

# Memory, orality, and space: a qualitative case study on the tradition of *dengbêj* and traditional houses from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage

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# Memory, orality, and space: a qualitative case study on the tradition of *dengbêj* and traditional houses from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between the *dengbêj* tradition, one of the most prominent aspects of Kurdish oral culture, and its spatial context within UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The research is primarily guided by the following question: 'How does the tradition of *dengbêj*, as a form of oral culture, generate memory, and how does this memory interact with historical spaces?' In this context, *dengbêj* is regarded not merely as a melodic form of narration but as a folkloric archive in which migrations, struggles, joys and sorrows are transformed into oral memory. The *Dengbêj* House, where the oral tradition of *dengbêj* performance is practised, is in the Suriçi district of Diyarbakır, in southeastern Türkiye, within the historic walled area listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. The research was conducted through a qualitative method based on a phenomenological approach. In this context, semi-structured interviews were

conducted with 12 participants from different age groups and professions who had visited the *Dengbêj* House, and the obtained data were analysed using Colaizzi's method, which is widely employed in phenomenological analysis. Consequently, this study reveals that intangible cultural heritage, through the oral tradition of *dengbêj* performance, is not merely an action-based tradition but also acquires meaning through the spatial context in which it is performed, thereby forming collective memory. In this respect, by examining the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and architectural space, which has been addressed only to a limited extent in literature, this study contributes to addressing the interdisciplinary gap.

## Keywords

*Dengbêj*, identity, traditional architecture, Diyarbakir house, spatial memory

## Introduction

The term *dengbêj* in Kurdish derives from the words *den* (voice) and *bêj* (to tell), meaning 'the one who tells; the one who gives voice'. SelimTemo (2007) also defines it as *deyrbaz*, referring to a person who produces works in the style of folk poetry and narrates songs. The tradition of *dengbêj* represents one of the most distinctive forms of oral narration in Kurdish folk culture. Through oral

tradition, themes such as history, epics, love, mourning, migration and war are transmitted across generations. Without relying on written texts, *dengbêj* narrators record the past and values of their community through memory-based storytelling, thereby keeping collective memory alive (Uzun 2017). Yaşar Kemal, in his literary works, underscores the social and cultural value of oral narrative traditions by placing the *dengbêj* practice at the

centre of his narratives. In his novel *Kale kapısı* (The castle gate), Kemal emphasises that *dengbêj* were considered sacred among the people and that their primary role was to produce narratives through epics, songs and tales (Kemal 1999). In *Biradahikâyesi* (The story of an island), he portrays a *dengbêj* character who arrives on the island performing epics accompanied by a shepherd's flute (*kaval*), thereby illustrating that *dengbêj* is not merely a profession but a way of life. Through this character, Kemal conveys that even during times of war, famine and poverty, communities drew strength and morale from *dengbêj* (Kemal 2002). As a narrative practice considered within the framework of intangible cultural heritage (hereafter 'ICH'), *dengbêj* encompasses not only historical themes but also contemporary issues; it gives voice to themes of love, affection and enmity in melodic form, without the use of any instrument, making the *dengbêj* both a folk artist and a bard (Aras 2004, 5–9; KuloğluYüksel 2025). According to UNESCO, ICH includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, as well as knowledge and skills. In this sense, the *dengbêj* tradition is not only an individual act of narration but also a collective tool for constructing and preserving community identity. *Dengbêj* used to gather communities during night assemblies known as *şevberk*, where they narrated stories that both provided entertainment and fostered socialisation, while also offering perspectives on the past and the world. The *dengbêj* tradition, forming the backbone of Kurdish oral culture, remained until recent times as the memory, intellectual voice and emotional expression of its society. The stories narrated by *dengbêj* encompassed diverse themes, according to which they were categorised into different types (Kardaş 2013).

Although *dengbêj* narratives originate in individual experiences, once shared within the community, they become part of collective memory. The fundamental feature of long-term memory is its continuity over time – that is, its capacity to preserve information. This continuity is based on the ability to recall and reconstruct an original or similar representation of a past event through the process of remembering (Dudai 2002). In recent architectural literature, the concept of collective memory has gained increasing significance, particularly in relation to abandoned structures, temporary places of accommodation, and spaces that have been transformed into permanent settlements following migration. Such places are considered not only as physical structures but also as sites where social memory is created,

transmitted and spatially represented (Vurucular Kesimci and Ciravoğlu 2024). Pierre Nora argues that 'collective memory' is consciously sustained through certain places and structures (Nora 2006, 17–35). As traditional forms of memory began to fade, societies turned to specific symbolic spaces to maintain their connection with the past. These spaces sometimes take the form of monuments, museums or traditional houses, while at other times they are embodied in rituals and symbols such as ceremonies and flags. According to Nora, such sites are not merely physical but also symbolic spaces of memory that carry cultural significance (Nora 2006, 17–35). They are representative domains where memory is reproduced, bringing the past into the present (Nora 2006, 17–35, 128). Memory has a binding character and encompasses narratives that connect individuals to a community, with places serving as carriers of these narratives (Assmann 2011, 44). The past is preserved not only through memory but also through the medium of places (Lowenthal 1985, 102–104). Places are not simply physical structures that host various events; they become carriers of memory, holding traces of those events and embodying the recollections associated with them. Squares, houses, schools or streets encountered in daily life acquire a place in both individual and collective memory, not merely through their physical form but through the layered meanings integrated with past experiences. Over time, places thus become imbued with emotional, historical and cultural contexts. In this respect, spatial memory can be defined as the sum of memories, sensations, experiences, images and social meanings associated with a specific place. This concept encompasses not only individual remembrance but also the shared past and identity of communities. Kevin Lynch's (1960) notion of the 'urban image' demonstrates how urban spaces are shaped in the minds of individuals, while Maurice Halbwachs's (1950) theory of 'collective memory' emphasises that memory is formed within social frameworks. Therefore, the meaning of a place must be evaluated not solely through its physical attributes but also through the layers of memory it contains. In architecture, urban planning and cultural heritage conservation, approaching spaces with this awareness is of great importance for preserving their historical continuity and social connections.

In the 21st century, as urban culture continues to be transmitted across generations, space has increasingly come to be perceived merely as a physical void. The rapid transformation of rural populations into urban populations

has reinforced this perception. Within this context, in an era when the spiritual dimension of place has been disregarded and the concept of *genius loci* is on the verge of being forgotten, folklorists have introduced the notion of 'urban folklore' into the terminology. Urban folklore represents an approach that examines how the dynamics of urban life interact with the components of traditional folklore. By revealing how folkloric practices transmitted orally or through tradition are shaped and reproduced in urban settings, it highlights the effects of urban transformation processes on cultural continuity (Oğuz 2001). Urban folklore encompasses domains such as rituals, beliefs, traditions, neighborhood life, urban culture, and local myths and legends (Radzi and Bahri 2016). In this regard, the impact of space extends beyond its physical form; it plays a crucial role in transmitting intangible cultural heritages such as traditions, customs, myths, narratives, songs and lament to future generations. Urban spaces make significant contributions to the production and dissemination of folkloric knowledge. Oral traditions are transmitted across generations through collective memory. However, modernity and the technological age, coupled with high literacy rates, have led to the practical decline of oral traditions (Tosh 2015). This situation threatens the presence of oral narrative forms such as *dengbêj* within urban spaces, making the safeguarding of ICH increasingly critical.

Elements of ICH constitute indispensable components of urban folk culture. In this context, the present study addresses the tradition of *dengbêj* – one of the most potent elements of Kurdish oral narrative – within the framework of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, aiming to reveal the impact of this tradition on spatial memory. *Dengbêj* is not only a form of oral narration but also a cultural practice in which migrations, joys, sorrows and acts of heroism are inscribed into memory through *stran*. Each *stran* resonates not only in the ear but also in the stones, walls and courtyards of the spaces where it is performed.

Accordingly, the focus of this research is the traditional courtyard houses of Diyarbakir's Suriçi district, characterised by basalt stonework – and in particular, the Dengbêj House. The thick basalt stone walls, cool courtyards and *eyvan*-based layouts of Suriçi houses are living sites of memory that embody shelter, voice and culture. The *stran* performed by *dengbêj* has echoed through these stone structures, where the resonance of

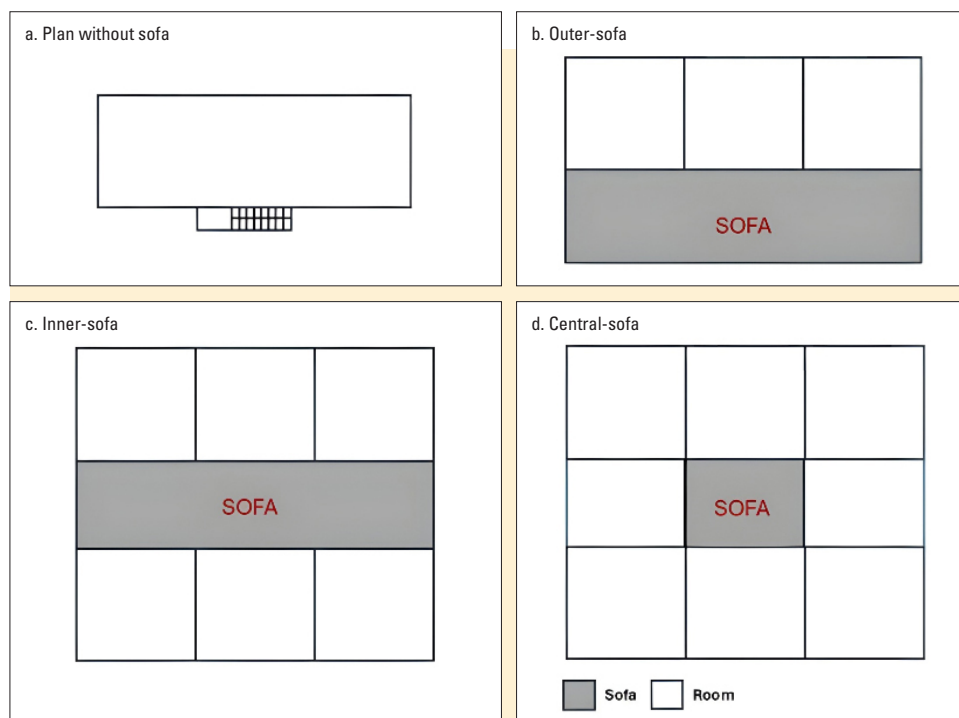
sound has permeated the pores of the stone, transforming the space into a living archive. Thus, space becomes not merely a physical structure but a carrier of memory that preserves the traces of words, voices and culture.

This study examines the role of spatial memory in the *dengbêj* tradition. The scope of the research is limited to the Dengbêj House, located within the traditional urban fabric of the Suriçi district of Diyarbakir, and the narrative sessions conducted in this space. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research employs semi-structured interviews and participant observation as data collection methods. The data were analysed using the Colaizzi method, and the identities of all participants were anonymised after informed consent was obtained. In accordance with Colaizzi's seven-stage analysis process, the researchers read the interview transcripts, identified significant statements, and formed thematic clusters by grouping similar meanings. In this process, meaningful units were extracted from participants' statements, common themes were identified, and the relationship between space and memory was interpreted holistically. The narrative sessions conducted in the Dengbêj House were observed with respect to spatial use, forms of interaction, and the relationship between narrative and space. The interviews, conducted with participants' consent, were recorded, transcribed and analysed using MAXQDA's thematic analysis method.

As a result, the study reveals that the *dengbêj* tradition is not merely an oral narrative practice; rather, it is a cultural practice that contributes to the formation and transmission of collective memory within a spatial context. Traditional spaces such as the Dengbêj House stand out as significant places where oral culture is sustained and social memory is reproduced. This situation demonstrates that the preservation of ICH is possible not only through the documentation of narratives but also through the conservation of the architectural and spatial contexts in which these narratives exist.

## Traditional Turkish houses and the Dengbêj House

Shelter, as emphasised in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is one of the most fundamental human requirements. Throughout human history, individuals have constructed various forms of dwellings to sustain life and protect themselves from adverse external conditions. Today, in



**Figure 1**  
Spatial plan types of traditional Turkish houses.  
Source: Photo from the authors' archive, 2025.

housing design, factors such as climate, topography, customs and traditions, and cultural values are evaluated together in the planning process. In this context, the architecture of the traditional Turkish house, which traces its origins to Central Asia and has been used extensively throughout Anatolia, has been preserved from the past to the present (Küçükerman and Edirne 2022).

Traditional Turkish houses, shaped by influences beginning in Central Asia and transmitted through the traditions and construction practices of the Seljuk and Ottoman empires, continue to inform building typologies today. According to Sedad Hakki Eldem, the architectural characteristics of traditional Turkish houses emerged not only from accumulated cultural heritage over time but also by considering the climatic, geographical, economic and everyday life practices of Anatolia (Eldem 1954, 11).

When examining the plan typologies of the traditional Turkish house, four different types can be identified based on the variation of the sofa space (sofa: a semi-open hall or gallery space, typically serving as a circulation and living area) located on the upper floor. In the *sofasız* (without sofa) plan type (Figure 1a), the building may be designed

as either a single storey or two storeys. This type, generally preferred in hot-dry climatic regions, consists of rooms aligned side by side, with circulation provided through external units such as courtyards or gardens. In two-storey examples of the *sofasız* type, a semi-open balcony known as a *gezemek* is typically found on the upper floor (Bektaş 1996, 99).

In the *dis sofaslı* (outer sofa) plan type, the rooms aligned side by side are connected to each other through external sofas (Figure 1b). In the *icsofaslı* (inner sofa) type, rooms are located on both sides of the sofa. Finally, in the *ortasofalı* (central sofa) plan type, the sofa is positioned at the centre, with rooms arranged around it on all four sides (Figure 1d).

Within this framework, the planning schemes and spatial organisations of residential architecture across Anatolia display similar characteristics. Climate, ground conditions, geological structure, vegetation, as well as the social structure and production characteristics of different regions, have been the principal factors shaping variations in housing typologies (Yariş 2020). Accordingly, Turkish residential architecture in Anatolia has been classified into regional types, with the majority of traditional houses



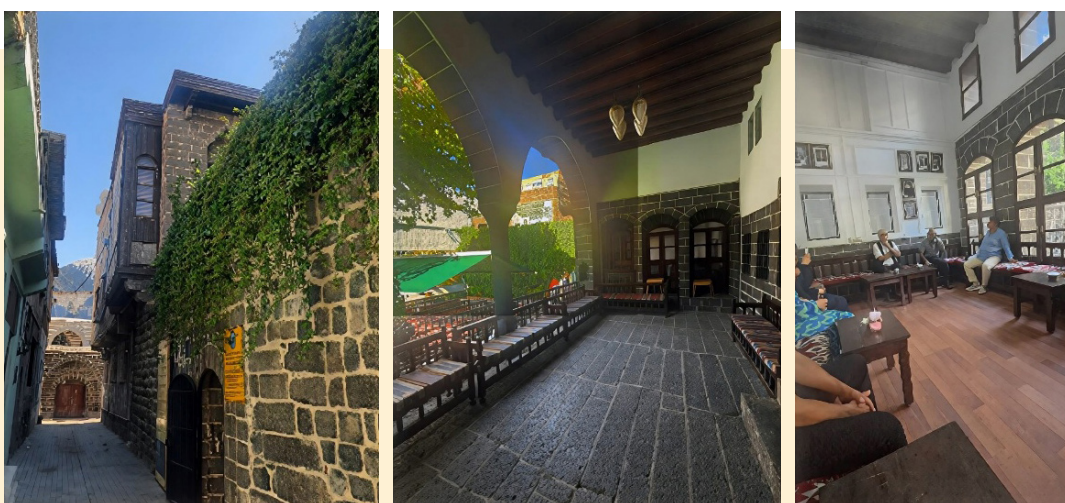
**Figure 2**  
Urban fabric of traditional Diyarbakir houses.  
Source: Photo from the authors' archive, 2025.

in southeastern Anatolia being constructed using stone masonry (Kuban 1995; 2007).

Among the examples of traditional Turkish houses, those built in Diyarbakir hold a particularly significant place in terms of architectural value. Located within the Suriçi urban fabric – an area that has hosted numerous civilisations throughout history and where traditional settlement patterns have been preserved up to the present – the traditional Diyarbakir house reflects both the harsh continental climate of the region and its multicultural structure, with its thick basalt stone walls and varied courtyard typologies (Beysanoğlu 1999; Bekleyen 2019; Gülürmak Güler and Kakdaş Ateş 2026). Especially in

response to the challenges of the hot-dry climate, the houses were designed with narrow streets and specific plan typologies that incorporated passive cooling strategies (Figure 2).

Traditional Diyarbakir houses exhibit five distinct plan types: L-shaped, U-shaped, I-shaped, central courtyard and inner courtyard (Tuncer 1999; Haspolat 2014). In these dwellings, climate has been the primary determinant in the organisation of spaces. Particularly in houses where the courtyard is positioned at the centre, spatial orientations were arranged according to seasonal use, with separate areas designated as summer and winter quarters. In courtyard-type houses, the southern side of the house



**Figure 3**  
An example of the entrance, *iwan* (*eyvan*) and room in a *dengbêj* house.  
Source: Photo from the authors' archive, 2025.

was designed for winter use, while the northern-facing parts were reserved for summer living (Oruç 2017). Not only orientation and building form, but also additional architectural elements such as the *eyvan* (a vaulted, open-fronted hall, or *ivan*), *gezemek* (a semi-open balcony or gallery) and *serdap* (a cool underground storage or living space) contributed to climatic adaptation. These features enhanced passive cooling strategies, ensuring both comfort and functional diversity within traditional domestic architecture.

The Dengbêj House, one of the traditional houses of Diyarbakir, is in Ziya Gökalp neighbourhood, Kılıçlı Street, parcel 6, block 415, in the city centre. The overall appearance of the building – featuring a courtyard (*avlu*), an *eyvan*, and windows with segmented arches – reflects the architectural characteristics of traditional Diyarbakir houses, designed in harmony with the local climate. The entrance to the house is through a low-arched doorway on the eastern façade, which opens into a rectangular courtyard. At the centre of the courtyard stands an ornamental fountain. A single-columned, two-arched *eyvan*, suitable for summer use, opens onto two rooms. The windows of the structure are round-arched and segmented. Originally roofed with an earthen covering, the house was later modified with a flat roof. Below the roofline, stone consoles support wooden eaves. On the eastern façade, stone consoles can also be seen that once carried *cumba* (traditional projecting bay windows) typical of Diyarbakir houses. The building is entirely constructed of basalt stone. Wooden beams support the interior ceilings of the rooms. Inside the rooms, wall niches (*niş*), one of the defining features of traditional Diyarbakir houses, are present as storage and decorative elements (Figure 3).

## Methodology

This research was structured within the framework of a phenomenological approach, grounded in qualitative research methods. In line with the aim of the study, the research sought to reveal participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the relationship between *dengbêj*, space and memory. The study group consisted of volunteer participants aged between 18 and 65, of different genders, professions and socio-cultural backgrounds, who had visited the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakir. Participants were selected through criterion sampling, in accordance with the objectives of the research. Based on the interviews

**Table 1**  
Information about the interview participants.

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation
P1	62	Male	Dengbêj
P2	45	Female	Teacher
P3	30	Male	University Student
P4	70	Male	Dengbêj
PS	52	Female	Housewife
P6	27	Male	Musician
P7	36	Female	Doctor
P8	19	Female	High School Student
P9	48	Male	Historian
P10	25	Male	Worker
P11	54	Female	Academic
P12	34	Male	Tradesman

conducted, a total of 12 participants were included, from whom reliable and meaningful data could be obtained. During the interview process, the data were analysed simultaneously. As the analysis progressed, similar themes emerged, and no new meaningful ones emerged. In this case, it was understood that data saturation had been reached through continuously recurring responses, and the interviews were therefore concluded.

The key selection criteria required that participants possess experience and familiarity with both the *dengbêj* tradition and the cultural context of Diyarbakir (Table 1).

The necessary ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Social and Human Sciences at Harran University. With the committee's decision dated 9 July 2025 (No. 2025/244), the study entitled 'The impact of intangible cultural heritage on spatial memory: the case of *dengbêj* tradition and the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakir' was unanimously approved and officially authorised. Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, scope and possible outcomes of the study, after which both written and verbal informed consents were obtained. Personal information of the participants was kept confidential, was used solely for research purposes and was never shared with third parties.

## Data collection process

The research data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants. Prior to each interview, both written and verbal consents were obtained. The interviews were conducted in a private setting with only the researcher and participant present. Care was taken to ensure that the physical conditions of the interview environment (e.g. lighting, temperature, ventilation) were comfortable, allowing participants to feel at ease. Each interview lasted approximately 35–45 minutes and was recorded with two audio devices, with the participants' permission.

The interview form was developed based on a review of the relevant literature and structured in line with the purpose of the research. The semi-structured interview form consisted of 11 main questions aimed at uncovering participants' experiences, perceptions and reflections regarding the city of Diyarbakır, the *dengbêj* tradition, cultural memory, and identity. When necessary (e.g. if a participant remained silent or digressed), supportive probing questions were asked.

The main questions included:

- What kinds of memories related to the city of Diyarbakır are reflected in your *dengbêj* narratives? How do these narratives influence collective memory?
- What does Diyarbakır represent for you? What are your most significant memories in this city?
- In your opinion, what is the role of the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır's cultural identity?
- Which structures or spaces in the city serve as 'sites of memory' (*lieux de mémoire*) for you, and why?
- How does the *dengbêj* tradition contribute to preserving the identity of this city?
- Do you think *dengbêj* performances play a role in transmitting urban memory?
- What do the spaces in which you perform (e.g. the Dengbêj House, coffeehouses, village squares) mean to you?
- How do the spaces where you perform influence your narratives?
- In your view, how does a narrative become embedded in a space? How does space shape narrative?
- When performing in the Dengbêj House, where do you feel yourself transported to in the past?
- Why do you think it is important to preserve spaces

like the Dengbêj House for transmitting *dengbêj* to future generations?

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and edited for coherence while preserving content integrity. For the analysis, Colaizzi's method – commonly employed in phenomenological research – was applied. In this process, meaningful units were extracted from participants' statements, grouped according to similarities and differences, and organised into common themes. The findings were then presented within a holistic interpretation framework that highlighted the relationship between space and memory.

The transcripts were processed and analysed using MAXQDA software. The findings of the thematic analysis were grouped into three main themes: spatial memory; urban identity; and narrative–space relationship. Within these overarching categories, subthemes and corresponding codes were identified with the assistance of the software. This approach enabled the study to move beyond individual experiences and to reveal, in a comprehensive manner, the role of the *dengbêj* tradition in sustaining Diyarbakır's cultural memory (Table 2).

According to the information presented in Table 2, three overarching themes with subthemes and codes were identified:

### A. Spatial memory

This theme highlights individuals' personal connections with Diyarbakır and their experiences of place. The subtheme A1 (Personal memories and place) demonstrates the role of the city's streets, houses and public spaces in shaping both individual and collective memory. Within this framework, A1.1 (Diyarbakır memories) and A1.2 (Past place) emphasise Diyarbakır as a site of memory that sustains past experiences. A1.3 (Participant information: age, gender, occupation) provides contextual support, showing how diversity enriches participants' interpretations and reflections.

### B. Urban identity

This theme focuses on the perception of Diyarbakır as a symbolic reference point of identity – the subtheme B1 (Cultural continuity and tradition) reveals that the *dengbêj* tradition and the Dengbêj House are essential elements

in maintaining urban identity. Here, B1.1 (Role of Dengbêj House), B1.2 (Memory transmission) and B1.3 (Future transmission) explain how cultural continuity is transmitted across the past, present and future. The subtheme B2 (Belonging and roots) emphasises feelings of belonging and rootedness. In this regard, B2.1 (Representation of the city) and B2.2 (Role in identity) highlight the city's function in the construction of individual identity.

### C. Narrative–place relationship

This theme underlines the close interrelation between oral culture and space – the subtheme C1 (Performance spaces) demonstrates the importance of the settings in which narratives are produced and re-circulated. Within this framework, C1.1 (Memory spaces), C1.2 (Place expression), C1.3 (Place effect) and C1.4 (Place narrative) explain how narratives are shaped within spatial contexts, how they influence audiences, and how place itself functions as a carrier of memory.

## Analysis of findings

The survey data obtained in the study comprehensively reveal the multilayered relationships participants established with Diyarbakir in terms of memory, identity and place. Participants' narratives reflect both the traces of personal lived experiences at the individual level and the dimensions of collective memory that resonate within the shared social consciousness. In this context, the thematic

analysis identified three overarching themes: spatial memory, urban identity, and narrative–place relationship. The *spatial memory* theme emphasises the connections between personal memories and the city's tangible and intangible spatial elements. The *urban identity* theme explains the identity-based ties formed with Diyarbakir through cultural continuity, tradition and belonging. The *narrative–place relationship* theme highlights how individual and collective narratives are integrated with the physical environment, particularly through performance spaces. Together, these three themes provide a strong analytical framework for understanding the multidimensional experiences of Diyarbakir as reflected in participants' memories. From personal recollections to collective memory, from cultural continuity to the symbolic role of place, and from performance practices to identity construction, participants' accounts reveal both commonalities and differences. Thus, the findings demonstrate that Diyarbakir is not only a physical place but also a living site of memory where collective identity and cultural transmission are continuously sustained.

### Theme 1: Spatial memory

Participants positioned Diyarbakir at the centre of both individual and collective memory. Responses revealed that the city's streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces serve as concrete reference points that keep memories alive. For some, Diyarbakir represents labour and struggle; for others, trade and solidarity; and for yet others, inspiration or family ties (A1.2).

**Table 2**

Themes and subthemes obtained within the scope of the study.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
A. Spatial Memory	A1. Personal Memories and Place	A1.1 Diyarbakir Memories A1.2 Past Place A1.3 Participant Information (Age, Gender, Occupation) - contextual support
B. Urban Identity	B1. Cultural Continuity and Tradition	B1.1 Role of Dengbej House B1.2 Memory Transmission B1.3 Future Transmission
	B2. Belonging and Roots	B2.1 Representation of the City B2.2 Role in Identity
C. Narrative-Place Relationship	C1. Performance Spaces	C1.1 Memory Spaces C1.2 Place Expression C1.3 Place Effect C1.4 Place Narrative

Participant statement – P1, *Dengbêj*, 62 years old:

*For me, Diyarbakir is not only the place where I grew up, but also where my voice has taken root. The sounds I heard in coffeehouses and the courtyards of stone houses as a child still echo in my ears today. Every time I sing a stran, fragments of my own life and the memories of my listeners come alive. Without this city, I would not exist; Diyarbakir is the essence of my life and the source of my voice.*

The findings on the theme of spatial memory reveal that space is not merely a backdrop for cultural practices; rather, it is an active element in which memory is produced.

### **Subtheme 1: Personal memories and place**

When recounting their life stories, participants frequently referred to specific places (A1.3). Streets, houses and markets (A1.2) emerged as inseparable parts of individual experiences, while simultaneously acquiring a collective dimension by evoking others' memories. In this respect, memory spaces are not merely current sites of use but carriers of connections with the past. Spaces such as the *Dengbêj* House, coffeehouses and village squares enable the reproduction of past experiences in the present, thus turning urban space into a bridge between past and present (A1.1).

Participant statement – P3, University Student, 30 years old:

*For me, this city has always symbolised resistance and the enthusiasm of youth. The streets we wandered, the student houses we lived in, the days in the library remain vivid in my mind. Whatever I've lived has made me who I am today. When I share my memories, others recall their own. Diyarbakir is not only the past; it gives strength to hold on to the future.*

## **Theme 2: Urban identity**

Participants defined Diyarbakir not merely as a city but as a fundamental source through which identity is shaped. Their responses showed that the city's historical and cultural heritage instills a strong sense of belonging. For individuals from diverse social backgrounds, Diyarbakir symbolises not only struggle and labour but also inspiration, pride and cultural continuity.

Participant statement – P5, Housewife, 52 years old:

*In our childhood, doors were never locked. In one house, the oven was lit, and another shared the bread that was baked. When there was a wedding, everyone attended; when there was a funeral, everyone was present as well. This is the identity of Diyarbakir: solidarity, hospitality, and valuing the spoken word. Even if the streets have changed, when I look at the stone houses, I feel the warmth of those days come alive again.*

When the main and subfindings of this theme are examined, it is observed that ICH is not merely an individual practice but also represents the social values of urban life, a sense of belonging and a form of solidarity.

### **Subtheme 1: Cultural continuity and tradition**

Participants viewed the *dengbêj* tradition – and especially the *Dengbêj* House – as among the most important elements sustaining the city's cultural identity (B1.1). These spaces make the transmission of oral culture possible and establish a bridge between past and present (B1.2, B1.3).

Participant statement – P9, Historian, 48 years old:

*The dengbêj tradition is the most vital vein that keeps this city's memory alive. The stran carries both personal sorrows and the history of the people. For centuries, they have been sung in inns, courtyards and squares – revived each time. Cultural continuity does not mean preserving the past exactly as it was but rather reproducing it in the present. *Dengbêj* is the most vivid example of this.*

### **Subtheme 2: Belonging and roots**

Participants described Diyarbakir as the carrier of their personal roots and sense of belonging. Expressions such as 'the essence of my life' or 'the city that made me who I am' highlight the strong bond between personal identity and urban space (B2.1, B2.2).

Participant statement – P12, Shopkeeper, 34 years old:

*My roots are in this bazaar. My father and grandfather stood in the same shop. Every stone reminds me of my family. Here, customers do not just come to buy things; they come to ask how you are, to converse. In*

*Diyarbakir, you never feel like a stranger; that is what belonging means. The past and present fit together in the same shop, on the same street.*

*friends, and we all felt silent. The air of that house, its stones and walls, made the stran feel completely different.*

### **Theme 3: Narrative–place relationship**

Findings revealed that narratives cannot be understood independently of place. Participants emphasised that performance venues such as coffeehouses, village squares and the Dengbêj House directly shape the tone, emotion and social context of *dengbêj* performances. In this sense, place is not merely the stage of narrative but an inseparable part of its meaning.

Participant statement – P7, Doctor, 36 years old:

*When you listen to a dengbêj song in a courtyard, the sound penetrates your soul. The stone walls create such an echo that the words grow and merge with the space. I remember listening to dengbêj with my grandfather by the city walls; the voice, the smell, the shadows – all blended. A stran is not complete on its own; it comes to life with the place. In Diyarbakir, the stones speak as much as the words do – one is incomplete without the other.*

This theme reveals that the performance of *dengbêj* tradition in a traditional space is not only a verbal expression but also a cultural performance shaped by sensory and spatial experiences.

#### **Subtheme 1: Performance spaces**

Participants considered performance venues (C1.2) as spaces where social memory is reproduced (C1.1). The atmosphere (C1.3) and the sense of community provided by these venues enhance the narrative's impact on the audience (C1.4). In particular, the Dengbêj House was seen as the contemporary counterpart of traditional performance spaces, ensuring the continuity of the tradition.

Participant statement – P8, High School Student, 19 years old:

*I first heard dengbêj in the Dengbêj House. There was no microphone, but the sound rose from the walls and reached everyone. In that moment, I felt like I was living in the past. It was not like the songs we listened to at school; it was more heartfelt, deeper. I went with*

## **Discussion**

Cultural heritage studies are not limited to stone structures and architectural textures; they also require the preservation of intangible cultural practices that sustain the identity, memory and values of communities. From this perspective, space is not merely a physical environment but a context in which social memory is constructed, cultural continuity is ensured and identity is reproduced. Oral cultural practices – particularly the *dengbêj* tradition – create a much stronger memory effect when integrated with space, carrying individual experiences into a collective framework.

The findings of this study show that Diyarbakir constitutes the centre of both individual and collective memory for participants. Streets, bazaars, houses and public spaces emerge as memory sites where the past is recalled and connected to the present. This confirms Pierre Nora's concept of '*lieux de mémoire*', revealing that the tangible elements of the city have become symbols carrying cultural memory.

Results related to urban identity demonstrate that Diyarbakir serves as a common point of reference for individuals from diverse social groups in terms of belonging, roots and cultural continuity. The *dengbêj* tradition stands out as both an expression and a carrier of this identity. As emphasised by the study participants, the Dengbêj House is not merely an architectural structure but a social memory space where oral culture is actively reproduced, bridging past and present. This finding resonates with Jan Vansina's approach to oral history, showing that the past is not only constructed through written documents but also through oral transmission and performance (Vansina 1961).

Findings on the narrative–place relationship further demonstrate that oral culture cannot be considered independently from its spatial context. The echo of *dengbêj* voices against stone walls, the atmosphere of courtyards where songs are performed in front of communities, and performances held in public squares all illustrate how space amplifies the impact of oral culture and ensures its permanence in memory. Participant narratives reveal that

meaning is derived not solely from the spoken word, but from the union of word and space.

These discussions clearly show that tangible and intangible cultural heritage constitute an inseparable whole. Architectural structures derive meaning not only from their physical existence but also from the oral and social practices that inhabit them. Therefore, the safeguarding of folkloric practices should not be limited to the restoration of buildings; it should also encompass the preservation of oral traditions, the support of communities' connections with these spaces, and the continuity of performance practices.

## Conclusion

The *dengbêj* tradition is one of the most distinctive and potent examples of ICH as defined by UNESCO. While *stran* (songs) originate from individual experiences, they become part of the collective memory once they are performed before audiences. In this process, architectural space functions not merely as a backdrop but as an active element that facilitates remembrance and ensures the continuity of cultural transmission.

The findings reveal that *dengbêj* performances held in traditional spaces – such as courtyards, coffeehouses, village square and, especially, the Dengbêj House – create a more substantial memory effect among listeners. The echo of voices on stone walls, the sense of community reinforced by courtyards, and the collective sharing enabled by squares all enhance the sensory dimension of oral performance, securing its permanence. In this way, architecture functions not only as the carrier of intangible heritage but also as a

'memory space' that strengthens it.

Participants' statements indicate that the *dengbêj* tradition evokes a sense of belonging, connection to the past, aesthetic appreciation and emotional intensity in listeners. However, these effects are felt most strongly in traditional spaces, where the atmosphere merges with oral culture, leaving a more profound imprint on memory. Therefore, the preservation of ICH cannot be achieved merely by recording oral performances; it also requires sustaining the architectural spaces in which these traditions are rooted.

Accordingly, cultural heritage policies must consider both tangible and intangible dimensions. Alongside preserving oral performances through digital archives, introducing younger generations to this heritage through education, and involving *dengbêj* as social actors in the process, it is equally important to sustain the functions of traditional performance venues such as coffeehouses, courtyards and squares. The meaning carried by words becomes more powerful when integrated with space, thus constructing a stronger memory.

In conclusion, the *dengbêj* tradition serves as a bridge connecting individual memory with collective remembrance, as well as the past with the present. Architecture constitutes the structural pillars of this bridge; yet, what makes it truly valuable are the oral performances that imbue the space with meaning and keep cultural identity alive. For this reason, *dengbêj* represents one of the strongest fields of interaction between intangible cultural heritage and architecture: a cultural whole in which the word comes to life in space, and space gains identity through the word. 🏠

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