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# Understanding public interest in the preservation of Sibiu's local heritage

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, scholars, heritage practitioners and policymakers have increasingly emphasised the role of citizens in heritage practices. Understanding how local communities engage with cultural heritage is essential for refining preservation strategies, developing inclusive and sustainable policies, and responsibly commercialising local heritage. Preserving cultural heritage not only enriches community life but also plays a vital role in shaping local identities. Despite this, no prior research has examined citizens' perceptions of heritage preservation in Romania. This study addresses that need by investigating the interest of Sibiu's residents in heritage preservation – a city renowned for its rich cultural heritage and its designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2007. Drawing from the ELABCHROM social survey, which included 932 respondents from the Sibiu region, and employing multivariate statistical modelling, we pursue two objectives. First, we assess the level of public interest in preserving local heritage. Second, we analyse the complex interplay of factors influencing this interest, including sociodemographic characteristics, cultural consumption behaviours and opinions on the local cultural events. We argue that citizens' attitudes towards heritage preservation are shaped by a multifaceted process that reflects both broader demographic trends observed in other European surveys and unique, context-specific and locally situated influences.

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Sibiu; Romania; cultural heritage; preservation; public interest

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, scholars, heritage practitioners, and policy makers have increasingly emphasised the social dimension of cultural heritage (Lähdesmäki and Turunen *forthcoming*; Sophia 2020). In such an emphasis, cultural heritage is not a thing, to use an oft-cited observation by Smith (2006, 11), but a practice, a performance and a process through which heritage is defined, valorised, transmitted and preserved (Harrison 2013; Schramm 2015; Smith 2006; Waterton and Smith 2009).

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The social dimension of heritage highlights the role of communities and citizens in heritage practices and processes. This is reflected in the governance of cultural heritage, which has progressively adopted participatory principles aimed at involving citizens. Participatory heritage governance seeks to challenge the top-down, authority-based model of heritage management and to bridge the gap between heritage experts and non-experts (Colomer and Pastor Perez 2024). It encourages and guides the cultural heritage field to actively involve citizens, communities and interest groups in the processes of heritage assessment, meaning-making, communication, conservation, preservation, decision-making and/or management (Colomer and Pastor Perez 2024; Lähdesmäki and Turunen *forthcoming*; SoPHIA 2020, 28). Despite these important goals, participatory management of cultural heritage and citizen engagement in heritage practices such as preservation face various challenges, ranging from a lack of interest in participation to governance structures and policies that discourage participation (Lähdesmäki and Turunen *forthcoming*). These challenges are the result of a longstanding socialisation process that spans generations and is contingent upon specific local cultural heritage.

In this article, we focus on one core cultural heritage practice, namely heritage preservation, and citizens' perceptions and attitudes towards it in a local context. A thorough understanding of citizens' perceptions of heritage preservation and information on their engagement with local cultural heritage provides critical insights that can be used to develop and refine preservation strategies, create inclusive and sustainable policies, and facilitate the responsible commercialisation of cultural heritage. A deeper understanding of citizens' perceptions is not only important for better heritage governance and management but can also enrich community life in general, as local heritage plays a central role in defining local identities. Several studies have highlighted the role of cultural heritage in fostering identity formation in local communities (Harrison 2013; Moore and Whelan 2007), in supporting the sense of belonging and social well-being of its members (Lähdesmäki and Turunen *forthcoming*; Sophia 2020), and in developing a 'sense of place' as heritage management and practice increasingly seek to draw on the views and expressions of interest of local communities (Szymanski and Schofield 2010).

We argue that citizens' perceptions and attitudes towards heritage preservation are formed in a complex process, reflecting both general demographic trends and context-specific and situated factors. Our study is based on local survey data collected in Sibiu, Romania, in 2023, including questions on interest in preserving local heritage, its commodification, regulation, funding and cultural participation. We ask: What is citizens' level of interest in preserving local heritage in Sibiu, and what factors influence their interest? The results of the analysis will be interpreted in the context of other European surveys exploring citizens' perceptions of cultural heritage. However, such surveys are rarely fully comparable because of differences in questions, implementation, analysis models, and cultural and social contexts.

Although the Romanian national authorities regularly conduct comprehensive cultural barometer polls, there are only a few previous studies on citizens' perceptions of cultural heritage in Romania. Our study, conducted in Sibiu, fills this research gap, although the results cannot be generalised to the whole country. A similar study (Herman et al. 2018), connected with Jewish urban cultural heritage was previously conducted in another Romanian city, Oradea with 281 respondents, including authorities, locals and tourists. The study explored items on the importance of rehabilitation,

expectations regarding public involvement and attitudes towards the preservation of urban heritage. Another recent sociological study on cultural resources, consumption and audience profiles, satisfaction and expectations focuses on Bihor County (Hatos 2020). In Sibiu, Rusu (2023) used an interdisciplinary perspective to analyse the ideological ethos reflected in the memorial landscape of the city, as well as the public attitudes towards its various components. However, none of these studies were centred on the residents' interest in preserving cultural heritage and factors moderating this interest in Romania.

Compared to other cities in Romania, Sibiu is characterised by a vibrant cultural scene and culturally active inhabitants. It is an attractive regional capital for tourists interested in cultural events and festivals. In a recent national comparative study on the cultural vitality of Romanian cities, Sibiu ranked first in the vitality index, which is composed of five dimensions: cultural infrastructure, budgetary expenditure on culture, specialised human resources, cultural participation, and cultural and creative sectors (Croitoru et al. 2021, 17). The study highlights the city's outstanding stability in mapping cultural vitality over the years. One of the cornerstones of this vitality is the continued active cultural participation of its citizens. Since 2010, the city has been in the top three positions of the ranking, and in the most recent study, it was the top city (72). Such good vitality is due to Sibiu's long-lasting legacy in the city's cultural life and its designation as European Capital of Culture in 2007.

Next, we discuss the importance of civic engagement for the democratisation of heritage, and summarise previous heritage surveys and barometers, particularly the information they provide on citizens' perceptions and attitudes towards heritage preservation. We then present our case city, the survey data and our analysis model in more detail. This section is followed by the logistic regression analysis and the interpretation of the results. The discussion and conclusions highlight the main findings and compare them with previous survey studies on citizens' perceptions of heritage preservation. We close the article with suggestions for how the findings could be used to develop management and policy for heritage preservation.

## **Democratising cultural heritage through citizen participation**

The social dimension of cultural heritage builds on a critical turn in heritage studies that has challenged the Western notion of heritage and its hierarchical, expert-led approach to heritage management, which Smith (2006) refers to as the 'authorised heritage discourse' (AHD). Such a discourse emphasis refers to 'a professional discourse that privileges expert values and knowledge about the past and its material manifestations and dominates and regulates professional heritage practices' (Smith 2006, 4). AHD is not opposed to citizen engagement as such but has an extremely limited understanding of it. As Smith (2006, 31) notes, AHD users see heritage as 'something visitors are led to, instructed about, but then not invited to engage with more actively'. The critical turn in heritage studies has sought to overcome the limitations of AHD and to democratise heritage by incorporating the insights and narratives of communities and groups that are usually unheard or marginalised in heritage management and policymaking. Furthermore, the critical turn has brought local cultural activities into the spotlight. Harrison (2013, 16), for example, has noted

that local festivals can be perceived as unofficial heritage, associated with values and practices that exist at a local or community level but are not included in the state's perception of its heritage or national history. A thorough understanding of the diversity and complexity of cultural heritage requires attention to the situated nature of heritage expressions, meanings and practices. The population's interest in heritage preservation is a first important step for processes of preservation which require awareness and understanding, as well as policies which might involve serious costs and inconvenience to local residents (Katapidi 2023).

The critical turn in heritage studies includes a strong democratic mission to dismantle the dominance of elite heritage narratives and top-down power hierarchies in heritage governance and management. A key method of such deconstruction is dialogue between policymakers, heritage practitioners and citizens. Citizen engagement can be seen as an antidote to the top-down, expert-led heritage processes and narratives of AHD, and as a way to mitigate the dominant role of technocratic knowledge and professionalism by sharing power and agency with communities and citizens (Lähdesmäki and Turunen *forthcoming*). Over the past decade, agency in the heritage field has been increasingly extended to non-experts in various community-led initiatives focused on local heritage. For example, Koerner and Russell (2016, 218) emphasise that 'it is local heritage that is most meaningful for people', and that with the growth of community archaeology, that is, community-led initiatives carried out in collaboration with professional archaeologists, 'we are beginning to see the democratisation of archaeology, where concern for heritage will be led by people and their concern for what they deem to be their heritage'. Additional evidence is necessary to establish the existence of a critical mass interested in local heritage in countries such as Romania, where democratic traditions have revived relatively recently, and where the general population's attitudes are considerably less studied in relation to cultural heritage.

Better engaging citizens in heritage preservation require a deeper understanding of their perceptions and attitudes towards cultural heritage because these are unevenly distributed among different sociodemographic groups. Various regional, national, and transnational cultural agencies have sought to explore these perceptions and attitudes in relation to different demographic factors. The results show various similarities, but also differences, based on the situated nature of cultural heritage meanings and practices.

The European Commission (2017) Special Eurobarometer on Cultural Heritage is the most comprehensive and prominent survey on cultural heritage in Europe, covering 28 EU Member States with 27,881 respondents. The results of the survey underline Europeans' positive attitude towards cultural heritage. Of all respondents, 84% felt that cultural heritage was important to them personally, 84% felt it was important to their local community, 87% felt it was important to their region, and 91% felt it was important to their country. The percentages were slightly lower among Romanian respondents, namely 82%, 78%, 77% and 78% (European 2017, 4). European respondents generally felt that public authorities should allocate more resources to cultural heritage: 74% agreed with this statement. Romanian respondents were more supportive (80%) than the average (72). In both the EU (46%) and Romania (45%), national authorities were seen as the actors who should do the most to protect cultural heritage. EU-wide, the next most frequently mentioned actors were the EU (40%), local and regional authorities (39%), and citizens themselves (34%). In Romania, the results were the same for the EU and local

and regional authorities, but Romanians considered the role of citizens to be slightly more important (39%) than EU citizens did – on average 34% (76).

The Eurobarometer measured different forms of participation in cultural heritage against selected demographic factors such as age, (binary, cis) gender and education. The longer respondents had studied, the more likely they were to be involved in cultural heritage. The youngest respondents aged under 25 were less likely to be involved, but so were the oldest respondents aged 55 or over (European 2017, 12). Gender did not have a significant impact on participation. Education and age, respectively, influenced respondents' perceptions of the importance of cultural heritage for them personally and for their local community, region, country, and the EU (25). The longer respondents had been in education, the more likely they were to perceive cultural heritage as important for each of these areas, and the youngest respondents, aged under 25, were less likely than older age groups to perceive cultural heritage as important for these areas. In addition, involvement in cultural heritage increased the likelihood that respondents would agree that cultural heritage is important for each of these areas.

The HERIWELL cultural heritage survey of 8818 respondents from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, and Spain yielded similar but not identical results (EPSON 2022). The study suggests that educational level increases participation in cultural heritage, while gender, age, or occupation are less relevant factors (EPSON 2022, 57–58). However, the report highlights differences between the countries surveyed. This research is also important because it demonstrates the dynamic nature of attitudes towards cultural heritage, which are differentially affected by specific structural changes or crises (e.g. negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic on some population groups' interest in – or access to – cultural heritage).

National authorities in many European countries have surveyed their citizens' views and opinions on cultural heritage and participation in it. In Romania, such surveys have not focused on cultural heritage per se, but the Cultural Consumption Barometer touches on cultural heritage. It shows that while cultural consumption in public spaces has decreased significantly compared to the years before the Covid-19 pandemic, since then, visits to historical monuments and archaeological sites have increased significantly (Croitoru et al. 2022, 8). The survey results show 'a tendency towards lower participation of women, the elderly, people living in rural areas, and those with low levels of education and income (below the national average)' (Croitoru et al. 2022, 8). Similarly to the Eurobarometer and HERIWELL surveys, the UK national surveys (Britain 2022; Research 2022) underline that citizens perceive cultural heritage as important to them personally and, more broadly, to their community. The Britain Thinks (2022, 10) survey suggests that as people's socioeconomic position rises, their interest in participating in heritage activities increases slightly. The results also suggest that heritage inspires a sense of place and cultural identity, and such feelings were stronger than average outside England, namely in Northern Ireland and Wales, or in rural areas, such as Yorkshire in this study (Britain 2022, 17–18). Our final national example comes from Finland and its Cultural Heritage Barometer, which analyses citizens' perceptions of cultural heritage according to various demographic factors and political opinions. It finds that gender, age and level of education influence attitudes to heritage preservation. Women considered it slightly more important than men, and the older and more educated the respondents were, the more likely they were to consider heritage preservation important

(Kulttuuriperintöbarometri 2021, 20). Many other factors measured did not influence respondents' perceptions of the importance of heritage preservation. These included place of residence (urban or rural), income level, financial situation, or party affiliation (Kulttuuriperintöbarometri 2021, 21).

These surveys reveal some transnational trends in citizens' perceptions of cultural heritage and its preservation, such as the influence of education on these perceptions. The results also highlight national and regional differences, and thus the need for national, regional and local heritage managers and policy makers to have locally rooted, contextualised and situated knowledge of citizens' perceptions.

## Case city and its context

In order to understand the respondents' perceptions of local cultural heritage and its preservation, it is important to consider Sibiu's historical context. Sibiu served as a major political, economic and cultural centre of Transylvania, with its origins dating back to the twelfth century. The city's first fortification was built between 1191 and 1224, erected around St Mary's Church (S. A. Luca, Karl Pinter, and Georgescu 2003), and between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, the Hungarians gradually expanded their control over Transylvania. In the course of these campaigns, the Hungarian monarchs encouraged the settlement of Székely and German-speaking Saxon communities, both to aid in the conquest and to strengthen the defence of the region's frontiers (Nägler 1992). These historical developments laid the foundations for the ethnic and cultural diversity that would come to characterise Transylvania, and, by extension, Sibiu.

Sibiu, like several other Transylvanian towns, maintained its well-preserved medieval characteristics but, at the same time, underwent a series of urbanistic changes typical of the eighteenth century. The integration of Transylvania into the Habsburg Empire gave a new position to the German-speaking Saxons and the towns that they controlled, which was also the case for Sibiu (Pop 2021). One of Sibiu's most important landmarks is the Brukenthal Palace, the former residence of Baron Samuel von Brukenthal. Baron Brukenthal was appointed as Governor of Transylvania, and during his stay in Vienna as an adviser for the Empress Maria Theresia, he gathered an impressive collection of paintings, books, numismatics and other items. Upon his return to Sibiu, he exhibited and preserved this collection in the Brukenthal Palace, built in the centre of Sibiu and inspired by Viennese Baroque architecture. As his testamentary desire, the Palace was opened to the public as a museum in early 1817, being the first museum on the territory of today's Romania (Frâncu and Maria Teodorescu 2021).

At present, Sibiu's museum landscape is no longer confined to the Brukenthal Museum (including all its branches). Among many local museums, the Astra Museum is recognised as 'the most important ethno[graphic] museum institution in Romania' and 'the largest open-air museum in Europe' (Muzeul ASTRA 2025) dedicated to the research, preservation and promotion of Romanian rural cultural tangible and intangible heritage, as well as the cultural heritage of national minorities. Today, Sibiu is renowned for its vibrant festival scene, encompassing various genres such as film and theatre (e.g. Sibiu International Theatre Festival; Astra Film Festival; Transylvania International Film Festival Sibiu).

A significant milestone in Sibiu's cultural legacy was its designation as the European Capital of Culture for 2007 (the year when it joined the EU). This EU action aims to promote cities and regions by celebrating the diversity and European dimension of culture and cultural heritage, and by encouraging citizens to engage in cultural activities. Since the early 1990s, following the example of Glasgow, this action has been used for urban development, with many declining industrial cities seeking to improve their liveability, attractiveness, economic status, and image through creative and cultural industries and investment in culture and cultural infrastructure (Lähdesmäki 2014; Lähdesmäki et al. 2021; Meyerscough 1991). In addition, the European Capital of Culture programmes have been utilised for consolidating local identities, as was the case in Sibiu (S. Luca and Dragoman 2016).

The European Capital of Culture year in Sibiu made a lasting impact on the city and its cultural heritage. Regarding the tangible heritage, such as monuments and archaeological sites, the preparations for the year as culture capital launched an extensive archaeological research project in the historical centre, aiming to modernise, rehabilitate and restore public spaces. During the preparations, 22 archaeological rescue excavations were completed (Crîngaci-Țiplic and Țiplic 2019). The communication campaign for the European Capital of Culture year was structured around the idea that Sibiu is a 'city of cultures', which could encourage positive attitudes towards diversity and multiculturalism (Gheorghiță 2016). In this respect, the inhabitants felt pride and belonging to the local community as a result of participating in different cultural events throughout 2007 (S. Luca (2009)). Citizens' active participation in culture is one of the legacies of the European Capital of Culture year in Sibiu.

## Data and methods

The data used in this study are part of the broader ELABCHROM project and were collected through a public opinion survey conducted during the spring and summer of 2023 among the local population of Sibiu. The questionnaire was self-administered, and the data were collected and organised using the specialised platform Question.Pro. Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary, with no incentives offered. To ensure a large and diverse sample, multiple outreach methods were employed, including individual and institutional social media announcements, local media coverage and direct invitations through personal contact networks. The primary objective was to achieve a diverse sample to facilitate subsequent comparisons across different demographic groups and to analyse relationships between variables using statistical models. The resulting sample includes 932 participants and is heterogeneous with regard to relevant sociodemographic variables that characterise the local population profile (unweighted data). The questionnaire used for the survey was designed within the scope of the research project to gather information on cultural consumption behaviours, subjective evaluations of the local cultural life, attitudes and opinions regarding the local cultural heritage, as well as standardised socioeconomic and demographic data. In this context, categorical, ordinal and numerical variables were utilised. The study received ethical approval from the ethics committee of the Lucian Blaga University Sibiu.

In order to analyse the survey data in this study, an initial series of descriptive statistical analyses is employed to characterise the sample and to provide a general

overview of the key variables. Subsequently, a logistic regression model is developed to examine the relationships between the dependent variable – interest in preserving local heritage – and a set of independent variables. The logistic regression model is a standard statistical method used to examine the relationship between a binary dependent variable and multiple independent variables measured on various scales. In survey-based social research, logistic regression can be used to calculate odds ratio or probabilities that an individual falls into one of two mutually exclusive outcome categories while having the possibility of simultaneously adjustments for multiple predictors (Agresti 2002; Miles and Shevlin 2000). Based on our data, we preferred the logistic regression model since it offers the advantage of accommodating diverse categories of predictors and testing whether their influence is statistically significant on the dependent variable, while controlling for a range of other variables.

## Analysis and results

### *Descriptive analyses: outlining the variables and the composition of the sample*

Descriptive analyses primarily provide a measure of the expressed interest of the local population of Sibiu in preserving local heritage, as well as an understanding of how this information will be employed in the subsequent statistical modelling in this study. Furthermore, the analysis introduces the set of independent variables considered for explaining variations in Sibiu residents' interest in preserving local heritage.

To measure interest in preserving local heritage, the questionnaire included a specific question in which participants selected their level of interest on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating very low interest and 5 indicating very high interest. Katapidi (2023, 290) pointed out that 'for the majority of locals, heritage is the amalgamation of tangible and intangible elements moulding a distinctive "atmosphere", characteristic of the so-called traditional physiognomy of the area'. Given the scarcity of research on this topic in Romania, in this exploratory study, we decided to measure the general attitude without distinguishing between tangible and intangible heritage at this point. The data in Table 1 indicate that respondents had a high declared interest in preserving local culture. Specifically, within the sample of 930 respondents to this question, 66.1% reported being highly or very highly interested in the preservation of local heritage. Conversely, 33.9% of respondents did not report a high level of interest in the preservation of local heritage.

Given the distribution of responses for the question, we followed Harpe (2015) recommendations on working with Likert-type scale variables and we subsequently

**Table 1.** Dependent variable: 'to what extent are you interested in preserving the local (tangible and intangible) heritage of Sibiu?'.

Likert-type scale	Number of people	Percentage	Dichotomic categories
1.Very little	14	1.5%	33.9% (low or moderate interest in preserving local heritage)
2.Little	60	6.5%	
3.Neither little nor much	241	25.9%	
4.Much	312	33.5%	66.1% (high interest in preserving local heritage)
5.Very much	303	32.6%	
Total	930	100%	

Source: ELABCHROM survey (2023).

analyse the data for inferential modelling using the two recoded categories presented in the last column of Table 1 (*low or moderate interest in preserving local heritage* = 0 and *high interest in preserving local heritage* = 1). The descriptive analyses of the independent variables in this study are presented in Table 2 and provide an overview of the distribution of responses and relevant indicators.

At the sample level, respondents' ages range from 18 to 83 years, with a mean age of 35.51 years. According to the most recent national census, the mean age in the county of Sibiu was 41.2 years (NIS 2021). The 62.5% proportion of women in the sample indicates that approximately six out of every ten participants were female, and four were male. About half of the participants (48.8%) have completed tertiary education, the percentage is higher compared to the share in the county's adult population (approximately 25%) even if Sibiu is one of the counties in Romania with higher rates of people holding university degrees. Within our sample 82.4% people were residents in urban areas, with Sibiu being the main city covered by the study. The study included residents in the

**Table 2.** Independent variables. Percentage or mean and standard deviation (SD).

Socioeconomic and demographic variables	Age (years)	Mean = 35.51; SD = 14.95
	Min = 18	
	Max = 83	
	Gender (binary)	Female = 62.5% Male = 37.5%
	Level of education (completed)	Primary or secondary without high-school diploma = 8.6% Secondary with high-school diploma = 42.6% Tertiary education = 48.8%
	Residence	Urban = 82.4% Rural = 17.6%
Cultural consumption, opinions and attitudes regarding local cultural life	Household income (Likert-type scale)	Mean = 3.54; SD = 0.93
	1 = Very low income	
	5 = Very high income	
	Festival attendance (index from 0 to 5)	Mean = 2.53; SD = 1.62
	0 = No attendance at festivals	
	5 = Attendance at multiple, diverse festivals	
	Assessment regarding the diversity of the festivals taking place within the local community (Likert-type scale)	Mean = 3.55; SD = 0.81
	1 = Very small	
	5 = Very large	
	The commodification of cultural heritage in Sibiu is a good thing for the community (Likert-type scale)	Mean = 4.40; SD = 0.76
	1 = Strongly disagree	
	5 = Strongly agree	
	The public budget for cultural activities in Sibiu should be...? (Likert-type scale)	Mean = 3.78; SD = 0.81
	1 = Much smaller	
	5 = Much larger	
	Public authorities must intervene to regulate the cultural sphere of the community (Likert-type scale)	Mean = 4.13; SD = 0.98
	1 = Strongly disagree	
	5 = Strongly agree	

Source: ELABCHROM survey (2023).

county of Sibiu regardless if they were living in the urban or rural areas of this county (according to the most recent national census, the share of urban population in the county of Sibiu was 63.4% - NIS 2021). The differences between the general population of the county and the sample are the result of the self-selection bias linked to the topic of this study which raised higher interest among particular categories of populations (younger, urban, higher educated, etc.). While cautiousness is needed in extrapolating the descriptive results of the study from the sample to the general population, these differences are less important when we use inferential statistics to test relationships between variables.

To differentiate between respondents in economic terms, a 5-point Likert scale was employed, with a mean score of 3.54, indicating a slightly above-average level relative to the scale's midpoint. A subjective measure was preferred to avoid the high non-response rate commonly encountered in Romania for direct questions regarding income levels.

In evaluating cultural consumption, a series of questions was employed to assess participation in festivals over the past two years, given that this represents the predominant form of engagement with cultural life in the region (encompassing theatre, music, film, food and other festivals). The response scale ranged from 0 to 5, with findings indicating that, on average, individuals participated in approximately 2.5 festivals. As this enquiry addresses behavioural patterns, the responses reflect the prevalence of the respondents' cultural participation.

The survey collected a series of opinions and social attitudes regarding local cultural life. The assessment of the diversity of festivals taking place within the community was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with a mean value of 3.55, indicating that residents perceive the cultural offerings in this domain as relatively diverse. There is a predominant agreement within the sample that 'the commodification of cultural heritage in Sibiu is a good thing for the community', as reflected by the high mean score of 4.4 on the Likert scale used to measure agreement with this statement. Additionally, there is a relatively high level of consensus that 'the public budget for cultural activities in Sibiu should be larger', with a mean value of 3.78, which exceeds the midpoint of the scale. Last but not least, authorities are widely viewed as responsible for regulating the community's cultural sphere, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.13, well above the midpoint of the 1 to 5 scale. All these elements outline a local context in which residents actively participate in cultural life and hold relatively articulated opinions regarding its various aspects.

### ***The logistic regression model: understanding variation in interest for preserving local heritage***

Through the logistic regression model presented in Table 3, we show the influence of a set of independent variables on an individual's odds of stating a high interest in preserving local heritage. The logistic regression model is robust, with the included factors explaining approximately 22% of the variance (Nagelkerke R Square = 0.215). Additionally, the model enhances the predictive accuracy of cases from 66% to 71.4%, indicating a significant improvement in correctly classifying respondents' interest in heritage preservation.

The first cluster of predictors includes standardised socioeconomic and demographic variables. The relationship between age and the individual's interest in

**Table 3.** Results of the logistic regression model for dependent variable 'high interest in preserving local heritage'.

Independent variables		B*	SE*	Wald*	Sig*	Exp(B)
Socioeconomic and demographic variables	Age (years)	.022	.006	13.697	.000	1.022
	Gender male (Yes = 1)	.227	.161	1.994	.158	1.255
	Tertiary education completed (category of reference)			12.555	.002	
	Primary or secondary education without high-school diploma	−.985	.300	10.767	.001	.373
	Secondary education with high-school diploma	−.401	.179	5.016	.025	.670
	Residence rural (Yes =1)	.114	.199	.331	.565	1.121
	Household income (Likert-type scale) 1 = Very low income 5 = Very high income	−.186	.087	4.597	.032	.830
Cultural consumption, opinions and attitudes regarding local cultural life	Festival attendance 0 = No attendance at festivals 5 = Attendance at multiple, diverse festivals	.293	.053	30.136	.000	1.340
	Assessment regarding the diversity of the festivals taking place within the local community (Likert-type scale) 1 = Very small 5 = Very large	.283	.099	8.130	.004	1.327
	The commodification of cultural heritage in Sibiu is a good thing for the community (Likert-type scale) 1 = Strongly disagree 5 = Strongly agree	.372	.101	13.593	.000	1.450
	The public budget for cultural activities in Sibiu should be...? (Likert-type scale) 1 = Much smaller 5 = Much larger	.286	.099	8.409	.004	1.331
	Public authorities must intervene to regulate the cultural sphere of the community (Likert-type scale) 1 = Strongly disagree 5 = Strongly agree	.184	.079	5.401	.020	1.202
	Constant	−4.397	.762	33.343	.000	.012
	Cox & Snell R Square			0.156		
	Nagelkerke R Square			0.215		
Predicted value		66%			71.4%	
No. of cases				921		

Source: ELABCHROM survey (2023).

\*B - Regression coefficient (unstandardised); SE - Standard Error of B; Wald - results of the Wald statistic test; Sig - Significance (pvalue); Exp(B) - Exponentiated coefficient (odds ratio).

preserving local heritage in Sibiu is positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Each additional year added to an individual's age increases the likelihood that the person is interested in preserving local heritage. Given the number of variables included in the model, the statistically significant and strong effect of age may serve as an indicator of a person's attachment to local heritage and desire to preserve the world in which previous generations lived. This phenomenon reflects a conservative mindset, particularly within an urban setting where local heritage is closely linked to the city's historical legacy. At the sample level, the propensity to engage in

heritage preservation appears to be largely gender-neutral. While the observed positive association indicates a marginally higher level of interest among male respondents, this difference lacks statistical significance ( $p > 0.05$ ), thus precluding definitive assertions regarding gender-based disparities in attitudes towards heritage preservation.

The relationship between an individual's level of completed education and interest in heritage preservation (dependent variable) is statistically significant. Due to the educational structure of the sample, the category of respondents with primary or secondary education (without a high-school diploma) was used as the reference group for comparisons. Accordingly, it can be observed that both individuals with primary or secondary education without a high-school diploma and those who completed their education with a high-school diploma have significantly lower odds ( $p < 0.05$ ) of expressing interest in heritage preservation. It is reasonable to expect that the positive effect of higher education may be attributable to the enhanced understanding of local heritage fostered through advanced educational attainment. Beyond the traditional positive relationship between the individual's level of education and their interest in local heritage, an additional factor that may explain this outcome is the presence in Sibiu of a university, which is one of the most important higher education institutions in Romania. This university offers academic programmes and activities that promote awareness of the importance of local heritage, potentially influencing residents' attitudes towards heritage preservation.

Residency in urban or rural environments does not have a statistically significant influence on interest in preserving local heritage. This finding can also be related to the fact that rural areas in Transylvania possess a rich local heritage linked to the Saxon cultural legacy, including fortified churches, historic houses and representative buildings. Against this background, the rural population demonstrates a significant interest in the preservation of local heritage. It is also important to note that household income demonstrates a statistically significant negative correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ) with the dependent variable. This indicates that individuals with higher incomes tend to exhibit less interest in the preservation of local heritage. A potential interpretation of this finding may be linked to differences in access to extra-local heritage sites and cultural experiences, as higher-income groups are more likely to engage with these through tourism or other cultural consumption behaviours, which remain less economically accessible for lower-income populations in Romania.

The second group of variables includes indicators about cultural consumption, opinions and attitudes regarding local cultural life. Firstly, participation in festivals has a statistically significant influence ( $p < 0.001$ ) on individual interest in preserving local heritage. Additionally, the more comprehensive and diverse an individual perceives the local festival offerings to be, the higher the statistically significant odds ( $p < 0.05$ ) that this individual is interested in heritage preservation. In fact, both variables indicate that those who appreciate the existing festivals and consider them inspired by the rich variety of local culture are more likely to be interested in heritage preservation. Thus, we can note that interest in local heritage is connected to one's own cultural consumption practices and to being someone who participates in festivals. Following a similar logic, the idea that the commodification of cultural heritage in Sibiu is beneficial for the community is also present in the responses. In this case, a higher level of agreement with the

commodification of cultural heritage significantly increases the odds ( $p < 0.001$ ) of being interested in preservation. Heritage represents an important economic and cultural resource, and its commodification can contribute to the well-being of the local community. This became evident in a city like Sibiu with its designation as a European Capital of Culture in 2007 and the influx of tourists interested in the local cultural heritage.

Public authorities play an important role in heritage preservation, and their policies, programmes and regulations are associated with public interest in this area. Therefore, the idea that the public budget for cultural activities should be increased is positively and statistically significantly associated ( $p < 0.05$ ) with locals' interest in preserving local heritage. However, the role of authorities is not just to finance but also to regulate the cultural sphere for the community, including how heritage is preserved and utilised through local cultural activities. Thus, those who believe that authorities should intervene to regulate the cultural sphere have significantly higher odds ( $p < 0.05$ ) of being interested in heritage preservation. The results of the model indicate a significant convergence between cultural consumption practices, the utilisation of heritage and the role attributed to public authorities in relation to interest in heritage preservation.

## Discussion and conclusion

The results of the logistic regression model yielded several key conclusions. First, they demonstrate that interest in local heritage preservation is not uniformly distributed throughout the population of Sibiu. Instead, several factors are associated with the profile of individuals who exhibit a particularly strong interest in this domain. Interest in cultural heritage and/or its preservation appears to increase with age and educational attainment. In this regard, our findings align with several other European studies on citizens' perceptions of cultural heritage, its preservation and public participation in heritage practices. The sociodemographic profile of individuals interested in local heritage preservation highlights the need to raise awareness among younger people and those with lower levels of education. Based on the results, we include here individuals with primary or lower-secondary education as well as people with higher-secondary education (high-school graduates). A significant higher interest was recorded only for respondents holding a university degree. Young people and those with lower levels of education should be targeted through campaigns designed to foster greater interest by incorporating elements that directly engage them.

Our study confirms that perceptions and attitudes towards heritage preservation are shaped through a complex process influenced by various sociodemographic factors, as well as cultural, historical and social contexts. In the case of Sibiu, the city's vibrant cultural atmosphere and longstanding tradition of cultural participation – strengthened by its designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2007 – form a crucial backdrop for understanding citizens' views on heritage preservation. The finding that cultural consumption, particularly through participation in festivals, contributes to increased interest in heritage preservation suggests a valuable tool for enhancing public engagement. Attracting new audience groups and organising more socially inclusive festivals could further promote interest in preserving local heritage.

Our analysis also indicates that the way local authorities fulfil their roles in public cultural life is directly linked to citizens' attitudes towards heritage preservation. In communities like Sibiu, which boasts a rich and diverse cultural heritage, citizens expect cultural authorities to implement regulatory and financial measures for managing and valorising local heritage. This expectation is closely tied to the public's interest in heritage preservation. While participatory principles of heritage governance emphasise citizen involvement in heritage practices, including preservation, citizens also expect authorities to play an active role in ensuring that heritage preservation is adequately funded and regulated. This is consistent with broader pan-European trends documented by Eurobarometer (2017) and EPSON (2022). However, one should not ignore the fact that different groups have varying interests in local heritage, and heritage planning strategies should ensure socially sustainable modalities of preservation and commodification if the case. In such processes, accommodating different perspectives on preservation is challenging (Noonan and Krupka 2010; Poullos 2014) and requires empirical knowledge of the local population's interests and opinions.

Broad surveys on citizens' perceptions of cultural heritage and its preservation provide crucial insights for policymakers, authorities and cultural sector managers. Such data support the planning of new preservation strategies, the development of more inclusive and sustainable heritage policies, and the responsible commercialisation of local heritage for both residents and visitors. At their best, these surveys contribute to the democratisation of heritage practices by highlighting citizens' interests and attitudes and identifying potential actions. While our study underscores some common sociodemographic factors, such as age and educational attainment, influencing Europeans' views on cultural heritage and its preservation, we also emphasise context-specific and situated understandings. In the case of Sibiu, these understandings included the relationship between participating in festivals and being interested in preserving the heritage of a city known for its vibrant cultural atmosphere and festival scene. Efforts to increase participation and engagement in heritage preservation must be grounded in a nuanced understanding of local cultural, historical and social contexts. Although broad survey data, such as that analysed in this article, provide important information on citizens' views, attitudes, and habits in light of their demographic background, in-depth qualitative research is, however, needed to examine citizens' complex, context-specific, situated and potentially fluid and transforming understandings of heritage preservation.

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## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu and ELABCHROM consortium. Restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under licence for this study. Data are available from the corresponding author with the permission of the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu and ELABCHROM consortium.

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