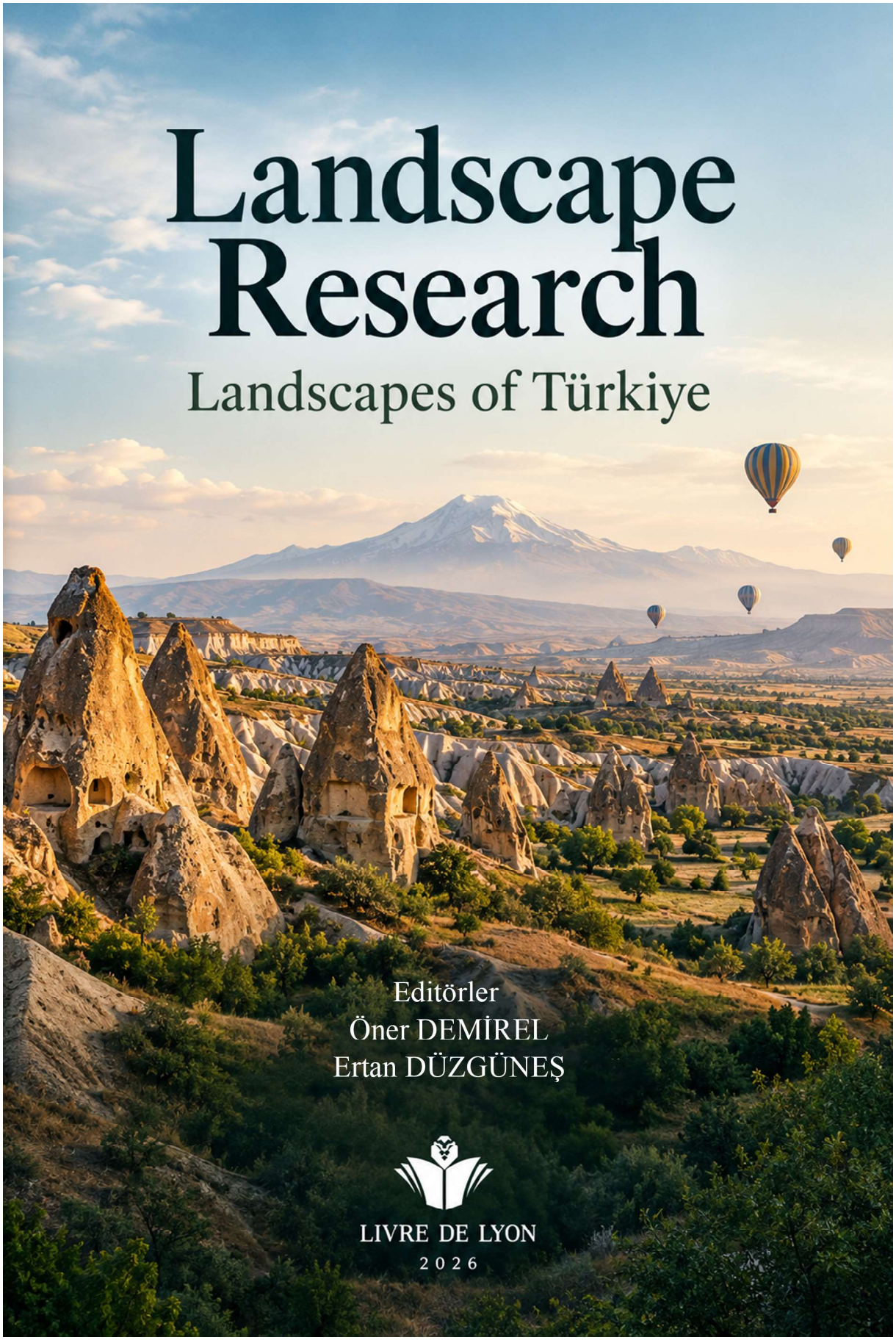
Landscape Research

Landscapes of Türkiye



Editörler
Öner DEMİREL
Ertan DÜZGÜNEŞ

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Landscape Research: Landscapes of Türkiye

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CHAPTER VI

THE ECOMUSEUM APPROACH TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: THE İSTİKLAL YOLU CULTURAL ROUTE

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1. Introduction

Following the Second World War, the understanding of cultural heritage expanded from the conservation of individual structures to a holistic framework encompassing historic urban fabric, rural settlements, and intangible values. This transformation laid the groundwork for defining cultural routes as instruments of sustainable conservation that address tangible and intangible cultural heritage together with its setting (UNESCO, 1972, 2003; ICOMOS, 1964, 2008).

In recent years, approaches to cultural heritage conservation have moved away from the traditional emphasis on safeguarding the physical environment alone and toward a holistic conservation model centred on sustainability, participation, and local development (Council of Europe, 2005; UNESCO, 2011). This shift has been underpinned by the recognition that cultural heritage is not merely a value that carries and reflects the past, but also a living resource

that strengthens social identity, supports local economies, and contributes to sustainable development (ICOMOS, 2021; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2021).

A key concept in this transformation is the cultural landscape, which refers to the assemblage of natural, tangible, and intangible values produced through the long-term interaction between humans and the natural environment. Accordingly, the conservation of cultural landscapes requires the continuity not only of the physical environment but also of ways of life, modes of production, local identity, and human–nature relationships (Olwig, 1996; Rössler, 2006; UNESCO, 2011).

Cultural routes connect natural, tangible, and intangible heritage components from different periods and places along a shared itinerary, thereby enabling the cultural landscape to be read holistically. In this respect, cultural routes function not only as conservation instruments but also as heritage-management tools that support local participation, sustainable tourism, the transmission of identity, and local development (ICOMOS, 2008; Council of Europe, 2023; Timothy & Boyd, 2015).

This holistic, place-based approach corresponds with the ecomuseum model, which envisages the conservation of cultural landscapes in partnership with local communities (Erdoğan & Belen, 2017).

The İstiklal Yolu is a historic road along which weapons, ammunition, and logistical supplies brought into Anatolia through İnebolu Port during the National Struggle were transported to Ankara via Kastamonu and Çankırı. By carrying ammunition collected in İnebolu across the provincial borders of Kastamonu and Çankırı to the front in Ankara, 344 km away, the route came to symbolise the Anatolian people's ability to overcome adversity and made a major contribution to the successful conclusion of the Turkish War of Independence (Çiçek, 2002). Its strategic importance was also emphasised by Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's statement, "My eyes are on Sakarya and Dumlupınar; my ears are in İnebolu." The route was designated a cultural route by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2012 (Kastamonu İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2013; Turan, 1999b).

Today, the İstiklal Yolu extends beyond its historical role as the principal logistical corridor of the National Struggle and constitutes a holistic cultural landscape through its natural environment, historic settlements, and tangible and intangible cultural heritage elements. Its multilayered character requires not only the preservation of historical memory, but also the continuation of

local identity, the transmission of cultural heritage to future generations, and its consideration in relation to sustainable development objectives. In this context, the İstiklal Yolu offers considerable potential in terms of the core principles of the ecomuseum approach: local participation, spatial continuity, and the holistic management of cultural heritage.

Against this background, the study aims to evaluate the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route within the framework of the ecomuseum approach and in relation to the sustainability of the cultural landscape. To this end, the literature on cultural landscapes, cultural routes, and the ecomuseum approach was first reviewed. Academic studies, institutional information and records, and other relevant documents concerning the İstiklal Yolu were then analysed to identify the cultural-landscape characteristics of the area. The data obtained were evaluated in accordance with the fundamental principles of the ecomuseum approach, and the potential of the İstiklal Yolu was discussed with respect to cultural-landscape conservation, local participation, the holistic management and conservation of cultural heritage, and sustainable local development. The study thus seeks to provide an ecomuseum-based evaluation framework for the sustainable management of cultural routes.

2. Cultural Landscape Conservation and the Holistic Approach

Contemporary approaches to cultural heritage conservation no longer focus exclusively on the protection of the built environment or monuments; instead, they address the interaction among the natural environment, cultural values, and social life from a holistic perspective. In this respect, the concept of cultural landscape has emerged as a principal approach through which natural and cultural elements can be assessed together. Understanding the principles of cultural landscape conservation is important for establishing the theoretical basis of the ecomuseum approach examined in this study.

2.1. Cultural Landscape and Sustainable Conservation

Shaped by the reciprocal interaction between people and the natural environment, the cultural landscape is a living heritage system that encompasses historical processes, modes of production, local knowledge, collective memory, and the meanings attributed to place, as well as the physical environment (Pan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Its conservation therefore requires not only the preservation of the physical environment but also the incorporation of the

social relations, experiences, and cultural continuity that have produced these characteristics into planning and management processes (Kang & Liu, 2024).

Traditional approaches concerned solely with the conservation of tangible cultural heritage tend to relegate the social environment, local knowledge, and everyday ways of life that produced these assets to a secondary position. More recent approaches, which have shifted from object-centred conservation toward people- and process-centred conservation, have incorporated local participation, governance, and sustainable development into conservation processes, thereby providing the theoretical foundation for the ecomuseum model, which safeguards an entire settlement and its living environment in situ (Babić, 2016; Li & Selim, 2024; Rivard, 2001).

2.2. The Ecomuseum Approach

Traditional museology, which developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries around the collection, conservation, and exhibition of objects, generally detached cultural heritage from its spatial and social context and positioned visitors as passive observers (Šola, 1987; Vergo, 1989). New museology emerged in response to criticisms of this understanding and transformed the museum into a participatory institution that works with society. The ecomuseum, in turn, became one of the spatially extended manifestations of this transformation, enabling local communities to play an active role in interpreting and managing heritage (Mayrand, 2014; Konsa & Jeeser, 2019).

Although the ecomuseum approach has not been directly defined as a conservation model in any international charter or convention, it substantially accords with the conservation principles developed since the second half of the twentieth century by international organisations such as UNESCO, ICOM, ICOMOS, and ICCROM. In this context, the ecomuseum is regarded less as a model based on a specific normative instrument than as a flexible conservation approach that enables the core principles and approaches adopted in international conservation documents to be implemented holistically across spatial, managerial, and social dimensions (Smith, 2006). The Québec Declaration, adopted by ICOMOS in 2008, provides a strong theoretical basis for the participatory and multivocal character of the ecomuseum model (ICOMOS, 2008). Similarly, UNESCO's Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) advocates addressing heritage areas at the landscape scale and in integration with social practices and local life, directly corresponding with the "place as museum" principle embraced by the ecomuseum approach (UNESCO, 2011).

The principle of being "with society and for society," as expressed in ICOM's museum definition and code of ethics, is regarded as a spatially extended application of the principles developed by ICOM concerning the social role of museums (Brown & Mairesse, 2018). The ecomuseum model can thus be understood not merely as a theoretical proposition, but as a structure operating through a specific set of components and relationships.

Unlike traditional museums, the ecomuseum model is not concentrated within a single building. Rather, it creates a spatially dispersed yet conceptually integrated network that connects different places, stops, and landscape elements through route-based organisation. Each component consequently ceases to function as an independent element producing an isolated meaning and instead becomes part of an integrated narrative through its relationships with the other components. The experience of cultural heritage is therefore reconfigured as a dynamic process occurring through spatial continuity rather than being fixed at a single point (Davis, 2011; Koštialová, 2022).

A shared feature of ecomuseum practices is that cultural heritage is approached not simply as a tangible object or area requiring protection, but as a process continually reproduced through social relations, experiences, and narratives (Waterton & Watson, 2013). In other words, each ecomuseum practice can be understood through the manner in which its spatial configuration is established, local communities are included, narratives are produced, and these processes operate in relation to sustainability and local development (Badia & Donato, 2023).

A review of recent scholarship indicates that, despite the diversity of ecomuseum practices across different geographical contexts, they are organised around a set of shared principles. These principles extend the ecomuseum beyond a museum model and reveal it as a holistic conservation approach that defines the relationships among place, community, and all forms of heritage.

Table 1. Fundamental Principles of the Ecomuseum Approach Identified in the Literature

Fundamental Principle	Description
Focus on place and cultural landscape elements	Conservation of heritage within a defined geographical area together with its natural and cultural setting
Holistic conservation	Integrated evaluation of natural, cultural, tangible, and intangible heritage
Local community participation and empowerment	Local communities as active agents in conservation and management processes
Local identity, memory, and cultural continuity	Safeguarding local knowledge, traditions, belonging, and collective memory
Participatory governance	Development of shared decision-making processes among public institutions, local authorities, civil society, and communities
Sustainable local development	Contribution of conservation initiatives to the local economy, tourism, education, and quality of life

Note. Prepared by the author based on Badia and Donato (2023), Borrelli et al. (2024), Chiapparino and Galli (2016), Elmalı Şen et al. (2020), Li and Selim (2024), Moreno Mendoza et al. (2021), Pappalardo (2020), Pavlis (2024), and Tsipra and Drinia (2022).

Focus on place and cultural landscape elements

One of the principal characteristics distinguishing the ecomuseum model from traditional museology is that conservation is not confined to a particular museum building or the representation of a collection; instead, the geography in which heritage emerged is addressed together with its historical elements and social contexts. In this model, "place" signifies more than a physical location: it describes a dynamic living environment jointly shaped by the natural environment, cultural landscape, historical layers, modes of production, collective memory, and human–nature interaction. The ecomuseum therefore prioritises the conservation and interpretation of cultural heritage within its setting, rather than removing it from its environment and context for display (Chiapparino & Galli, 2016; Pavlis, 2024; Tsipra & Drinia, 2022).

This focus on place directly corresponds with the defining characteristics of cultural landscapes. In their study of geocultural landscapes, Tsipra and

Drinia (2022) emphasise that natural and cultural heritage cannot be evaluated independently and that sustainable conservation is possible only when the landscape is safeguarded as an integrated whole. Similarly, Pavlis (2024) defines the ecomuseum as a place-based governance model that jointly considers the natural, cultural, and social attributes of a particular region and argues that heritage acquires meaning only through its relationship with place (Pavlis, 2024; Tsipra & Drinia, 2022).

Contemporary ecomuseum approaches shift the focus of conservation from individual elements of built heritage to the cultural landscape as a whole. The natural environment, historic structures, traditional production areas, transport networks, ways of life, and collective memory are consequently treated as mutually complementary components of the same cultural system. According to Li and Selim (2024), this shift is among the clearest indications of the transition from object-centred conservation to place- and community-centred conservation. The ecomuseum thus offers a cultural-landscape-oriented model that seeks not merely to preserve heritage but to enable it to continue living and evolving within its distinctive setting (Li & Selim, 2024).

Conserving a cultural landscape within its own context and through its constituent elements, however, cannot be reduced to the mere coexistence of natural and cultural features within the same area. It requires the relationships among these elements to be assessed together, thereby making holistic conservation—the second fundamental principle of the ecomuseum—essential.

Holistic conservation

Within the ecomuseum approach, heritage elements are treated not as separate cultural or natural assets but as an integrated system of reciprocal relationships. Conservation is therefore not reduced to the physical preservation of historic monuments or museum collections; the natural environment, cultural landscape, modes of production and ways of life, traditional knowledge, and associated practices are evaluated together. The ecomuseum approach thus establishes an integrated conservation model in which cultural heritage protection is not separated from ecological processes or social life (Badia & Donato, 2023; Tsipra & Drinia, 2022).

Research on Mediterranean ecomuseums has demonstrated that biodiversity, traditional agriculture, local gastronomy, cultural practices, and community life form a biocultural system whose components sustain one another, and that conserving these relationships is a fundamental condition of

sustainable heritage management (Borrelli et al., 2024). Similarly, a study of rural ecomuseums has shown that sustainable rural development can be supported by safeguarding not only historic environments but also local modes of production, traditional knowledge systems, and rural ways of life (Belliggiano et al., 2021). The ecomuseum approach therefore provides a comprehensive conservation model that integrates the natural, cultural, economic, and social components constituting the cultural landscape. The sustainable implementation of holistic conservation, however, depends not only on considering heritage components together but also on the local community's ownership of the process. Another fundamental principle of the ecomuseum approach is therefore a community-centred model of management based on the active participation of local people in conservation and management processes.

Local community participation and empowerment

Whereas decision-making under traditional conservation approaches is generally led by experts and institutions, the ecomuseum approach recognises local communities as primary actors in the identification, conservation, interpretation, and management of heritage. Participation is not confined to the expression of opinions; local communities are expected to be included in decision-making, assume responsibility, and help develop a shared approach to the future management of heritage (Li & Selim, 2024; Spennemann, 2021). Ecomuseums also frame heritage conservation as a community-based process in which local people serve not only as bearers of heritage but also as its managers (Pappalardo, 2020). Shared management among public institutions, local authorities, civil society organisations, and local communities further strengthens the sustainability of conservation initiatives (Moreno Mendoza et al., 2021). Participation within the ecomuseum approach is consequently regarded as a core principle that extends beyond supporting conservation activities: it enables local people to assume ownership of their heritage, have a voice in decision-making, and take active responsibility for transmitting cultural values to future generations. This emphasis also makes the safeguarding of local identity, memory, and cultural continuity a central principle of the ecomuseum approach.

Local identity, memory, and cultural continuity

Local identity and memory—including local knowledge, oral history, traditional modes of production, everyday practices, and cultural narratives—

are recognised as heritage components requiring protection alongside historic structures. Ecomuseums are regarded as participatory conservation models that enable local people to engage with their past, strengthen their sense of attachment to place, and transmit cultural values to future generations (Elmalı Şen et al., 2020; Pavlis, 2024). They create spaces for social learning in which communities can reinterpret their heritage and reinforce shared memory (Pappalardo, 2020). Educational and participatory learning processes in community-based museology also support the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage (Molina-Torres, 2021). In this respect, the ecomuseum approach offers a holistic understanding of heritage that seeks to protect not only the physical components of the cultural landscape but also the local identity, social memory, and cultural continuity that give the landscape meaning.

Participatory governance

Within the ecomuseum approach, cultural heritage conservation is understood not as a process conducted solely by experts or public institutions, but as a participatory governance model in which different stakeholders assume shared responsibility. Local communities, public institutions, local authorities, civil society organisations, universities, and other relevant actors jointly participate in decisions concerning the conservation, management, and future of heritage. Rather than assigning the process to a single institution, this model adopts a shared approach to management in which diverse forms of knowledge and experience are brought together (Badia & Donato, 2023; Moreno Mendoza et al., 2021). The success of ecomuseums depends not only on safeguarding heritage values but also on supporting them through participatory management mechanisms (Moreno Mendoza et al., 2021). Cooperation among local authorities, civil society, and local communities plays a decisive role in enabling ecomuseums to meet regional-development and cultural-sustainability objectives (Pavlis, 2024). Participatory governance is therefore considered a fundamental principle that ensures continuity in conservation and strengthens the shared responsibility of local communities for heritage.

Sustainable local development

The ecomuseum approach seeks to combine the conservation of natural and cultural heritage with support for local production, the continuation of traditional knowledge and skills, the development of small-scale tourism,

and the strengthening of local economies. Heritage conservation is therefore understood not simply as an instrument of local development, but as an integrated process conducted in reciprocal interaction with it. Conservation consequently evolves from the preservation of past values into a development approach that improves local quality of life and supports the social, cultural, and economic sustainability of the region (Badia & Donato, 2023; Belliggiano et al., 2021). Recent studies indicate that ecomuseums contribute to sustainable local development not only economically but also socially and environmentally. Research on rural ecomuseums has shown that local production, biocultural heritage, and tourism practices can support rural development (Belliggiano et al., 2021). By connecting cultural heritage, tourism, and local entrepreneurship, ecomuseums may also stimulate local economies while contributing to heritage conservation (Simeoni & De Crescenzo, 2018).

These considerations demonstrate that the ecomuseum approach is not merely an alternative model of museology, but a holistic approach to heritage management that brings together a focus on place and cultural landscape, holistic conservation, local participation, participatory governance, local identity, and sustainable local development. These principles provide a theoretical framework for evaluating cultural landscapes and have accordingly been adopted as the principal reference points for the examination of the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route in this study.

3. Materials and Methods

The study area is the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route. Its evaluation through the ecomuseum approach was conducted as a qualitative study based on document analysis, and the area was analysed using evaluation criteria developed from the recent literature on ecomuseums. The research method is first explained, followed by the process through which the evaluation criteria were formulated, the characteristics of the study area, and the stages of data collection and analysis.

3.1. Research Method

This study was designed within a qualitative research framework to evaluate the sustainability of cultural landscapes through the ecomuseum approach. Qualitative research enables phenomena and events to be examined from multiple perspectives within their own contexts and allows the meanings and relationships embedded in individual and community experiences to be

understood in depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Because cultural landscapes comprise multilayered and complex relationships among the natural and built environment, cultural heritage areas, social memory, local identity, and collective memory, a qualitative method was adopted to facilitate their holistic evaluation.

Document analysis was used as the data-collection method. Document analysis is a qualitative research technique based on the systematic examination, evaluation, and interpretation of written and visual materials containing information about the phenomenon under investigation (Bowen, 2009; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The method enables institutional documents, management plans, scholarly research, and other written sources to be analysed comparatively, particularly in cultural heritage and cultural landscape studies. It also permits historical, cultural, and administrative data concerning the study area to be evaluated together, thereby supporting a comprehensive analysis. The principal documents examined within the scope of the research are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Documents Examined within the Scope of the Study

Document	**Institution and Date**	**Topics Covered by the Document**
Decision designating the İstiklal Yolu as a national park	Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2018	Determination of the national park's legal status, boundaries, and basis for protection
Decisions registering sections of the İstiklal Yolu as historic sites	Ankara Regional Council for the Conservation of Cultural Assets No. I, 2012–2013	Determination of the route's protection status and historic-site boundaries
Documents concerning the Long-Term Development Plan for the İstiklal Yolu Historical National Park	General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks; Kastamonu Governorate; Ankara Regional Conservation Council No. I, 2019–2020	Examination of the plan-preparation process, the conservation–use balance, the relationship with cultural assets, and institutional opinions
TR82 Regional Tourism Master Plan	North Anatolian Development Agency, 2025	Examination of the route's position within regional tourism, infrastructure requirements, destination management, and local-development potential
Promotional activities, walks, and commemorative events concerning the İstiklal Yolu	Kastamonu and Çankırı governorates, provincial directorates of culture and tourism, municipalities, and relevant public institutions	Examination of route promotion, interinstitutional initiatives, walks, and commemorative events
Projects, activities, and educational initiatives concerning the İstiklal Yolu	İstiklal Yolu Education, Culture, Tourism and Youth Association and relevant civil society organisations	Examination of civil society participation, volunteering, education, awareness-raising, and the transmission of local memory

Document	Institution and Date	Topics Covered by the Document
Provincial environmental status reports for Kastamonu and Çankırı and official records concerning protected areas	Provincial directorates of environment, urbanisation and climate change; General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks; current reports	Examination of the natural environment, protected areas, environmental values and pressures, and relationships between natural and cultural heritage
Scholarly research on the İstiklal Yolu	Universities and academic publishers	Supplementary information on the route's historical development, natural and cultural values, collective memory, and tourism and recreation potential

The research comprised two principal stages. In the first stage, national and international scholarship on the ecomuseum approach was systematically reviewed, and the fundamental principles of the ecomuseum were identified on the basis of recent studies. In the second stage, an evaluation framework specific to the study area was developed from these principles, and data obtained through document analysis concerning the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route were evaluated using descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis seeks to organise, interpret, and systematically present data in accordance with predetermined themes or a conceptual framework (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The theoretical framework developed from the recent ecomuseum literature was thus used as the principal evaluation instrument for analysing the study area.

3.2. Determination of the Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation of the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route in accordance with the ecomuseum approach was based on the fundamental ecomuseum principles identified through the literature review presented in Section 2.2. These principles, which are repeatedly emphasised in recent ecomuseum scholarship, were adopted as evaluation criteria during the applied stage of the research and used to analyse the study area systematically. The principles set out in the theoretical framework were thereby incorporated into the research method to establish an analytical approach for the holistic evaluation of the cultural landscape.

Within this framework, the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route was examined according to six complementary evaluation criteria: a focus on cultural landscape, holistic conservation, local community participation and empowerment, participatory governance, local identity, memory and cultural continuity, and sustainable local development.

Table 3. Evaluation Criteria Used in the Study

Fundamental Principle	**Description**
Focus on place and cultural landscape elements	Evaluation of the route as a spatial whole comprising settlements, natural elements, cultural assets, and patterns of use
Holistic conservation	Integrated treatment of natural, tangible, and intangible cultural values in conservation and management processes
Local community participation and empowerment	Support for the role of local communities in identifying, conserving, interpreting, and evaluating heritage
Local identity, memory, and cultural continuity	Evaluation of intergenerational transmission through belonging, collective memory, oral narratives, education, and heritage interpretation
Participatory governance	Evaluation of cooperation, shared responsibility, and joint decision-making among institutions and stakeholders
Sustainable local development	Evaluation of the relationship between conservation and economic, social, and environmental sustainability

Note. Prepared by the author based on the literature reviewed in Section 2.2.

The methodological process of the study is summarised in Figure 1.

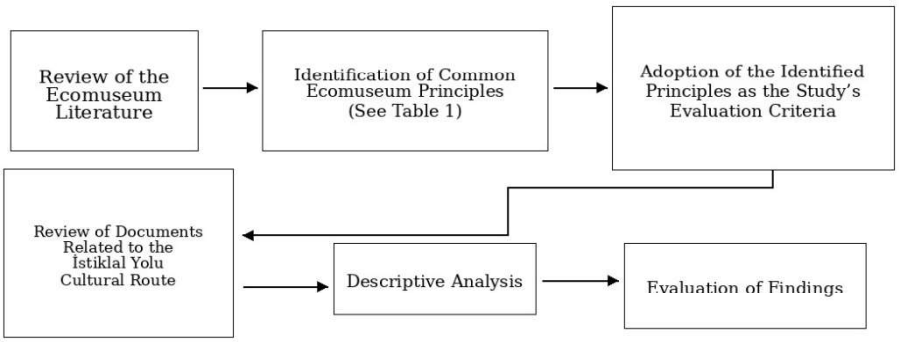


Figure 1. Research Process

In accordance with the sequence shown in Figure 1, written and visual documents concerning the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route were examined using the specified evaluation criteria, and the findings for each criterion were interpreted through descriptive analysis.

3.3. Study Area

The İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route, selected as the study area, encompasses the historic transport corridor that begins at İnebolu Port and reaches Ankara via Kastamonu, Ilgaz, and Çankırı. Extending from the coast through mountainous and forested areas, valleys, and plateau systems, the route forms a natural passage between the Black Sea and Central Anatolian regions and connects numerous settlements with differing geographical characteristics. The route is associated with the heroism of Turkish women and the transport of arms and ammunition dispatched by the National Forces during the National Struggle. In addition to this defining historical function, its natural and historical values have made it one of Türkiye's important heritage areas (Kocaoğlu, 2018; Taşlıgil, 2020).

The route acquired national historical significance because of the strategic function it performed during the Turkish War of Independence. The occupation of İstanbul and the Marmara Region during the National Struggle necessitated the use of alternative transport corridors to supply the fronts with arms and ammunition. Military materiel delivered by sea to İnebolu Port was transported by ox carts, horse-drawn carts, and pack animals along the İnebolu–Kastamonu–Ilgaz–Çankırı–Ankara line before reaching the Western Front. The İstiklal Yolu was therefore one of the principal transport corridors underpinning the logistical infrastructure of the National Struggle (Eski, 1997; Kocaoğlu, 2018; Yakupoğlu, 2014).

During the war years, the İstiklal Yolu functioned not only as a route for military supplies but also as a network of solidarity sustained by the collective efforts of local communities. Despite severe climatic and terrain conditions, local residents made substantial sacrifices to ensure the safe delivery of ammunition and logistical supplies to the front; women, older people, and children also played active roles in this process (Oğuz Tanrıverdi & Erol, 2024). The route consequently became a site of historical and spatial memory representing social solidarity and a shared spirit of struggle. It retained this historical value after the proclamation of the Republic and continues to occupy a place in national memory through commemorative walks, cultural events, and conservation initiatives (Şahin, 1993; Taşlıgil, 2020; Yakupoğlu, 2014).

Measures taken to conserve the historical values of the İstiklal Yolu include the designation of the section extending through the districts of İnebolu, Küre, and Seydişehir in Kastamonu Province to central Kastamonu as a historic site by Decision No. 274 of the Ankara Regional Council for the Conservation of Cultural Assets No. I, dated 16 November 2012, in recognition of its importance during the National Struggle. Sections passing through Ayan village in the central district of Çankırı, İkiçam village in Korgun district, and İnköy and Kuşçayı villages in Ilgaz district were similarly designated as historic sites by Decision No. 1005 of the same Council, dated 26 September 2013. In addition, the historic route and its designated surroundings were declared the "İstiklal Yolu Historical National Park" by Presidential Decision No. 302 of 1 November 2018. Cultural-route projects and promotional activities conducted along the route further indicate that the İstiklal Yolu is regarded not merely as a historical road representing the past, but as an important heritage area that remains in use and continues to be conserved (Kocaoğlu, 2018; Taşlıgil, 2020).

Natural Values

Extending approximately 340 km from İnebolu Port to Ankara via Küre, Seydiler, Kastamonu, Ilgaz, Çankırı, and Kalecik, the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route displays considerable natural-landscape diversity because elevation, topography, and climate vary over short distances. In the northern section extending inland from the Black Sea coast, dense forests shaped by the region's humid climate predominate. Temperature and precipitation conditions change across the Küre and Ilgaz Mountains, whereas a more open landscape dominated by steppe and agricultural land emerges toward the south under continental climatic conditions. The route is therefore not merely a transport corridor linking settlements and historical sites; it is also a natural transect in which coastal, mountain, forest, valley, rural-settlement, and plateau landscapes follow one another (Meteoroloji Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008; Taşlıgil, 2020).

The Küre Mountains, located along the İnebolu–Küre–Kastamonu section of the route, support biodiversity through their deep valleys, canyons, caves, and natural forest ecosystems. A section of the mountains within the provinces of Bartın and Kastamonu was designated a national park in 2000 to conserve its natural-resource values. Although the boundaries of Küre Mountains National Park do not fully coincide with the İstiklal Yolu, the park forms an important part of the broader ecological and geomorphological system within which the northern section of the route developed (URL-1). Ersizlerdere Canyon, situated

on the Küre–İnebolu road, is among the natural values directly associated with this section of the route. Surrounded by fir, beech, oak, pine, and hornbeam communities, the canyon and its immediate surroundings were designated a nature park on 10 September 2020, encompassing 217 hectares. In addition to its natural qualities, the canyon derives its name from Ersizlerdere village, which sent much of its male population to the front during the National Struggle; this association illustrates the integration of natural and historical values within the same place (URL-2).

Ilgaz Mountain, located where the route passes from Kastamonu into Çankırı, creates both topographical and climatic diversity between the Black Sea and Central Anatolia. A 1,117.69-hectare section of the mountain was therefore designated a national park in 1976. A total of 234 species and infraspecific taxa representing 51 families have been identified within the park; 37 are endemic to Türkiye, giving the area an endemism rate of 15.8%. Because part of the İstiklal Yolu passes through the national park, Ilgaz Mountain is more than an attraction defined by natural values: it also forms part of the historical landscape that makes visible the climatic and terrain conditions that had to be overcome during the National Struggle (Öztürk & Aydoğdu, 2012). The natural diversity along the İstiklal Yolu, together with the historic route, traditional settlement patterns, and human activities, consequently forms a multilayered cultural landscape.



Figure 2. Natural Landscape Values along and around the İstiklal Yolu Route, from Left to Right: Ersizlerdere Canyon, Küre Mountains National Park, and Ilgaz Mountain National Park

Note: (URL-1; URL-2; URL-3)

Tangible Cultural Values

İnebolu Port, the starting point of the İstiklal Yolu, is a principal focal point that renders the route's historical function visible because it was where transfers between maritime and overland transport occurred. İnebolu's traditional housing fabric, ochre-painted buildings, and roofs covered with local stone further

enrich the diversity of tangible cultural heritage. The traditional architecture encountered at the beginning of the route is not merely an aesthetic backdrop; it is a product of local geology, construction techniques, and ways of life (Halaç & Dağlı, 2022). When the port, coastal settlement, and traditional housing fabric are considered together, İnebolu emerges as a place in which the maritime and local settlement cultures of the İstiklal Yolu are represented within the same setting.

The Turkish Hearth Building and the Former Military Recruitment Office in İnebolu are prominent immovable cultural assets representing the administrative and social organisation of the route. Constructed in the nineteenth century, the Turkish Hearth Building was the place where Mustafa Kemal Atatürk announced the Hat Law on 27 August 1925 and has served various public functions in different periods (URL-4). Its current use as the İstiklal Yolu Museum has made it a focal point for conveying the memory of the route (Oğuz Tanrıverdi & Erol, 2024). The Former Military Recruitment Office, whose architecture combines dressed stone, brick, and timber, constitutes physical evidence of both traditional domestic architecture and the military-administrative system of the period. The significance of these buildings derives not only from their architectural characteristics but also from their relationship with the organisation, supply operations, and public solidarity that developed in İnebolu during the National Struggle (Özlü, 2019).

Historic roads, bridges, inns, and gendarmerie posts in the interior sections of the route are the spatial manifestations of logistical movement. Registered stone bridges in Halife village in central Kastamonu, Uzunöz village in Küre, and Çiğilerik village in Seydiler are physical structures that reflect the continuity of transport. Stopping places such as Ecevit Inn in Küre and Halil Ağa Inn and Topal Ali Inn near Ilgaz, together with the Doğdu, Gündoğdu, Üçoluk, and Tüney posts or the sites on which they once stood, illustrate how shelter, provisioning, and security were organised along the journey. These were not incidental structures; rather, they constituted a service network that sustained the continuity of the İnebolu–Kastamonu–Ankara line (Turan, 1999a). In the Çankırı section, the Ayan–İkiçam–Doğdu Post–Topal Ali Inn–Kıyısın–Üçoluk Post sequence enables parts of the route to be interpreted at the landscape scale.



Figure 3. Tangible Cultural Values along the İstiklal Yolu Route, from Left to Right: İnebolu Turkish Hearth Building, Former Military Recruitment Office, Registered Stone Bridge, and the Martyr Şerife Bacı Monument

Note: (URL-5)

The martyrs' cemeteries and monuments in Seydiler, Kastamonu, and Ilgaz, together with the final section connecting the route to military production facilities in Ankara, mark the destination of the route. The Seydiler Martyrs' Monument, Kastamonu Martyrs' Monument, and Ilgaz Derbent Martyrs' Monument render the sacrifices made along the road visible in public space, while the military factory in Mamak, Ankara, represents the final link in the logistical chain extending from sea to land and onward into the production and distribution system. Some structures survive intact, while others remain as ruins, building sites, traces, or commemorative markers. These different levels of preservation do not diminish the value of the route; rather, they reveal the transformation of the cultural landscape over time and its layers of memory. The İstiklal Yolu can therefore be defined not as a sightseeing route composed of discrete monuments, but as an integrated historic landscape in which the port, road, settlements, bridges, inns, posts, monuments, and production facilities complement one another.

Intangible Cultural Values

The transfer of ammunition and logistical supplies from İnebolu to the interior along the İstiklal Yolu was accomplished not only by military units but also through the participation of local residents, carters, boatmen, women, children, and older people (Çelebi, 2022; Özlü, 2019). Narratives centred on the role of ox carts in the supply operation and the heroism of Turkish women—notably Şerife Bacı, Halime Çavuş, and Necibe Nine—helped shape local memory (URL-6). The tradition of the denk boat in İnebolu clearly demonstrates the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage. Although the boat itself is a movable cultural asset, its construction technique, rowing practices,

knowledge of unloading cargo onto the shore, and the culture of solidarity that developed around the Boatmen's Guild constitute intangible cultural heritage. The efforts of İnebolu's boatmen during the National Struggle and the award of the white-striped İstiklal Medal to their guild made this maritime practice a defining component of the route's identity. Commemorative ceremonies and İstiklal Yolu walks held along the route also reproduce its memory in contemporary life. Conducted in the Çankırı section since 2009, these walks offer a historical experience while seeking to foster historical awareness among younger generations (URL-7).

The Kastamonu and Çankırı areas through which the İstiklal Yolu passes also possess a rich body of intangible cultural heritage comprising oral narratives of the National Struggle, traditional crafts, dress, cuisine, and practices of social solidarity. As of 2023, fourteen elements from Kastamonu were reported to be included in the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (URL-8). Prominent examples include the handmade production of the Tosya pocketknife; the Kastamonu çarşaf bağı, which combines a knotting technique with dowry culture; block printing, or the yazma tradition; and the weaving, preparation, and use of traditional Azdavay garments, including items such as the sash and apron (URL-8; URL-9; URL-10). In Çankırı, the Yâran gatherings—the local form of the Traditional Sohbet Meetings inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010—sustain music, games, oral expression, traditional dress, dining arrangements, and practices of social solidarity. Yâran cuisine and the ceremonial keşkek tradition, which was inscribed on the same list in 2011, further make the region's culinary and cooperative traditions visible (URL-11; URL-12). The cultural-landscape diversity of the İstiklal Yolu consequently emerges at the intersection of the spatial continuity of tangible heritage and the social continuity of intangible heritage. From an ecomuseum perspective, the route should therefore be approached not as a linear corridor in which cultural heritage is merely displayed, but as a living cultural-landscape system continually reinterpreted through local participation.

4. Evaluation of the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Landscape through the Ecomuseum Approach

The İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route constitutes a multilayered cultural landscape through its natural environment, rural and urban settlements, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, traditional modes of production, and social

memory of the National Struggle. Its sustainability depends not only on physical conservation, but also on maintaining the spatial, historical, social, and economic relationships among these values. This section evaluates the current condition of the İstiklal Yolu cultural landscape according to the criteria identified through the review of ecomuseum scholarship. The documents examined and discussed in Table 2 were analysed in accordance with the ecomuseum evaluation criteria presented in Table 3. The analysis was intended to identify both how the ecomuseum approach could contribute to balancing conservation and use and to the intergenerational transmission of the İstiklal Yolu cultural landscape, and the existing conditions that constrain its implementation.

Focus on Place and Cultural Landscape Elements

Within the ecomuseum approach, place is not an enclosed setting in which heritage is displayed, but an experienced environment where relationships are established among natural characteristics, historical events, human activities, and social meanings. The İstiklal Yolu brings together the historic route, its logistical function during the National Struggle, rural settlements, historic structures, and diverse natural-landscape characters. The registration of specific sections as historic sites and the subsequent designation of the İstiklal Yolu Historical National Park demonstrate that the road is recognised not merely as a transport corridor, but as a spatial whole that must be conserved together with the setting in which historical events occurred.

Natural values, historic roads, bridges, public buildings, monuments, traditional production, local narratives, and everyday practices form complementary components of a cultural landscape along the route. This diversity enables the İstiklal Yolu to develop as a route-based ecomuseum in which different places are connected through a shared narrative, rather than through the conventional museological practice of exhibiting heritage within a single building. Nevertheless, current promotional activities foreground the narrative of the National Struggle, while the relationships among the natural environment, rural life, traditional production, and intangible cultural heritage are not made sufficiently visible as part of the same whole. The İstiklal Yolu therefore provides a strong spatial foundation for a place- and cultural-landscape-oriented ecomuseum, but requires a shared inventory and interpretation system that connects all components of the cultural landscape.

Holistic Conservation

Within the ecomuseum approach, conservation is not confined to maintaining registered buildings; natural, cultural, tangible, and intangible heritage are addressed together with due regard for their interrelationships. The presence of multiple protection designations along the İstiklal Yolu, including historic sites, national parks, a nature park, and registered immovable cultural assets, indicates that the values constituting the cultural landscape have received substantial legal recognition. Official records concerning the Long-Term Development Plan for the İstiklal Yolu Historical National Park likewise aim to regulate activities through a conservation–use balance and transmit the route to future generations.

Nevertheless, the operation of conservation processes through different legislation, institutions, and planning instruments indicates that the integrity of the cultural landscape is not automatically secured in practice. The decision of the Regional Conservation Council concerning the Long-Term Development Plan required the boundaries of the historic sites and the registered cultural assets to be incorporated into the plan, demonstrating the need for coordination between natural-area planning and cultural heritage conservation. Although existing protection designations provide important safeguards for natural areas and physical heritage, approaches to the continuity of intangible cultural heritage, local modes of production, social memory, and living culture remain more limited. The sustainability of the İstiklal Yolu cultural landscape consequently depends less on the mere existence of different designations than on evaluating its values together through a holistic, route-scale approach.

Local Community Participation and Empowerment

Within the ecomuseum approach, local communities are not merely bearers of heritage or participants in organised activities; they are the principal agents in its identification, interpretation, conservation, and management. The documents reviewed indicate that traditional walks along the İstiklal Yolu have involved local residents, public institutions, students, civil society organisations, and visitors from different provinces, and that educational, commemorative, and voluntary activities have been organised to promote the route and transmit historical memory. The consultation of public institutions, local authorities, and civil society organisations during the draft stage of the Long-Term Development Plan may also be regarded as a participatory practice.

These activities alone, however, are insufficient to demonstrate that local communities participate continuously and with delegated authority in management. The documents reviewed do not identify a permanent mechanism that clearly defines the decision-making authority, forms of representation, and responsibilities of local communities. Participation appears to occur predominantly through walks, commemorations, promotional activities, and consultation, while shared decision-making and resource management remain more limited. The absence of an institutionalised role for local communities in planning and management constrains the incorporation of the local knowledge, traditions, and practices that constitute the cultural landscape into conservation processes. Although the İstiklal Yolu thus provides an important foundation for participation and social ownership, the local community empowerment required for the social sustainability of the cultural landscape has not yet been sufficiently developed.

Local Identity, Memory, and Cultural Continuity

One of the principal strengths of the İstiklal Yolu cultural landscape is the meaning the route carries within the shared memory of the National Struggle. The transport of ammunition and logistical supplies by ox carts, narratives concerning local heroes, and the historic structures and monuments along the route establish a strong connection between past and present. Walks and commemorative events also ensure that the historical narrative is not confined to written sources, but is transmitted across generations through renewed experiences of the route.

Traditional crafts, elements of local dress, food culture, folk narratives, and modes of production also demonstrate that the identity of the route is not limited to the period of the National Struggle. The predominance of that theme within the current institutional narrative may, however, relegate everyday culture and diverse forms of local heritage to a secondary position. From an ecomuseum perspective, the essential requirement is not to weaken the powerful historical narrative, but to expand it by connecting it with local production, ways of life, the natural environment, and living culture. Such an approach could make the distinctive values of settlements along the route visible within a shared route identity and support the intergenerational transmission of the meanings and living culture embedded in the cultural landscape.

Participatory Governance

Because the İstiklal Yolu encompasses multiple provinces, districts, and rural settlements, numerous institutions working in conservation, tourism, transport, culture, the environment, and local development must be involved. While the planning and management of the national park are conducted by the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks, historic sites and registered cultural assets fall within the jurisdiction of the Regional Conservation Council. Provincial governorates, municipalities, provincial directorates of culture and tourism, the development agency, and civil society organisations participate in promotional, event-related, and route-development activities. The involvement of these actors in planning meetings and traditional walks indicates that a foundation for interinstitutional cooperation exists.

The documents reviewed, however, do not clearly identify a permanent, shared governance structure covering the entire route and defining the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved. Because cooperation generally develops through particular planning processes, events, or projects, interinstitutional relationships may remain temporary and continuity in monitoring the implementation of decisions may not be achieved. From an ecomuseum perspective, governance should extend beyond coordination among institutions and ensure the regular participation of local communities, producers, universities, and civil society organisations in decision-making. To manage the cultural landscape without fragmenting it across administrative boundaries and protection designations, the existing multi-actor structure must be transformed into a route-scale mechanism for shared decision-making, implementation, and monitoring.

Sustainable Local Development

The historical importance of the İstiklal Yolu, its diverse natural and cultural landscapes, walking routes, local products, and traditional crafts create considerable potential for connecting conservation with local development. The TR82 Regional Tourism Master Plan emphasises the regional tourism significance of the İstiklal Yolu and identifies requirements concerning planning, infrastructure, and the development of tourism opportunities. Although traditional walks and commemorative events enhance the route's visibility, the documents reviewed do not reveal an integrated route-scale model that regulates the economic and social benefits tourism could provide to local producers, craftspeople, and rural settlements.

Under the ecomuseum approach, local development is based not merely on increasing visitor numbers, but on creating production, employment, and income opportunities compatible with heritage conservation. Incorporating traditional products, crafts, local gastronomy, and rural-life experiences into the route narrative offers important opportunities to sustain the living qualities of the cultural landscape. Transforming these values solely into tourism products, however, may weaken their cultural meanings and compromise their authenticity. Local development activities should therefore be designed with due regard for the carrying capacity and authenticity of the cultural landscape and the needs of local communities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study evaluated the İstiklal Yolu Cultural Route through the ecomuseum approach, which was considered an instrument for the sustainability of cultural landscapes. The findings demonstrate that the route forms a multilayered cultural landscape through its natural environment, historic structures, rural and urban settlements, intangible cultural heritage, traditional modes of production, and social memory of the National Struggle. This diversity makes the İstiklal Yolu suitable for the implementation of a route-based ecomuseum approach.

The various protection designations applied to the İstiklal Yolu cultural landscape—including historic sites, national parks, a nature park, and registered immovable cultural assets—provide an important legal and administrative foundation. Nevertheless, the treatment of natural, cultural, tangible, and intangible heritage by different institutions and practices complicates the holistic conservation of the cultural landscape. Although commemorative, walking, educational, and promotional activities conducted along the route contribute to public awareness, the role of local communities in planning and management has not been sufficiently institutionalised. Similarly, despite cooperation among different institutions, a permanent shared-management mechanism encompassing the entire route has not yet been clearly established.

The İstiklal Yolu cannot therefore currently be described as a functioning ecomuseum. Nevertheless, the area's strong historical memory, diversity of natural and cultural heritage, local production, and potential for collective awareness provide an important foundation for developing the ecomuseum approach. Such an approach could ensure that the values along the route are treated not merely as elements to be visited or displayed, but as components of a cultural landscape sustained through the lives of local communities.

A participatory management model encompassing the entire route should therefore be established, with defined roles for relevant public institutions, local authorities, universities, civil society organisations, local producers, and local communities. Natural, cultural, tangible, and intangible heritage values should be connected through a shared inventory and interpretation system, and different places should be addressed through a common narrative reflecting the integrity of the route. Local communities should participate not only in activities but also in decisions concerning the identification, conservation, interpretation, and management of heritage. Traditional crafts, local products, gastronomy, and rural culture should be linked to the route in accordance with conservation priorities, and practices should be developed to ensure that the benefits of tourism are returned to local communities.

In conclusion, the ecomuseum approach moves beyond conserving the values of the İstiklal Yolu individually and provides a holistic framework for sustaining the spatial, historical, and social relationships among them. Implementing this framework through participatory, conservation-oriented management would contribute both to transmitting the distinctive values of the İstiklal Yolu cultural landscape to future generations and to sustaining local life.

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