing out that sociology has traditionally examined the issue of cultural assimilation, especially in the United States, where it has primarily been analyzed by reference to marriage rates between immigrants and natives.

Assimilation is characterized as “a natural and unhindered process whereby individuals and groups adopt the memories, feelings, and behaviors of other individuals and groups, sharing their experiences and histories to become integrated into a shared cultural life through a process of interpenetration and fusion” (Park and Burgess, 2017:10-11).

Berry (1997) defines the assimilation strategy as one in which the dominant group consciously opts for interaction, while members of the non-dominant group make little effort to preserve their own culture. For group members adopting this approach, cultural continuity fails to materialize as they abandon their original culture and blend into the dominant group. However, while immigrants often prefer to relocate to places that were culturally similar to their own countries, they can still often encounter notable cultural differences that continue to deepen. Here, cultural self-selection can also become an instrument for cultural differentiation (Rapoport et al., 2020:4).

The preservation of cultural continuity within societies hinges on cultural transmission. This, as Wang and Gong (2011) observe, occurs in three distinct forms: (1) horizontal transmission, involving communication between individuals of the same generation; (2) vertical transmission, where a member of one generation interacts with a biologically related member of a subsequent generation; and (3) oblique transmission, encompassing exchanges between any member of one generation and a biologically unrelated member of a later generation. Intergenerational cultural transmission refers to the process through which cultural ideas, beliefs, and practices are passed from one generation to the next within a familial context. This transfer occurs through socialization practices among family members, such as grandparents, parents and children. Research on this subject has demonstrated that grandmothers' cultural socialization practices especially, directly shape mothers' cultural socialization efforts with their children over time. Mothers engage in cultural socialization to impart specific cultural attributes (Williams et al., 2020).

Challenges in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage are the product of multiple factors, including technological advancements (Maphas, 2008; Charr 2019), the erosion of local distinctions in cultural practices and their transmission, and, as noted by B. Mumcu (2023), phenomena such as urbanization, postmodernism, media and globalization. Among these, globalization (Robertson 1992; Giddens 2002) is particularly significant in driving cultural transformation. Paradoxically, this process initially highlights local differences, fragmenting traditional cultures into new forms, only to subsequently steer societies toward a singular global culture. As a result, culture emerges as one of globalization's most prominent domains of influence. An examination of this process reveals both positive and negative impacts on cultural elements (Yaman, 2019: 430). Mumcu (2023: 19-20) argues that cultural heritage awareness

and preservation are contingent upon numerous variables. He suggests that efforts to safeguard these elements hinge on fostering a preservation mindset within the broader society.¹

Nevertheless, intergenerational cultural transmission is not always seamless. Intergenerational cultural dissonance (ICD) represents a prevalent challenge for immigrant families. When immigrant parents adhere to traditional cultural beliefs while their children embrace the values of the dominant culture, this misalignment can engender conflicts and disruptions within family dynamics (Choi et al., 2008). Intergenerational cultural transmission constitutes a multifaceted process influenced by family socialization practices, personal aspirations and sociopolitical contexts (Williams et al., 2020; Tam, 2015).

The primary reason for the neglect of cultural heritage stems from the emergence of 'nation-states' which began to emerge in the Balkans in the 19th century and particularly accelerated in the early 20th century. During this period, newly established nation-states often defined the term 'citizen' in an insufficiently inclusive manner. In many cases, only those sharing the same religion, language, or ethnicity as the dominant group were designated as 'citizens,' with others being excluded, marginalized or compelled to leave the country. The cultural heritage artifacts of these 'others' were destroyed as part of the 'ethnic cleansing' process (Mac An Airchinnigh, Sotirova and Tonta, 2006, 32). There is also an observable connection between 'identity-bound' modern wars and the deliberate plunder and destruction of cultural heritage. Such conflicts are closely tied to the rise of 'new nationalism.' Nations, described as 'memory communities', actively shape what their citizens remember and forget. Purposeful collective amnesia and denial play a significant role in supporting nation-building endeavors (Van der Auwera, 2012: 53-55).

¹ For detailed information see. Tomlinson, J. (1999). *Globalization and Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Yahyagil, M. Y. (2019). *Küreselleşme Girdabında Kültür*, İstanbul: Yeditepe Üniversitesi Yayınları; *Globalization and Culture*. (2010). Vol: III (Global-Local Consumption), Edit. P. Jamesand, I. Szeman, Sage Publications.

Literature addressing processes of cultural loss and challenges in transmitting cultural heritage encompasses a wide range of studies. Angelini et al. (2015: 841) explore the relationship between immigrant life satisfaction and cultural assimilation, concluding that a positive, statistically significant correlation exists between the two. Ceylan (2021) focuses on Turkish immigrants in London in highlighting the assimilation of migrant children, and noting deficiencies in their ability to express identity and exercise self-governance. Investigating Turkish immigrants in Germany, Trebbe (2007) has found them to exhibit low levels of integration, with participants showing limited attachment to German citizenship, language and values. Yagmur and Bohnacker (2022), adopting a comparative approach, posit that migrant parent language use and choices are not isolated decisions but are heavily influenced by the dominant linguistic ideology of the host society, alongside deeply ingrained cultural values and identity concerns. A study by Karahan (2004) assessed the sociolinguistic conditions of Bosniak migrants in Türkiye, sampling groups from the first and second waves of migration after 1878, as well as those migrating in the 1950s. Karabostan (2022) has examined the migration experiences of Bosniaks in South Marmara and their efforts to sustain their cultural identity in Türkiye. Çuфта (2011) premises his own analysis on the assumption that ethnic, cultural and religious minorities face pressure, going on to explore the influence of European culture—specifically Italy’s established culture—on the religious and identity perceptions of Kosovar Bosniak youths. Bayraktar (2014) has analyzed the role of civil society organizations in the transmission and preservation of traditions among Bosniaks who migrated to İzmir, focusing on the İzmir Bosnia Sancak Culture and Solidarity Association.

1.2 Historical Background to the Bosnian Migration

This study examines intergenerational cultural transmission among Bosnians who migrated to Türkiye between the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War and the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923. As such, its historical starting point is the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War,

after which the Ottoman Empire —defeated by Russia— was compelled to sign the Treaty of Ayastefanos in Edirne on January 31, 1878. Opposing this treaty and wary of Russia's expansionist ambitions in the Balkans, Austria-Hungary entered into an agreement with Russia in Budapest on January 15, 1878. Under the terms of this agreement, Austria-Hungary agreed to refrain from interfering in Russia's activities in the Balkans in exchange for establishing its sovereignty over Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Berlin Congress, convened on July 13, 1878, with the participation of Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, subsequently saw Bosnia-Herzegovina placed under the occupation of Austria-Hungary—a decision that Ottoman delegates were told they could not contest. This temporary surrender of Bosnia-Herzegovina's administration by the Ottoman Empire to Austria-Hungary generated profound unease among the Bosnian-Herzegovinian population (Shaw, 2010: 187). Following Austria-Hungary's occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the already apprehensive Bosniaks sought refuge in Türkiye, initiating the first significant wave of migration in 1878 (Altuğ, 1991: 109). Upon arriving in Türkiye, Bosniak migrants settled across various regions and cities of the country.

A second major wave of migration occurred between 1881 and 1882. It was triggered by Austria-Hungary's decree mandating military service for Bosniaks in Bosnia, and its subsequent legalization, thus rendering conscription obligatory. Joining the Austro-Hungarian army was perceived by Bosniaks as a form of "estrangement from religion", leading to a significant surge in migrant applications in Türkiye. Migrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rumelia were once again resettled in various cities across the country. The "Migration Decree" of 1901 went on to prohibit those who had left Bosnia-Herzegovina without permission during this time from returning (Dedeić-Kırbaç, 2013: 9). The third significant migration wave of Bosnians to Türkiye took place between 1900 and 1901. This period began with a rebellion led by Mostar Mufti Ali Fehmi Dzabic, during which Austria sought to permanently sever ties

between Bosniaks and the Ottoman Empire, in order to bind Bosnian peoples to itself. This spurred Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslim population to seek religious autonomy, consequently leading Austro-Hungarian authorities to issue a migration order for Bosniaks on October 30, 1901.

The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary in 1908 provided the impetus for a fourth migration wave, with "Austria and Christianity" emerging as the primary driving forces. Unable to accept Austro-Hungarian occupation, Bosniaks migrated to Ottoman territories. Austro-Hungarian statistical records show that between 1878 and 1918, 63,000 Muslims emigrated from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Official Ottoman sources indicate that during the fourth wave alone, 17,044 individuals had migrated to Ottoman lands by the end of 1910, with this figure rising to 61,114 by 1918. These Ottoman records account only for those arriving in Istanbul by sea, and thus exclude migrants traveling overland or by rail via Belgrade. After the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Bosniaks were equated with Turks, who were regarded as the historical adversaries of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. As a result, Bosniaks were quickly branded as enemies and traitors. The perception of Muslims as an undesirable element within the state, coupled with ensuing internal conflicts, forced Bosniaks to migrate once more. After events in Šahovići,² a fifth wave of migration to Türkiye began (Tekin, 2020: 81). Between 1912 and 1918, encompassing both the Balkan Wars and World War I, numerous Bosniaks were again compelled to seek refuge in Ottoman territories. Previous studies have shown that first and second immigrants gradually begin to lose parts of their origin culture over time and can even assimilate. Many institutions and organizations, especially UNESCO, seek to preserve the cultural elements of immigrant societies.

² On November 10, 1924, a massacre took place in Şahoviç (Šahovići), where 73 percent of the population was Bosniak. This event is one of the most trauma-laden reasons for the Bosniak migration. During the massacre, which coincided with Eid al-Adha, 600-750 unarmed Bosnians were killed in an organised manner in Şahovici village in the Akova region. At that time, those targeted were unable to put up any resistance, resulting in not only killings, but also rapes and thefts. Fahriye Emgili, "Yugoslavya Döneminde Boşnak Göçleri (1919-1929)", *Tarih ve Günce Journal of Atatürk and the History of Turkish Republic*, 6 (Winter 2020), 12.

Understanding the values that these institutions aim to protect, requires understanding what intangible cultural heritage means.

1.3 Defining Intangible Cultural Heritage

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) describes intangible cultural heritage as encompassing “traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts”.³ Since the 1950s, UNESCO and various other international bodies have undertaken numerous initiatives to safeguard cultural heritage, resulting in the development of various treaties and other instruments (Blake 2000: 61). On October 17, 2003, during its 32nd General Conference in Paris, UNESCO adopted the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.” Türkiye formally joined this framework through Law No. 5448 (enacted on January 19, 2006), becoming an official party to the convention on March 27, 2006 (Ahunbay, 2019: 42-63).

Intangible cultural heritage is defined under this UNESCO convention as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”⁴ The convention emerged at a time when serious threats to intangible cultural heritage, such as deterioration, disappearance and destruction, were intensifying. It this reflects a universal will and shared concern for its preservation. The treaty envisages that communities—particularly indigenous groups—and, in certain instances, individuals, take proactive steps in the production, preservation, maintenance,

³ “What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?”, available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>.

⁴ Article 2(1) UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention#art2>.

and recreation of this heritage. Additionally, as part of its objectives, it seeks to raise awareness among younger generations about cultural heritage. It obliges each state party to implement safeguarding measures outlined in Article 13⁵ to ensure the protection, development and enhancement of intangible cultural heritage (Günay, 2007: 14). Beyond its commitment as a signatory to this international treaty, Türkiye has also incorporated cultural heritage preservation measures into its development plans, as ratified by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Notably, the Twelfth Development Plan (2024–2028) includes several provisions to protect intangible cultural heritage⁶.

In this respect, the present study looks at the challenges of transmitting cultural heritage among Türkiye's Bosniak immigrant population, drawing on data from Bosniak associations and canvassing solutions based on their responses. Preparation for this study revealed a notable gap in earlier research to the extent that collaboration with civil society organizations has been markedly limited. The present research addresses this deficiency and evaluates all aspects of Bosniak cultural heritage. Unlike previous works, however, it incorporates Bosniak civil society observations, problem assessments and recommendations into its wider observations about cultural heritage transmission. As such, it looks closely at the activities and experiences of twenty-two distinct Bosniak civil society organizations in Türkiye with a view to identifying obstacles to preserving their cultural identity and exploring potential solutions to these challenges. The exact number of Bosniak citizens to seek refuge in Türkiye over the aforementioned five major migrations remains unclear. However, interviews with presidents from participating civil society organizations suggest that Türkiye's Bosniak population is estimated to total around 5 million. This study looks at the intergenerational transmission of intangible cultural heritage among Bosniaks who migrated to Türkiye between the 1877-78

⁵ See. "UNESCO 2003 Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras Sözleşmesi", available at: <https://www.kulturportali.gov.tr/portal/somutolmayankulturelmiras>.

⁶ Twelfth Development Plan (2024-2028), available at: https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Twelfth-Development-Plan_2024-2028.pdf.

Ottoman-Russian War and the end of World War I. In doing so, it uses a qualitative research framework involving Bosniak civil society leadership in Türkiye.

2. Methodology

This research seeks to determine what Bosnian intangible cultural heritage is and what Bosnians do to ensure its sustainability. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the leadership of twenty-two associations representing Bosnians in Türkiye. These associations are non-governmental organizations that seek to keep Bosnian culture alive and represent 1,696,800 Turkish citizens of Bosnian heritage. As the leadership of these associations is fluent in both Turkish and Bosnian, no language barriers were encountered because interviews could be conducted in Turkish. The participating associations were as follows:

1. Adapazarı Bosnia and Herzegovina Culture and Solidarity Association,
2. Sakarya Bosniaks Culture and Solidarity Association,
3. Serdivan Bosnia Sancak Education Culture and Sports Club Association,
4. İzmir Bosnia Sancak Culture and Solidarity Association,
5. Halilbeyli Bosnia Herzegovina Education Culture and Solidarity Association,
6. Çiğli Bosnia Herzegovina Culture Association,
7. Gömeç Bosnia-Sancak Culture and Solidarity Association,
8. Sivas Bosnia Sancak Association,
9. Sefaköy Bosnia Sancak Association,
10. Istanbul Anatolian Side Bosnia Sancak Association,
11. Bosnia Sancak Academic Culture and History Foundation,
12. Kütahya Çayca Village Bosnia Herzegovinians Culture, Solidarity and Solidarity Association,
13. Adana Bosnia Brotherhood, Solidarity and Culture Association,
14. Biga Bosnia and Herzegovina Culture and Solidarity Association,
15. Fevziye Bosnia and Herzegovina Sancak Culture and Solidarity Association,
16. Kayseri Bosnian Turks Solidarity and Aid Association,
17. Bursa Bosnian Sancak Solidarity and Aid Association,
18. Karacabey Bosnian Sancak Association,
19. İnegöl Bosnian Turks Solidarity and Aid Association,
20. Karamürsel Bosnian Turks Solidarity and Aid Association,

21. Turgutlu Bosnian Turks Solidarity and Aid Association,

22. Aydın Bosniaks Culture and Solidarity Association

Analysis of the general demographic characteristics of interview participants identified the following features:

- Eleven (11) were 3rd generation Bosnians, nine (9) were 2nd generation, and two (2) were 1st generation immigrants.
- Twenty-one (21) were male and one (1) was female.
- Nine (9) were university graduates, three (3) were primary school graduates, and ten (10) were high school graduates.
- All participants were married to citizens of Bosnian origin.

Once gathered, this study's research data was subsequently qualitatively evaluated using content analysis. Qualitative research focuses on the personal, subjective, cultural and experiential basis of knowledge and practice. It emphasizes that the interpretation of data can vary according to the background of the analyst engaging in the interpretation (Kielmann, Cataldo, and Seeley, 2012, p. 9). MAXQDA software was used to support this study's analysis by categorizing the data obtained into 4 themes, 16 categories and 100 subcategories based on the content of participants' opinions. These themes, categories, and subcategories are presented in Table 1 (below).

Table 1

Themes and classifications

Theme	Classification	Sub-Classification
Bosnian Culture	Oral Cultural Heritage	Sevdalinka, Bosnian nursery rhymes, Bosnian odes, Bosnian lullabies, Finger plays, the drama of Joseph and Eve, Bosnian epics
	Clothing Culture	Bosnian Shalwar-Twill, embroidered Shamiya, Fez, Vest, Cepken, Camadan, Koparan, White headscarf
	Food Culture	Bosnian pie, Bosnian manti, Hurmanitsa, dry meat, Soka, Potoplika, Maslenitsa, Pura, cabbage rolls, kebab, pita, Kachamak, Piryan, Prsuta, Ustipak, Boraniye, İzlevak
	Beverage Culture	Surutka, Rasol, Compote, Bosnian coffee, Raki
Bosnian Traditions	Weddings	Kolo, Sevdalinka, accordion, folk dances, kidnapping, breaking the jug, taking food to the bride's house, serving salted coffee, Obikusha, young man's money, Keskek, playing cümbüş and dümbelek, groom's aunt, Temenna, Bayraktar, serving sherbet and Turkish delight
	Funerals	Taking food to the deceased's home, funeral prayer, women's participation in the funeral prayer, performing the funeral prayer in the cemetery, charity pilaf, Bosnian Mevlid reading, Bosnian hymns and odes
	Celebrations	Visiting the cemetery on the eve of Eid, distributing sherbet and Turkish delight on Eid, men gathering and going to the mosque, mass Eid breakfast, serving Bosnian pastry
	Sending Soldiers Off	Storing cookies
	Language	Speaking Bosnian in daily life, Bosnian interaction at home, Teaching Bosnian to the new generation

Lost Cultural Values	Traditions	Kidnapping girls, taking food to the bride's house, marriage between Bosnians, performing funeral prayers in the cemetery, men gathering and going to the mosque, mass Eid breakfast
	Oral Cultural Products	Sevdalinkas, Siyelo chats, lullabies, songs, nursery rhymes, epics, folk Songs, the Drama of Yusuf and Havva, finger plays
	Traditional Clothing	Wearing the Bosnian shalwar (dimiye), the laced shamiya, a cepken, a vest, Camadan, or a koparan
Sustainability of Cultural Heritage	Access to Cultural Heritage	Writing a book about Bosnian culture, providing access to Bosnian culture in digital media, creating digital networks in which Bosnians can participate
	Promotion of Culture	Organizing Teferiç-pita festivals, Bosnian genocide commemoration events and historical research symposiums, and establishing a Balkan historical research institute
	Keeping Bosnian Alive	Opening language courses, speaking Bosnian at home, producing Bosnian films/series
	Strengthening Interaction Between Bosnians	organizing coffee events, establishing a Bosnian folk dance team, organizing iftars during Ramadan, organizing Bosnian festivals

3. Results

This study's research findings are presented under four themes: Bosnian culture, Bosnian traditions, lost Bosnian cultural values and the sustainability of cultural heritage.

4.1. Bosnian Culture

This theme encompassed four classifications: namely, oral cultural heritage, clothing culture, food culture and beverage culture (See Figure 1).

4.1.1. Oral Cultural Heritage

Participant responses revealed quite a variety of oral culture products forming part of Bosnians' oral cultural heritage. Among these, *sevdalinkas* stand out. *Sevdalinkas* are a traditional musical style that speaks of love and affection in Bosnian culture. As such, they can be considered Bosnian folk music. Some participant responses highlighted the importance of *sevdalinkas* in Bosnian oral culture, as follows:

“Our sevdalinkas are the most prominent products of our oral culture that talk about love and affection. We even have sevdalinka choirs.” (P4)

“Sevdalinkas are indispensable to us. They are our oral cultural heritage that we listen to with great pleasure and believe are directly special to us.” (P5)

Among oral cultural products, Bosnian nursery rhymes, odes, hymns and folk songs also hold great importance. In this context, some interesting participant opinions are as follows:

“When someone dies, Bosnian hymns and odes are read afterward. We attend condolence gatherings for several days where these odes are read.” (P12)

“We have an uncle called Uncle Fuat. This uncle of ours, who is almost 100 years old, sings the folk songs he heard from his grandmother. The new generation who learned these songs from him also knows these songs now.” (P16)

Fingerplay, a verbal game played with fingers, is another element emphasized as falling within the scope of Bosnian oral culture. One participant stated:

"When I was a child, there was no television, no telephone, no radio in the evenings, and when we played it, we used to play a game where we said "pull your finger without saying inyak minyak" and whoever's fingers closed the most won." (P10)



Figure 1. Overview of Bosnian culture with reference to cultural themes and classifications

4.1.2. Clothing Culture

Participant's responses on the issue of clothing culture specific to Bosnians highlighted many options for men and women. Among the products reflecting Bosnian clothing culture, two stood out: the Bosnian shalwar (Dimiye-Dimya), which resembles a long, loose skirt that is also worn (in white) by brides at weddings, and the lace Shamiya. Some participant responses about clothing were as follows:

“There is a shalwar called Dimya for women. The Dimyas worn on special occasions have additional ornaments and embroideries like gold embroidery on the wrists and shoulders.” (P1)

“Among Bosnian clothing, women have “Dimyas”. They also have lace “Shamiyas”. Women wear their Dimyas, especially on henna nights and for weddings.” (P12)

In respect of men's attire, the red fez, which is worn on special occasions, was notable, with one participant stating:

“Men wear normal suits but wear a red fez on their heads.” (P3)

4.1.3. Food Culture

Participant responses revealed a remarkably rich Bosnian food culture. The most popular customary foods from Balkan countries are Bosnian pie, Bosnian Manti, Hurmanitsa, Kuru Et, Soka and Pita. Participants outlined the following:

“Rubitsa, our pie with yogurt and minced meat, is famous. We drizzle yogurt on it. It's eaten this way... In Bosnia, you cannot eat pie without clotted cream on top. Perhaps only minced meat pie is eaten without cream. The others all have clotted cream on top.” (P1)

“We have a Bosnian pie that has been known in Türkiye since the early 1900s. We call our minced meat pie Rubitsa. We also have dishes like Kuru Et, Hurmanitsa, Bosnian Manti, and Soka. Our cabbage rolls and meatballs, called Kebabi, are also famous.” (P4)

“Bosnian Böreği, dishes like Kaçamak made from corn flour, and Hurmanitsa dessert are the most common foods that are specific to our culture. When serving the böreği, we also put ayran in the middle of the plate.” (P8)

“Bosnian food is unique to Bosnian culture. One of our favorite dishes is Pita. We organize a Pita festival in April or May.” (P11)

4.1.4. Beverage Culture

Participants highlighted that Bosnian beverage culture is also quite rich. Bosnian Coffee, Hosaf, Rasol and Raki are prominent among beverages specific to Bosnian culture. Participants expressed some of the following opinions:

“Our plum Raki is good. We also make raki from other fruits. In addition, beverages such as Hosaf and Bosnian Coffee are also very common.” (P4)

“Our cranberry Hosaf is very common.” (P8)

Cabbage is a preferred ingredient in drinks as well as meals. Rasol stands out as a Bosnian cultural beverage that contains cabbage. Surutka, made from whey, is also among the healthy beverages of consumed by Bosnians. Participant responses included the following:

“Rasol made with white and red cabbage, Surutka made from whey, are among our traditional beverages.” (P20)

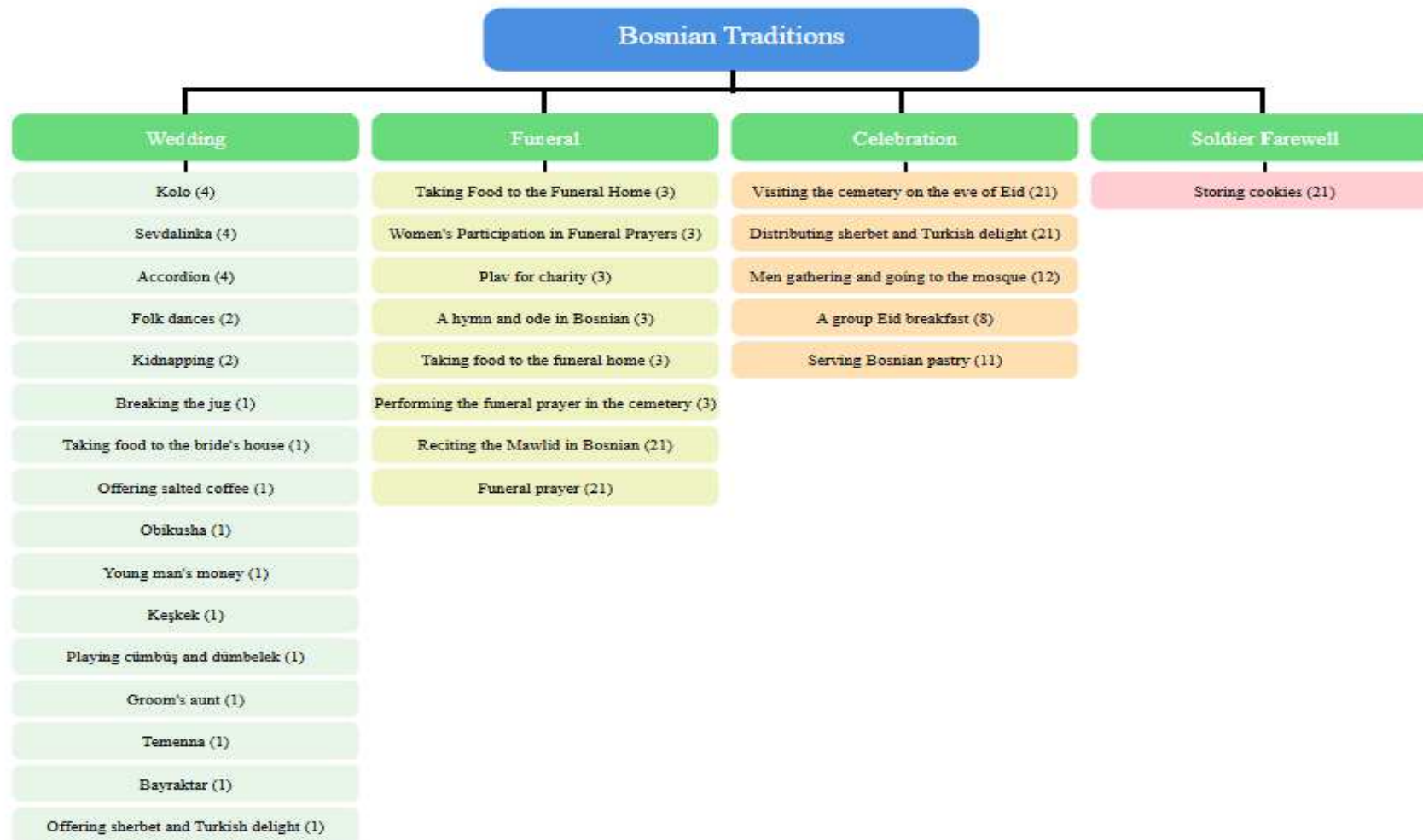


Figure 2. Bosnian traditions and their sub-classifications

4.2. Bosnian Traditions

Bosnian traditions are generally practiced at events like weddings, funerals, holidays and sending soldiers off. The findings related to these categories are reflected in Figure 2 (above).

4.2.1. Wedding Traditions

Traditional dances, songs, and musical instruments have an important role at Bosnian weddings. Kolo is a South Slavic circle dance that is included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List.⁷ Sevdalinkas (love songs specific to Bosnian culture), also stand out among wedding traditions. Some notable participant responses on the issue of wedding traditions are as follows:

“Kolo, which is played with at least three people, is indispensable for our weddings. Keşkek, made from chicken and cracked wheat, is also cooked at weddings accompanied by drums and zurna.” (P13)

“Henna night is held at the girl’s house and cümbüş at the boy’s house. We play the accordion and dance. Sevdalinkas are indispensable for weddings.” (P15)

4.2.2. Funeral Traditions

Bosnians funeral traditions are not limited to attending a funeral ceremony of an acquaintance or relative when they die. Bosnian funeral traditions include reading the Mevlid in Bosnian, performing the funeral prayer together with women, taking food to the deceased’s home, and distributing charity pilaf. Taking food to the home of the deceased for a week also shows that the Bosnian understanding of sharing and helping each other has an important place in Bosnian culture. Some interesting participant views on this are as follows:

“Our funerals are very, very crowded. They are more crowded than weddings. After a burial, there are always guests coming and going to and from the deceased’s home.”

⁷ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kolo-traditional-folk-dance-01270>

Neighbors take food to that home for a week to treat the guests. In addition, after the funeral, charity pilaf is distributed to people in need.” (P13)

“For example, we have a WhatsApp group as an association. We have a messaging system. When a Bosnian passes away, we send messages to all our Bosnian members. We perform the funeral prayer with those who come to the funeral.” (P6)

4.2.3. Celebration Tradition

Participant responses revealed certain prominent Bosnian holiday traditions, such as distributing sherbet and Turkish delight on holiday days, and visiting cemeteries the day before a celebration/holiday (Arefe day). Among such holiday traditions, serving börek, sherbet, dessert and Turkish delight, and family visits were among the traditions that participants mentioned with great enthusiasm. Some of the participant views on holiday traditions were as follows:

“We always make Bosnian börek on holidays. It should be among the treats. Our dessert is baklava. We also serve Turkish delight and sherbet on holidays. We make holiday visits to the elderly.” (P6)

“Men gather and go to the mosque on holidays and perform the holiday prayer. When the men come home, we have a holiday breakfast with the whole family.” (P9)

4.2.4. Sending Soldiers Off

Participant responses revealed that the Bosnian tradition of sending soldiers off to the army includes only one ritual. This tradition, which they call saving cookies, is based on making cookies in the home of the soldier shortly before their departure for military service, and keeping one of the cookies until the young man returns home. An interesting participant insight on this was as follows:

"The family of the young man who is leaving for military service organizes a party for him at home. The family, usually his mother, makes very large cookies for the soldier. The cookies are distributed to everyone, but the soldier's mother puts one of them in a container and keeps it. This cookie waits until the soldier returns from military service. They do not open the container so that it does not spoil. It is kept as if a cookie is the soldier's share." (P21)

4.3. Lost Cultural Values

The following classifications represent Bosnian cultural values that have been lost or are no longer practiced today, and are thus analyzed within this framework: language, traditions, oral cultural heritage and local clothing (See Figure 3).

4.3.1. Language

Participant interviews generated the finding that Bosnians do not use their original language in daily life as much as they used to and that, to a great extent, this language has thus lost its influence in daily interactions. One participant expressed the following:

"Bosnian is not spoken in daily life like it used to be. When we were young, Bosnian was spoken when we communicated with each other so that we would not forget our own language. Now, as a natural result of living in Türkiye, we always speak Turkish in daily life." (P8)

In addition, participant responses highlighted that Bosnian is no longer spoken in the homes of Bosnians living in Türkiye, despite it being their original language. One interesting view on this was as follows:

"It is normal for us to speak Turkish outside, at school, at work, etc., because we live in Türkiye and, of course, Turkish should be spoken. But why don't people speak their language at home? I think we are a bit lazy in this regard. We are lazy in teaching

Bosnian to the new generation. Even if we teach them, they forget if we don't speak it all the time. Unfortunately, there's no interaction in Bosnian at home anymore.” (P11)

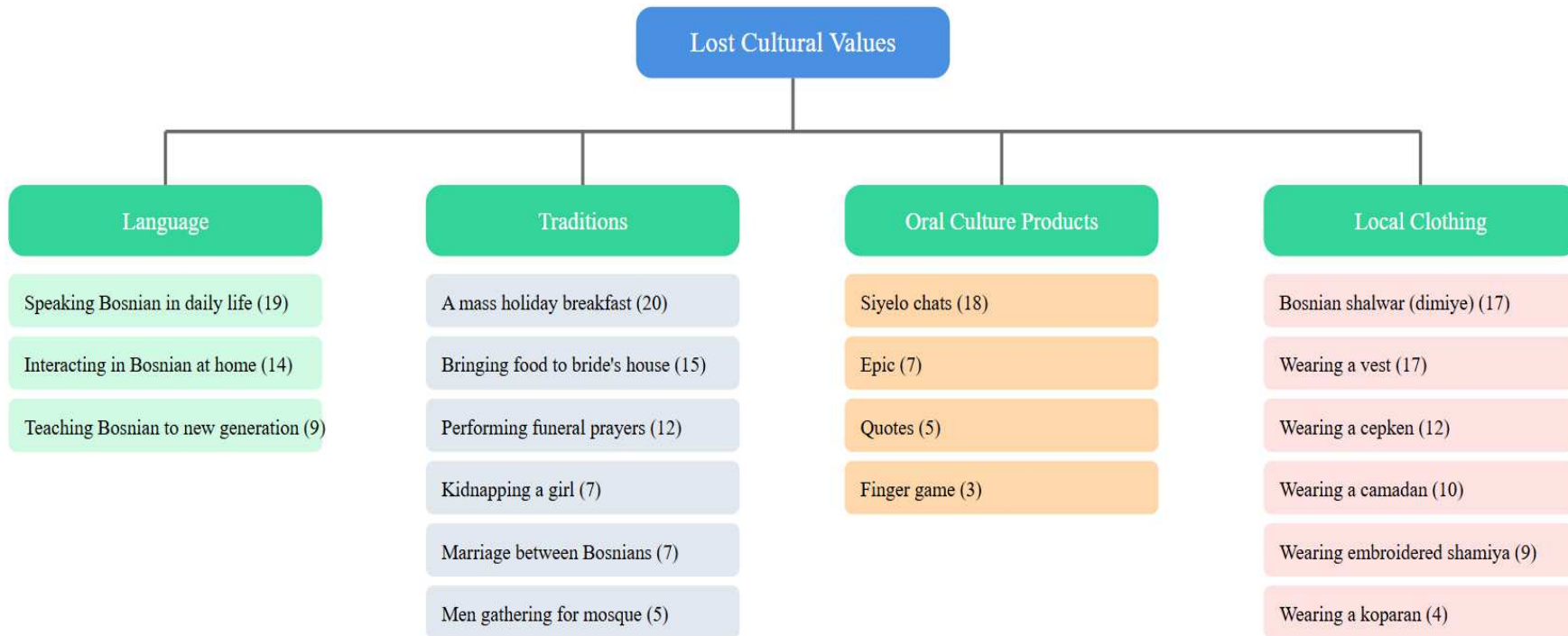


Figure 3. Lost cultural values by sub-classification

4.3.2. Traditions

According to participants, a communal holiday breakfast is a Bosnian tradition that has disappeared or diminished. Over time, the more widespread adoption of individual lifestyles and more nuclear families have significantly reduced communal activities. This may be why Bosnians state that they have holiday breakfasts less frequently today than in the past. One participant opined that:

“In the past, after the prayer on holiday mornings, the entire extended family would gather and have breakfast together. We would apply this tradition as if it were a rule and do it every holiday. Now, everyone has holiday breakfasts with their own nuclear family.” (P18)

Among other traditions that have diminished, participants also mentioned taking food to a bride's house at the time of her wedding. Rising economic costs are seen as an important barrier to implementing traditions related to special days. For example:

“The day after a wedding, treats and meals would be taken to the [bride's] house. No food would be cooked in that house for a few days. Every day lemonads and food and pastries were brought to the bride's home. Now the economic situation is going badly and unfortunately, these customs are a thing of the past.” (P7)

When a woman's family does not agree to her marriage, the man's kidnapping of the woman from her home to marry her is referred to as the tradition of kidnapping. Bosnians have also highlighted this as another diminishing tradition. One interesting participant response was as follows:

“Let's say the man kidnaps the girl he loves, but her mother and father won't give her away. After a certain period, the adults step in. They reconcile the families of both parties. After that, all the necessary things are done as if the girl had never run away.”

Bosnian food is served. Then games are played. They play games together. We have a different type of game when we take a bride. When he goes to the bride's house, they don't let the groom in right away. They play in front of the door. They have the groom cook eggs and present them to the bride for her to taste.” (P6)

4.3.3. Lost Oral Cultural Heritage

One of the key losses of Bosnian oral cultural heritage is Siyelo (Sijelo) chats. These chats, which are defined by the participants as community meetings, are not held as much today as they used to be. Participant views are generally represented in the following observation:

“We used to have Siyelo chats that we used to have as a group, like a village feast. They are not held much anymore. People live in different cities and city centers. You need to be together for these old chats, but this is not possible today.” (P9)

According to participants, epics and folk songs are also declining or even disappearing today. For example:

“My father used to tell an epic called Serdar Aga Muyo. Epics and folk songs were told a lot on the days when older women would gather. We don't even have this cultural heritage memorized anymore.” (P14)

Participants saw the opportunities offered by developing technologies to spend free time differently as being a significant contributor to a decrease in traditional Bosnian games and activities. One participant opined:

“Finger games were a game played when there were no phones, televisions or internet. Nowadays, digital games have taken their place.” (P16)

4.3.4. Traditional Clothing

According to participants, the most common Bosnian clothes no longer to be worn as much today are the Bosnian shalwar (dimiyе), vest, cepken and lace shamiye. Participants expressed the view that today's preference for modern clothing means that Bosnian clothing is not worn as much in daily life or on even on special occasions. One participant explained the following:

“Bosnian shalwar and lace shamiye are rarely worn at weddings and henna nights. The preferred clothing is more modern clothing that falls outside traditional clothing. Bosnians who go to work, go to school, and participate in social environments do not prefer their local clothing in their routine life anyway.” (P11)

An evaluation of participant responses highlights that Bosnians have a diverse range of oral cultural products and many options for men and women when it comes to cultural dress. However, according to the participants, these components of Bosnian culture are not used very often by Bosnians in daily life today.

4.4. Activities Related to the Protection and Sustainability of Cultural Heritage

Activities carried out by Bosnians to protect their cultural heritage and ensure its sustainability were analyzed within the framework of the following classifications: access to cultural heritage, promotion of culture, keeping the Bosnian language alive and strengthening interactions between Bosnians (See Figure 4).

4.4.1. Access to Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is the totality of material and spiritual values that a society has generated over its historical journey (Aktan and Tutar, 2007, p. 3). Bosnians think it important to make their cultural heritage accessible if they are to preserve it and ensure its sustainability. Key means to rendering such cultural heritage accessible appear to have included writing books about Bosnian culture, introducing Bosnian culture in digital media and creating digital networks in which

Bosnians can participate. Great effort has been made to introduce Bosnian culture and ensure its transmission to future generations via the writing of books. For example:

“We had someone from Bosnia write a Bosnian cookbook, in order not to forget our traditions and food culture. We’re currently working on translating it into Turkish. Also, there was a historian minister from the old Mostar canton, Zlatko Hadji Omerovic, who was and is currently involved in the migration issue. He is also preparing a book about the migration stories of living Bosnians. I think we will prepare it in a few months and translate it into Turkish to ensure that Bosnians learn their own culture and know where they come from by reading it. Because most families still don’t know their family tree. Or they think they do, but [in reality] they don’t really know that they come from that family.” (P8)

Participants claim that they are engaging more with digital networks to increase communication between Bosnians and ensure that Bosnian culture is shared more digitally and spreads rapidly.

One interesting participant response was as follows:

“We are making efforts to promote Bosnian culture on social media. When you look at YouTube, you can access more and more general content about Teferiç-pita festivals, our traditional dance Kolo, and Bosnian weddings. Our sevdalinkas are already spreading quite a lot on digital platforms. I think that taking part in digital networks is and will be of great benefit in transferring and promoting our culture to the future.” (P13)

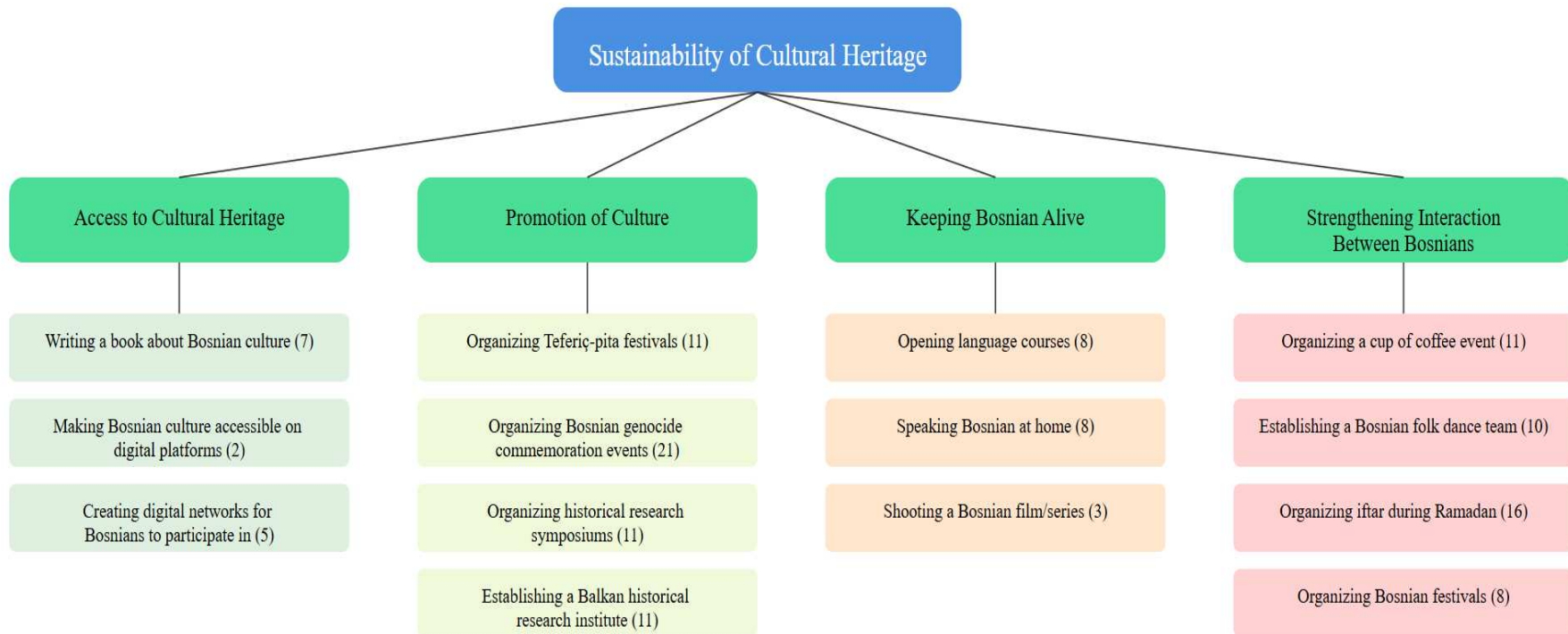


Figure 4. The sustainability of cultural heritage and its sub-classifications

4.4.2. Promotion of Culture

Participants thus reported engaging more through digital networks to increase communication between Bosnians and ensure that their culture is shared and spread more rapidly via online platforms. Participants saw activities and festivals in which both new generations of Bosniaks and non-Bosniaks can participate, as the primary means of promoting Bosniak culture. Bosnian genocide commemoration events, Teferiç-Pita festivals and historical research symposiums, which are held regularly every year, are at the forefront of such activities. There are also attempts to establish a Balkan historical research institute to ensure that Bosnian culture is recognized by wider audiences. One notable participant response on this issue was as follows:

“The Teferiç-Pita festivals that we organize with Bosniak associations are important activities for our culture to be recognized by future generations and non-Bosniaks. We regularly participate in these festivals. We also have scientific events to promote our history. Historical symposiums are an example of this. We are also attempting to establish a research institute to promote Balkan history. If we can achieve this, we will achieve our goal and ensure that our culture is recognized and not forgotten.” (P20)

4.4.3. Keeping Bosnian Alive

Participants saw language is one of the most important cultural values that must be preserved to ensure that their culture is known, recognized and not just forgotten. For participants, the Bosnian language must be transmitted to the new generation of Bosnians, and the establishment of language courses is an essential safeguard in this respect. As one participant opined:

“We started a language course in our association four or five months ago. The age range for students who attend the courses starts at 12. We are open to the participation of those who are older, but they must be at least 12 years old so that they can get to know both our language and our cultural heritage. (P8)

Accordingly, participants also saw keeping Bosnian alive as closely related to speaking Bosnian at home and among family. Participants expressed the view that it is important to speak Bosnian at home to ensure that it is known by people of Bosnian origin. They included the following:

“Language is a cultural asset that must be preserved so that the culture is alive and known. But if you don’t speak your language, you’ll forget it. The way to prevent this is to speak Bosnian fluently at home and among family. In this way, our language can be passed on to future generations. Although it is not common, there are, of course, Bosnians who try to do this.” (P6)

4.4.4. Strengthening Interaction Between Bosnians

Participants saw ensuring the sustainability of Bosnian culture as closely related to increasing interactions between Bosnians. Participant responses referenced organizing iftars to ensure mass participation during Ramadan, organizing coffee events, establishing a Bosnian folk dance team, and organizing festivals. Such events were believed to be enriched by the participation of Bosnian artists and operate to strengthen interactions between Bosnians. For example:

“There are artists who are working on Sevdalinka folk songs. They even turned a story that happened here into a song. It was launched here. Many Bosnians attended the festival they came to. This was a very important opportunity to meet and get to know each other. We sang songs and danced folk dances together. We even made a plan to establish a folk dance team. Establishing a folk dance team increases interaction between Bosnians. It also contributes to the preservation of our culture with a sustainable understanding.” (P8)

“We come together for iftar meals. We cook and eat our unique cultural dishes and tell our children the stories of these dishes. After the meal, we sing and listen to sevdalinks. The iftar meal is an opportunity to keep our culture alive. We also have coffee events.

These strengthen communication among Bosnians. When we come together, we live our own culture more and talk about what we can do to keep it alive. Festivals, festivities, and joint participation in kolo courses are important events for both our interaction and the continuation of our culture.” (P13)

5. Conclusions

Bosnians clearly have a very rich intangible cultural heritage. Whilst it is apparent that they have taken some measures to protect and preserve this heritage, such measures require significant improvement if it is truly to be sustained. Bosnian families need to use Bosnian more frequently at home and in social circles to transfer an important sense of belonging to this unique culture to their children. Language and folklore courses, strengthening relations with Bosnia, meeting the new generation of compatriots in Bosnia through national associations, and organizing cultural trips to Bosnia can contribute to the recognition and sustainability of Bosniak culture. By working more actively to increase the visibility of Bosnian culture, becoming stakeholders in sustainable projects, increasing the number of Türkiye’s sister cities with Bosnia-Herzegovina, organizing young student exchange programs, organizing food festivals with international participation, and cooperating with universities and funding organizations, Türkiye-based Bosnian associations can help sustain and preserve Bosnian culture.

Researching the cultural heritage of ethnic groups living as minorities in different countries contributes both to the recognition of these cultures and to the recognition of the colorful aspects of a universal cultural understanding composed of a myriad of different cultures.

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Competing Interest Statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no competing interests.

Ethical Approval Statement

This study uses data obtained from human participants. Ethics Committee of Sakarya University Rectorate approved that the study group headed by Ph.D. Lejla Oener could make interviews with the heads of the Bosnians associations in Türkiye and collect data from them in order to analyse the intergenerational intangible cultural heritage transmission rate of Bosnians living in Türkiye (Date : September 19, 2024 / Decision number : E61923333-050.99-399829). This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

The document can be reached at <https://turkiye.gov.tr/ebd?eK=5783&eD=BSUL2MJK8K&eS=399829>.

Informed Consent Statement

In the data collecting process of the study, informed consent forms were signed by all the participants. All the participants were informed about the aims and targets of the study and all of them signed informed consent forms agreeing that the information they gave would be

analyzed and research results to be published. All participants have been fully informed that their anonymity is assured, why the research is being conducted, how their data will be utilized, and if there are any risks to them of participating.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical reasons as it would not be appropriate to make the dataset public which was created with the information obtained from the participants but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Author Contributions

All the authors of the study contributed equally to this work.