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Remembering traditional craftsmanship: conserving a heritage of woodworking in Rize, Turkey

Gül Aktürk

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ABSTRACT

The rural vernacular architecture in the highlands of the Eastern Black Sea region of Turkey has survived for over 200 years, yet the local traditions of craftsmanship in wood are disappearing. As these craft skills are no longer being handed down, the value of the intangible heritage that lies behind the vernacular architecture is no longer being promoted, despite the importance of woodworking in the historical evolution of the area.

This paper reviews the longstanding tradition of woodworking and its relationship with the local community. Based on unstructured interviews with local people, analysis of archival sources and on-site observations, the study first highlights the use of wood in daily life, including everyday objects, decoration and carving on traditional furniture. Then it examines current local practices, the interconnected value of the built heritage, and the loss of those values in construction today. I ask how woodworking was used in the past and how people can now promote it. I will discuss the continuity of this legacy particularly through oral history, and how better public inclusion could safeguard this element of intangible heritage in the future.

Keywords

rural heritage, woodworking, carpentry, wooden buildings, *göz-dolma*, the Eastern Black Sea region, Fındıklı, Rize, Turkey, forestry, oral history, collective memory, shared knowledge, vernacular heritage, traditional craftsmanship (ICH Domain)

Introduction

Intangible heritage is inextricably linked with place, with identity and with recognising traditional community practices as cultural elements. Intangible heritage has gained international recognition following the adoption of UNESCO's 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. The *Convention* identifies intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as *the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage* [UNESCO: 2003]. Intangible heritage is a product of collective memories, shared knowledge and the aspirations of previous generations. However, the value of intangible elements is often underestimated by contrast with tangible heritage [Rosaldo: 2013] such as monuments, objects and artifacts.

The concept of intangible heritage was first introduced to Turkey following the adoption of the UNESCO *Convention* [*Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı*: 2003]. The Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism has been assigned responsibility for producing two national inventories documenting ICH; *Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras Ulusal Envanteri* (SOKUM) which lists elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Turkey and *Yaşayan İnsan Hazineleri* (YİH), which is complementary to SOKUM, as the Register of Living National Human Treasures, recognising the key practitioners of intangible heritage in the country.

The significance of intangible cultural productions is better recognised when abstract notions are supported by concrete evidence i.e. materials, objects and buildings, which inevitably correlate with tangible and natural heritage. Cultural landscapes, for instance, provide physical support for intangible assets, whereas the latter contribute to the preservation of tangible heritage [Poulios: 2014]. In order to understand what constitutes intangible heritage, the communities' interrelationship with their cultural landscapes should be defined [Caballero: 2017]. In the case of the communities in Rize, the tea terraces are related to the development of woodworking for the production of agricultural products and for farming and irrigation. Knowledge about woodworking tells us about everyday life in the region and the transformation of communities that have existed in the area for centuries.

The residents' use of their environment for materials shows how members of farming communities built their dwellings and settlements and created their tools and furnishings. From whole buildings to the smallest items in the house, woodworkers left a cultural mosaic in the region with a variety of wooden products. For at least 200 years the villagers have lived simple lives using items made from the materials they found around them. The cultural interest lies in seeing how these local people coped with their natural environment. While some forms of heritage have died out, other types survived, evolved and absorbed the cultural influences of each era through the transmission of knowledge [Liu: 2015].

The case of Fındıklı in Rize illustrates the living local tradition of woodworking as part of the rural setting. The abandonment of folk traditions, customs, mores and values over time as society became increasingly industrialised created a separation between the cities and the countryside. In an attempt to reconnect country dwellers to their environment and to revive lost values, and also to integrate new technologies into traditional practices, this paper aims to emphasise the role of the unwritten traditions of woodworking. Meanwhile, present day landscape narratives inform our knowledge of the construction of dwellings in the past and lead to debates on future applications.

This research acknowledges the transformations in woodworking traditions and the current challenges posed by changing trends as a part of the vernacular landscape. However, there is a lack of archival documentation of traditional craftsmanship in wood and in the collective memory of the people of the highland region to the east of the Black Sea. The main aim of this research, therefore, is to emphasise the need to document the oral testimonies of people in the area. This paper first assesses the traditional practices of wood carvers in the past. It then identifies the processes of change in their material legacy due to changes in lifestyles in the countryside. The findings could serve as a guide for local administrators to include local people in efforts to conserve the tradition of woodworking as a part of their contemporary lives and as a testimony to their living heritage.

The case of Rize

The city of Rize has the highest year-round rainfall

Plate 1
Every mansion has its own *serander* or *nayla* and this *serander* belongs to the Kazım Osman mansion.
Photo: Gül Aktürk, 12 January 2019.

in Turkey. Aside from the coast and river valleys, the terrain is steep and much of it is at a high altitude. The high humidity and close proximity to water sources increase the diversity of local flora and fauna. The area is thus rich in forests with various types of trees including pine, spruce, alder, walnut, valonia oak and juniper [Eruzun: 1996]. There is a pattern of sparsely populated settlements and the region is geographically, socially and culturally remote and inaccessible to outsiders.

Intangible heritage in Rize comprises a wide range of elements, e.g. traditional cuisine, beliefs, linguistics, medicine, clothing, dance, music and handicrafts [*Rize İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü*]. Traditional craftsmanship is well represented in a diversity of forms and materials including woodwork, ironwork, coppersmithing, weaving, wattle making, quilting, stone-masonry and hot-stone cooking [*Karadeniz Kültür Envanteri*]. Woodworking includes the making of everything from boats and *nayla* or *serander* (Plate 1) (storage buildings or granaries, built using the traditional joinery technique of dovetailing), to spoons, *kemençe* (a stringed instrument or lute) and *tulum* (a type of bagpipe), as well as babies' cribs and *sandık* (a wooden cabinet). This article focuses primarily on woodcarving, which is listed in the inventory of the intangible cultural heritage of Turkey. The widespread use of woodworking relates to the importance of timber as an intangible entity in the region.

The most common technique used in building construction in Rize is *göz-dolma* (wooden-framed stone-infilled walls) (Plate 2), although there are also rare examples of buildings made of timber or stone. Nowadays there is no longer any division between stonemasons and carpenters in Fındıklı, Rize. A stonemason today must also be able to work in timber due to the building techniques used for the hilltop village houses.

Plate 2
A typical example of stone-infilling technique from the mansion of M.İ.
Photo: Gül Aktürk, 10 January 2019.

Figure 1
The General Characteristics of the Interviewees.
Source: Table produced by the author, 20 December 2019.

	Initials	Gender	Age	Date	Relevancy	Job	Villages	No of Interviews
1	B.U.	Female	Above 50	10.01.19	Homeowner	Retired/ teacher	Çağlayan	1
2	A.S.	Male	84	11.01.19	Stone Mason	Constructor	Beydere	1
3	S.Ş.	Female	Above 40	11.01.19	Homeowner	Retired	Çağlayan	1
4	Y.Y.	Male	55	11.01.19	Project Manager of the EU funded project 'Training Masters for Rural Built Heritage in the Eastern Black Sea Region'	Former history teacher	Çağlayan	1
5	M.A.	Male	65	12.01.19	Farmer	Retired/ post officer	Çağlayan	1
6	Ş.S.	Male	42	14.01.19	Stone Mason	Constructor	Fındıklı center	1
7	H.Ş.	Male	72	30.06.19	Homeowner	Retired/ teacher	Çağlayan	1
8	S.T.	Female	Above 40	02.07.19	Homeowner	Housewife	Gürsu	1
9	T.H.	Male	75	02.07.19	Homeowner	Retired	Gürsu	1
10	G.A.	Female	Above 40	03.07.19	Homeowner	Retired	Hara	1
11	C.K.	Male	80	03.07.19 07.07.19 08.07.19	Homeowner	Retired/ former art teacher	Hara	3
12	Y.G.	Male	Above 50	05.07.19	Homeowner	Retired	Çağlayan	1
13	F.H.	Female	Above 40	12.01.19	Homeowner	Retired	Çağlayan	1
14	Ş.Ö.	Male	56	06.07.19	Homeowner	Retired/ land registry officer	Çağlayan	1

Methods and data collection

Research carried out in Rize in the Eastern Black Sea region of Turkey included fieldwork with on-site observations and interviews with local people, including the owners of historic buildings and the wood/ stone artisans in the villages of Fındıklı. Written sources consulted have included the existing literature on the history of wooden carving, and archival material, including personal letters, images and memoirs.

The central data consists of unstructured, face-to-face interviews with fourteen participants from four villages and from the centre of Fındıklı, using a respondent-driven method of 'snowball sampling'. The participants were five females and nine males whose ages ranged from 40 to 84 (Figure 1). There were eight retirees, and one-third of the participants were retired teachers. Among the participants, some house owners were recent migrants while the craftspeople had resided in the area most of their lives. Stonemasons A.S. and Ş.S. have a father/son and master/apprentice relationship. Both craftsmen were born and raised in the area. On the other hand, one participant, a farmer, had migrated to a western city for work but had now retired to his village. Interviews were recorded, then transcribed, and finally translated by the author from Turkish to English, retaining the local terms used for wood carving.

Figure 2
Themes, sub-themes, and the examples of quotations.
Source: Table produced by the author, 20 December 2019.

	Themes	Sub-themes	Definition of the theme	Quote e xamples	Extracted from	Responses
1	Carpenters	Identity of carpenters	Statements on the identities of the previous generation carpenters	'the builder of our house left his signature on the doors with a Jewish symbol in 1830'	B.U., G.A., Y.G., Y.Y., Ş.S., H.Ş., M.A., S.T., T.H.	8 homeowners and 1 programme director
2	The use of timber as a construction material	Construction of public buildings	Statements on which domains they used their expertise; for instance, planners of rural landscape	'my husband's father or grandfather constructed this house and the Meyvalı Mosque also known as Alişan mosque with timber 187 years ago.'	Y.G., G.A.	2 homeowners
		Construction of houses	Statements on the use of timber and construction techniques in rural built heritage	'For instance, we were using a long wood plane called *küstere* to shape the wood.'	Ş.S., A.S.	2 stone masons
3	The use of timber in Items	Extinct timber items	Statements on the rare wooden items	'there was no need for the use of timber window rails after the introduction of sash windows and glass.'	C.K., S.Ş.	2 homeowners
		Timber trade	Statements on the timber trade	'Trade destroyed the materials.'	Y.Y., C.K., Ş.S.	1 homeowner 1 stone mason and 1 programme director
4	Timber carving	Carving techniques	Statements on the timber carving techniques	'at first, I sketched the pattern then I carved *hasır*'	Ş.S.	1 stone mason
		Costs of timber carving	Statements on the value of timber carving	'A person paid 40 days' wages in order to have carved ornamentation on *hayat agacı*.'	Y.Y.	1 programme director
5	The current challenge of timber use -	Production by using raw materials	Statements on the production with timber	'In the old houses, people didn't buy anything they were making their own furniture, cupboards - excluding glass.'	Y.Y., S.Ş.	1 programme director and 1 homeowner
		Maintaining timber	Statements on the natural drying process	'if the dryness was starting from the bottom, once it was cut, it was growing again.'	Y.Y., Y.G.	1 programme director and 1 homeowner
		Gaps and needs	Statements on the barriers to the preservation of traditional artisanship	'the Public Education Centre in Fındıklı should increase the awareness of this tradition but we are not supported by any bureaucratic or official institutes.'	Ş.S., Y.Y., F.H., Ş.Ö.	1 stone mason, 1 programme director and 2 homeowners
6	Initiatives for the revival of woodworking	EU Funding	Statements on opportunities for the survival of traditional carpentry	'With the EU funded programme, there was an increasing awareness of cultural heritage.'	Ş.S., Y.Y.	1 stone mason and 1 programme director

The interviews covered a variety of topics within a larger project which included the vernacular narratives of the residents. The longest interview lasted one hour. To begin with, a week-long survey was conducted on-site in January 2019. A second site visit was carried out for two weeks in July 2019. The collection of ethnographic data highlights the technical knowledge of the community members and the relationship between master and apprentice in the transmission of expertise. Overall, the customary knowledge retained from past to present illustrates how rural dwellers adopted the necessary skills in the creation of tangible heritage.

The interviewees came from different educational backgrounds, so I used conversational narratives rather than semi-structured interviews. This interactive process between the interviewer and interviewee [Grele: 1994] captured the natural flow of the dialogue. Considering the nature of the conversations, a meta-analysis of interviews was not used for this paper. A thematic analysis examines the following six themes: (1) woodworkers (2) the use of timber as a construction material (3) the use of timber in artifacts (4) timber carving (5) the current challenges in using timber (6) initiatives for reviving woodworking (Figure 2). The themes were not dealt with in chronological order but rather followed the course of the interviews. The unwritten values of traditions were qualitatively analysed in order to link current solutions to local customs of the past. Drawing on the oral histories, this study investigates issues in the transformation of cultural memory about woodworking.

Stories of woodworking and the rural built heritage

Local narratives tell of the existence of earlier communities, taking into consideration the substantial changes in traditional villages and towns that resulted from the building of the new nation in 1923 [Öztürkmen: 2003]. After cultivating tea and hazelnuts became profitable, communities around the Black Sea spent less time producing handicrafts - including wood engraving [Sümerkan: 2008].

Historical data reveals that most of the region's buildings were entirely constructed with timber before the *göz-dolma* technique became prevalent. The abundance of forests with suitable species allowed the use of 8m or longer planks of wood for the construction of rural houses. Following the deforestation of the natural habitat however, locals sought out new construction materials. The use of stone enhanced the durability of the houses and changed their appearance. Grey, blue and green-toned stones are still collected from the River Çağlayan for building. The change in material led to a number of carpenters having to learn the skills of stonemasons.

As transporting stone from the river valleys up the steep hillsides was difficult, fewer houses in the highland mountain ranges are built with stone-infilled walls. In the past, people chipped the stones to orthogonal shapes with simple hand-made tools. The oral testimonies emphasised the intrinsic link between artisans and their natural environment and explained how local communities adapted their building materials, techniques and lifestyles as the rural landscape changed. During the period of industrialisation, builders adopted the use of brick, leading to a mosaic of different materials being used alongside the former timber and stone-infilled timber buildings.

The data obtained from the interviewees showed that their knowledge about carpenters was greater than their knowledge about the use of timber as a construction material or for making items, or about the current challenges of using timber. The least data was provided on the themes of wood carving and initiatives for the revival of woodworking. Both masons provided substantial knowledge on the use of timber as a construction material.

Uncovering the stories of woodworkers

Some oral stories gave information about the builders of the houses. This knowledge might have been lost as it had not so far been recorded in any written form. Interviewees not only answered questions about the identities of carpenters, but also gave some insight into how they mastered techniques and where they applied them. On this matter Y.Y. notes that *there are elderly masters in every village but* [the] *most well-known masters are Ş.S., A.S., B.Ö., and D.K. who are* [still] *actively doing this craft*.

The ancestors of current homeowners in the area contributed to advancing the skill of the traditional

carpenters. M.A. claimed that his father, Osman, and his grandfather, Ahmet, were both master woodworkers and he learned his skills from them, although he is not himself a woodworker. Interviewees said some house owners—the well-to-do, professional people and farmers—were also involved in the profession. Hence, wood carving was done by homeowners as well as by professional carvers. Whatever the case, wood was a central element in people's lives.

Elaborating on the interview with one house owner, H.Ş. reflected that most of the buildings were constructed by local masons although some builders were from Georgia. He specified that *these buildings were built by masons from Yusufeli in Turkey or Batumi in Georgia*. Later on, he explained that his own house had been constructed by a Turkish master. Regarding the ethnicity of the builders of the historic buildings, B.U., one of the house owners in the district surveyed, remarked that *the builder of our house left his signature on the doors with a Jewish symbol in 1830*. She observed that *the later restoration in 1929 was done by a Turkish master*. This pattern was repeated by other house owners including T.H., Y.G., S.T. and G.A. Therefore, in the case of some houses there are details of work by Georgian builders, but the later examples are the work of local artisans.

The use of timber in construction

G.A., the owner of a historic building, confirmed that *my husband's father or grandfather constructed this house and the Meyvalı Mosque (also known as Alşan mosque) with timber 187 years ago*. Echoing this explanation, the 8th generation house owner, Y.G., affirmed that *when the locals wanted to build the bridge of the village after Çağlayan* [referring to Beydere village] *my grandfather promised to construct it after he recovered from his sickness*. Like all their predecessors, the local builders built the houses and public buildings, including mosques, bridges and schools, without having had any formal training.

Before the introduction of clay tiles, even the roofs of these buildings were made of wooden tiles (*hartama*). Woodworking in the past required a great deal of effort, from the process of collection to shaping and carving. It was especially difficult to cut up the timber from the 10 meter high trees before the introduction of saw mills in the area. From the construction of houses to cooking habits, all activities involved the collaboration of neighbours at every stage. The difficulty of the whole process was outlined by one of the house owners, T.H., remembering the sound of the mason's adzes, *Everything was made by hand because there were no saw mills at the time*. Apprenticed to his father, the local stonemason, Ş.S., said:

> *Generally, most of the stones used in these houses were brought from the Çağlayan river. We use those stones which come rolling down from the Kackar mountains ... There are granite deposits ... The stones roll down naturally.*

With respect to traditional practices, Ş.S. observed that *in the construction of the cell-infilled houses, the stones were laid in the timber frame set back by 1 cm*. The uneven side of the stone was then covered with timber or plaster.

The local tradition of timber working revealed the symbiotic relationship between communities and their environment. Stone/timber mason, A.S., who started work at the age of 13, described the process of 'forming' the timber:

> *I brought the trees from Murgul, Şavşat and Hopa in Artvin in Turkey then I cut them here in my workshop. For instance, we were using a long wood plane called a küstere to shape the wood. By using yonma balta* (a chopper), *timber was peeled or whittled.... Then we checked whether both sides of the timber were of equal size or whether they had any bumps. After flattening them, we used an ayak keser* (a device to cut logs) *to drill a hole for the horizontal timber frame, because it cannot be opened with a woodworking rende or planya* (both are types of plane) (Plate 3).

Wooden household furnishings and utensils

Although the names of the untrained architects of the houses remain unknown, their characteristic handiwork—ceiling roses (Plate 4), cupboards and cabinets—is still visible in the structures today. While the evidence of daily traditional lifestyles is endangered, some senior citizens still remember such things, or continue the tradition of wood carving as a hobby. C.K.

Plate 3
C.K. keeps local carpenters' tools such as *rende* and *planya* along with other items in his open museum known as Masuniyet Müzesi.
Photo: Gül Aktürk, 03 July 2019.

Plate 4
The ceiling rose from the previous home of Ş.Ö. which burnt down.
Photo: Gül Aktürk, 06 July. 2019.

(aged 80) started collecting objects at the age of 20. He reminisces about the past and has turned his house into a museum for visitors who are interested in the history of the area. His uncle was a local carpenter and in his story, he mentioned the disappearance of household objects which were once widely used in daily life. For example, he observed that *there was no need for the use of timber window rails after the introduction of sash windows and glass*. The millstone in the old mills was a single massive block of juniper, but nowadays, junipers are extinct in the region.

This claim was supported by another house owner, S.Ş., who runs her house as a boutique hotel. She keeps these items in her 'house museum' to show the traditional agricultural lifestyle. By doing so, not only does the hotel attract tourists but it also displays items related to the old way of living. She explains that *by putting weight on pressed fruits with the one-piece timber dibek* (a heavy wooden block), *my mother used to produce grape molasses*.

Furthermore, personal diaries kept by C.K.'s father reveal that wood was not just a construction material but was also a means of trade and profit for the locals. He remembers his grandmother chopping wood in the forests and selling it in the town market to make a living. C. K. further explained that *the wooden cabinet called a sandık was a product of trade between Turkey and Russia during the Ottoman period*. Owners of the houses in Çağlayan village in Fındıklı were particularly closely involved in trading and lumbering, but Y.Y. said that the lumbering tradition no longer continues as it did in the past.

Wood carving

Along with structural carpentry, decorative wood carving and painting on wood were also crafts that were transmitted from generation to generation in the area. The builders of the houses were also skilled at carving special decorative patterns and figures on the timber. The interviewees gave detailed descriptions of selecting, cutting and planing timber. However, there is no longer any carving on wooden store houses. Ş.S. carved decoration on granary houses for customers who used them as pergolas. He explained how he did it - *first, I sketched the pattern then I carved hasır* (the decoration on a store house) (Plate 5). In order to have a smooth surface, he rubbed the wood with emery. He added that the ornamentation he completed recently on a 5-meter

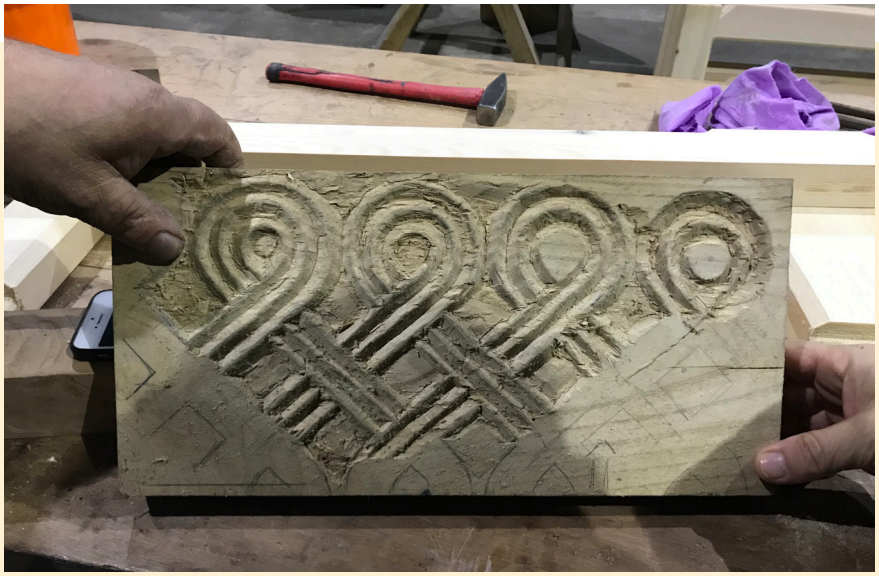

Plate 5
A typical example of carving for a *serander* part carved part sketched.
Photo: Gül Aktürk, 14 January 2019.

long piece of wood took ten days. Everybody, the well-to-do and the less well-off, paid for wood carvings on their buildings, though the complexity of the designs varied according to cost. Although the carving was purely decorative, most people followed local custom and had carving on their store houses; it was considered shameful to have a plain granary house because food was important and storing it in a decorative building showed respect [DOKAP: 2019]. Nevertheless, poverty prevented some people from having these carvings made. When asked about the importance of wooden engraving, Y.Y. explained that *a person paid 40 days' worth of wages in order to have carved ornamentation on the hayat agacı* (timber beam on the upper part of a store house). Depending on the budget of the house owner, there might only be carving on the front façade of the building or on all four sides of the structure.

Modern challenges for woodworking

Local people used to be self-sufficient - S.Ş.'s parents only brought sugar and water from outside the district. Y.Y., who was the project manager for the EU-funded project 'Training Masters for Rural Built Heritage in the Eastern Black Sea Region', agreed that *in the old houses, people didn't buy anything - they made all their own furniture, cupboards etc. excluding glass*. With the adoption of modern lifestyles, industrial manufacturing replaced home production. Faced with technological advances, the speed of traditional woodworking increased, but the economic benefits from the commercialisation of woodwork did not grow at the same rate.

With reference to the conservation of timber, Y.Y., who was once a house owner himself, talked about the natural drying of timber. As the grandson of a local craftsman, he recollected that his grandfather *would cut the chestnut trees when they were dry after a while*. He explained that *if the dryness was starting from the bottom, once it was cut, it would grow again*. Y.Y. thus explained the maintenance of chestnut trees by resurrecting them from their roots and reusing them in construction work. Arguably, today the lack of transmission of knowledge has led locals to deforest the land leaving chestnut tree trunks that are completely dried-out.

Darkened timber is sometimes a result of the smoke from coal-burning in the houses or of the wood being painted. However, according to Y.G., one of the house owners in the district, *the black colour on chestnut timber is a natural reaction of the wood to humidity*. Preserving the material against humidity requires natural drying. If not properly dried, timber, particularly chestnut, starts 'moving' - shrinking or

swelling. In order to avoid this, carvers prefer to use a natural drying process. In an attempt to minimise the 'movement' of the timber, Ş.S. recommended the use of the *daraba* system (timber boarding or a partition) - *we drill the massive timber with another type of timber on both sides*. According to him, the use of this system does not leave any gaps or fluctuations between the joints, but today the use of epoxy speeds up the process of degrading the material. He also talked about the *komar tree which we used to whittle*.

The detailed mastery of carpentry can easily be observed on many of the old buildings. The timber joints had to fit into the holes perpendicularly so stones could be placed in the gaps for the *göz-dolma* technique. If there is a bump on the timber, the stones will not fit into the frames and as the stones put extra weight on the structure, the workers had to pay more attention to how they worked the wood.

F.H. remarked the cost of the complete renovation of her house, *estimated as 500 billion*. She further explains that *the government provides 90 billion out of 500 and the homeowner covers the rest*. If the homeowners apply to the government to list their houses as a cultural heritage property, they can receive financial aid for the restoration. But this system imposes limitations on what can be done to the houses. Therefore, many homeowners, including Ş.Ö., avoid applying to get their properties listed, so as to be able to freely make alterations to their houses.

Due to increasing labour costs, the old woodworking practices have been replaced with cheaper imitations. Today, the problem in continuing the tradition lies in finding a master who will charge an affordable rate for both his labour and the material used. The following detailed description is from the stonemason, Ş.S.:

> *We can't get anything from the forests any more. We rely on material from the timber merchants, the lumbermen. They get it from the forestry. They cut the auctioned trees in the big workshops legally not like the illegal practices of the past. We use the cut timber in house construction. We usually buy logs and cut them to suit our needs*.

Echoing these views, Y.Y. highlighted the fact that *the Ministry of Forestry sells the forest lands at auction and lets them be destroyed*. Chestnut trees were once abundant but are now rare, just like the *juniper trees which were mostly used in water mills and store houses as they were tall*. He disapproved of the current methods of timber collection from the forests in that *the good quality timbers are not valued and are sold for nothing*. More fundamentally, it has become clear that manufacturing processes have effectively caused the abandonment of traditional woodworking. Even when confronted with the destruction of the natural environment, no amount of law enforcement seems able to prevent the loss of resources.

Ş.S. argued that *the Public Education Centre in Fındıklı should increase awareness of this tradition, but we are not supported by any bureaucratic or official institutes*. Institutional barriers were mentioned by both Y.Y. and Ş.S.. The national, regional, and primarily local, organisations could, if they would, function as public education centres to make training in woodworking more accessible to the public.

Initiatives for reviving the tradition of craftsmanship in wood

In 2008, Fındıklı Public Education Centre and the Architecture Faculty at the Black Sea Technical University started the project called 'Training Masters for Rural Built Heritage in the Eastern Black Sea Region.' Following 80 hours of theoretical education over 20 days, students completed 200 hours of practical work over 40 days. The first practical application of the knowledge thus gained was the reconstruction of a stone-arched bridge in Derbent village. Then the community members who participated in the programme erected stone-built toilets for public use, and most recently they have constructed a stone-infilled timber building which now operates as a café.

The continuation of the master-apprentice relationship is a priority in safeguarding traditional craftsmanship [Karakul: 2015]. There have been attempts to increase the number of skilled labourers able to continue this tradition and Ş.S. encouraged his colleagues to attend the courses offered under this project in which he worked as an instructor.

Due to the over-exploitation of natural resources, the ministries have taken control of the management

of rivers and forests. Today, the Ministry of Forestry no longer gives permission for individuals to cut down trees. Y.Y. described the benefits of this policy:

> *With the EU-funded programme there was an increasing awareness of cultural heritage. At the time, the number of listed buildings was around 20-30 and today it has risen to 100, and now people construct new buildings using this stone-infilling technique. In other regions, such as the Aegean region, the builders construct these types of houses. Most of these houses are transferable and are handed over several times to different owners*.

This programme paved the way for a series of publications documenting the built heritage, as well as for documentaries and advertisements for the programme on several media platforms. It also showed local people the importance of restoring their houses. Many now conscientiously renovate their houses rather than repairing them haphazardly.

Funded programmes to train highly skilled craftspeople are bringing scholars, masters, apprentices and ordinary people together to collaborate on a project to revive the tradition of woodworking. However, one-off projects are not sufficient to preserve and promote the intangible heritage in a sustainable way if the community members are not also supported by local institutions. Discouraged by the local administration, there are people who have stopped teaching or exhibiting their work. Crucially, a bridge needs to be built between older craftspeople, young practitioners, academics and government officials to recognise the importance of the traditional craft of working in wood.

Conclusion

The degree to which construction trends change over time largely depends on the environment. Materials and techniques may become old fashioned and eventually be abandoned, but the stories and memories associated with them live within people, in their memories. As long as the buildings survive, the value of woodworking remains, but as they decay over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to revive the manual skills related to their construction. This is when the documentation of oral testimony becomes more important than written history. The collection of oral traditions and narratives provides an insight into past traditions and the evolution of these customs over time.

Maintaining the old practices in modern times became problematic, but the physical presence of stone-infilled timber-framed dwellings reminds people of the long-lost customs associated with this tangible legacy. Despite official listings of the buildings or of the intangible heritage, it is not enough to protect these rural customs from degradation. Since young people cannot make any profit from woodwork, the nostalgic assets become the memories of older people.

Reminiscences of woodworking traditions can be archived and documented in order to pass on information to future generations. In addition to knowledge and skills, there needs to be a greater interest in, and passion for the craft [Karpuz: 1997]. Encouraging the often-unheard voices of communities requires more self-governance in safeguarding intangible values at a local level. Artistry and experimental knowledge must be encouraged by local people and motivate them to embrace their tradition of craftsmanship in wood.

As a form of architectural heritage, woodwork centres on interpersonal relationships in the Eastern Black Sea communities, including the well-to-do, professional people, farmers and house owners. This strong connection ensures that traditional craftsmanship is valued, even when a particular historical monument disappears [Ruggles and Silverman: 2009]. Even though the rural built heritage may become something akin to an open-air museum, the traditions that created it can only be revived with the archiving of oral histories for future practitioners. Originating from personal experiences, oral knowledge plays a significant part in safeguarding intangible heritage. It does not mean 'freezing' the customs and cultural practices but accepts that they will continue to evolve.

Creating an inventory of such practices can increase the number of jobs, qualified individuals and studies in the field of preservation, and can enhance the diffusion of expertise. Local achievements in the preservation of woodworking skills may lead to a rise in the transmission of knowledge among local artisans, and encourage them to interpret their own heritage for future generations.

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