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Factors Determining Public Participation as A Catalyst For Regional Development and Local Business Environment

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ABSTRACT

Research background: Artificial intelligence is shifting online shopping from recommendation-based assistance towards delegated search, comparison, configuration, and, in emerging cases, transaction execution. For SMEs, this transition may expand market access while simultaneously creating new forms of algorithmic gatekeeping and platform dependence.

Purpose of the article: This integrative review develops a theory-informed explanation of how agentic commerce may affect SME competitiveness. Competitiveness is conceptualised as the joint ability to capture agent-mediated demand while preserving strategic option value, customer access, and bargaining autonomy over time.

Methods: Seventeen documented OpenAlex title-and-abstract queries were used to identify English-language journal articles published between 2015 and July 2026. Following deduplication and eligibility screening, 117 Scopus- and/or Web of Science-indexed articles were reviewed in full, comprising 82 consumer-agent studies and 35 SME-platform studies. A concept-centric synthesis was conducted using dynamic capabilities and resource dependence as the principal theoretical lenses. The review does not claim exhaustive coverage or pooled causal effects, as the discovery process relied on a single source and only one record was identified through direct merchant-bridge queries. Claims were therefore calibrated according to evidential directness, convergence across research designs, and proximity to the outcome of interest.

Findings & Value added: The synthesis identifies five core themes: assistance-to-delegation, machine legibility, trust transfer, empowerment–dependence, and offering/governance contingency. The proposed framework distinguishes foundational capabilities—product-data legibility, interface and transaction readiness, and verifiable trust evidence—from higher-order sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities. These mechanisms operate through eligibility and visibility, trust transfer, delegation depth, and dependency exposure. The evidence is moderate for consumer trust mechanisms and established forms of platform dependence, but remains limited for execution-capable agents, direct SME outcomes, and comparative boundary effects. Six propositions are developed to provide a testable rather than validated causal framework. The findings are relevant to SME managers, platform and AI-agent designers, policymakers, and researchers seeking to understand how firms can capture agent-mediated demand without surrendering strategic option value.

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INTRODUCTION

Current developments in scholarly understanding demonstrate that the cultural heritage of modern cities cannot be viewed merely as an object of preservation, but also as a significant factor shaping territorial identity and the sustainable development of a territory (Torres et al., 2025). Reflecting this trend, research is gradually shifting from a traditional object-based conception of heritage

towards interpreting it as a dynamic, socially constructed, and value-driven phenomenon (e.g., Feiner et al., 2002). This shift is accompanied by increasing emphasis on linking the material values of architecture and urban planning with their symbolic, identity-related, and social meanings. At the same time, approaches based on participatory cultural heritage management, value-oriented management, and the activation of territorial capital are gaining prominence (Liu et al., 2026).

Critical heritage studies have brought about a significant theoretical and conceptual shift in the understanding of cultural heritage (McGill, 2018). They emphasise its role in processes of socially constructing meaning, through which individuals, communities, and institutions interpret the past, create collective identities, and shape perceptions of places, regions, and countries. From this perspective, heritage represents not merely a legacy of the past but also an active resource for development, the significance of which derives not solely from its material form but also from socially ascribed values (Mieg & Oevermann, 2026). This approach is further developed by conceptualising heritage as a cultural and social process in which meanings are created and reproduced through interpretation, collective memory, and social negotiation. The material form of heritage therefore serves as a medium through which these meanings are articulated and acquire social relevance (Min, 2025).

These theoretical shifts are particularly significant in the study of modern architectural and urban heritage and planned socialist cities (Gao & Shaw, 2026), whose value cannot be reduced solely to their material, architectural, or urbanistic dimensions (Nava Jiménez, 2026). In such environments, historically shaped spatial structures intersect with collective memory, social interpretations of the past, and contemporary processes of place-making and place attachment (Ngatindriatun et al., 2026). This perspective also provides a theoretical framework for examining Nová Dubnica as a planned town in which the historical production of space interacts with the contemporary territorial identity of its residents, as well as with current issues related to the conservation and management of cultural heritage.

Research gap: Existing literature predominantly addresses cultural heritage and regional development as separate issues, thereby overlooking their potential synergies. Although civic participation is increasingly identified as a critical determinant of spatial development quality and local business dynamics, current research lacks an integrated framework examining the direct and cross-cutting effects of participatory processes at the intersection of heritage preservation and regional socio-economic development. The originality of the present quantitative research lies in its conceptualisation of cultural heritage management as participatory cultural heritage management and in its emphasis on the role of space users. The primary objective of the article is to encourage a shift in the understanding of space. Space should not be understood merely as a physical entity composed of buildings, trees, and public areas, but more importantly as a social construct shaped by people and by their relationships with the places they inhabit.

Within the Slovak scholarly context, research on modern architectural heritage has primarily focused on the historical development of modern towns and cities, their urban structures, and the gradual recognition of their cultural heritage value. An additional perspective is provided by studies examining the relationships between cultural heritage, identity, and regional development.

Structure of the article. The introduction explains the fundamental motivations underlying the research. The subsequent theoretical background further elaborates on the examined factors and potential relationships. The methodology section defines the research objective, describes the primary data collection method based on a questionnaire survey, presents the hypotheses, and outlines the analytical methods. This section also includes the demographic profile of the participants. The analytical section presents the research findings through figures and tables, with particular emphasis on the application of structural equation modelling and confirmatory factor analysis. The discussion then summarises the findings, compares them with international evidence, and outlines potential theoretical and practical implications. The conclusion focuses primarily on the study limitations and directions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Cultural Heritage Management

Value-based approaches build on the social-constructivist understanding of cultural heritage and focus on identifying different types of heritage values and their significance for decision-making processes (e.g., Kapoor et al., 2026). Li et al. (2024) develop a values-based approach that analyses the sociocultural and socio-economic values of cultural heritage. Values associated with identity and the community's relationship with place are particularly important, as they also create significant preconditions for participatory approaches to heritage management.

In recent decades, international research on urban heritage, territorial identity, and cultural heritage management has shifted considerably from descriptive and typological approaches towards interdisciplinary interpretive frameworks integrating human geography, urban studies, the sociology of space, and cultural heritage policy (Paulissen & van Beek, 2024). A dominant trend in contemporary research is the understanding of space as a socially produced and meaning-constructed phenomenon that cannot be reduced to its physical form (Banini & Ilovan, 2021). This theoretical and conceptual shift also creates the basis for developing integrated approaches to cultural heritage management that link the preservation of historical values with territorial identity, stakeholder participation, and sustainable development (Mehta et al., 2026).

A fundamental theoretical framework underpinning this shift is Lefebvre's concept of the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991), which fundamentally redefines the understanding of the urbanised environment. In this approach, space results from the interaction among spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation—that is, the material, planning-related, symbolic, and lived dimensions of space. Lefebvre's concept has become an important point of departure for critical urban studies, which examine urban space as a product of social relations, power structures, and ideological processes (Sharma et al., 2026).

Research on representations of place and territorial identity builds on Lefebvre's tradition. Sica et al. (2025) emphasise that territorial identity is neither an essential nor a stable category, but rather the outcome of discursive, visual, and institutional processes of representation. In this context, place is understood as the result of the continuous creation and negotiation of meanings among different actors, with processes of selection and legitimation of particular interpretations of space playing an important role.

Building on this interpretive perspective is the concept of "dissonant heritage", developed by Arfa et al. (2022). The authors emphasise that cultural heritage is associated with divergent interpretations of the past, conflicts of values, and a plurality of identities. Heritage therefore does not necessarily represent a universally accepted value, but may instead become the subject of social negotiation among different groups of actors. This perspective is particularly relevant to the interpretation of twentieth-century architectural heritage and planned socialist cities, whose contemporary social valuation is shaped by historical experience, collective memory, and differing interpretations of their ideological context.

A complementary perspective is provided by the concept of territorial capital (Zorita et al., 2025; Camagni et al., 2020), which enables the integration of a territory's tangible and intangible resources within a unified analytical framework. From this perspective, cultural heritage can be interpreted not only as a historical asset requiring preservation, but also as part of a territory's endogenous resources capable of contributing to stronger territorial identity and sustainable local and regional development.

Critical heritage studies build on this understanding of space and identity. Within this framework, Abdelghani et al. (2026) interpret heritage as a cultural and social process of creating, interpreting, and negotiating meanings. Cultural heritage therefore does not arise merely from the existence of historical objects themselves, but through social processes in which individuals, communities, and institutions attribute meaning to the past and its material manifestations.

Similarly, Vicente-Gilabert et al. (2024) highlight the need to move beyond the protection of individual historic structures and to consider cultural heritage in relation to identity, interpretation, and spatial management. In this context, heritage becomes an active component of urban and regional development rather than merely an object of conservation (Ugong, 2024). Pendlebury (2009) builds on these value-oriented approaches by analysing the shift in heritage conservation towards models that account for a plurality of values, the negotiation of interests, and the broader societal context. This trend is further developed in approaches that emphasise stakeholder participation and the integration of cultural heritage conservation into spatial governance and development processes (Alonso & Villalba, 2026).

Tutchener et al. (2021) also offer a critical re-evaluation of the traditional understanding of heritage values, highlighting their historical, social, and political contingency. This perspective is particularly relevant when interpreting planned settlements from the post-war period, as their contemporary heritage value derives not merely from their historical and material substance but is also shaped through social interpretation and negotiation. Later work by Alonso and Villalba (2026) connects cultural heritage with sustainable development and emphasises the need to consider heritage conservation in the context of contemporary social and developmental needs.

Contemporary value-based approaches are further developed by Wang et al. (2025), who emphasise the social, political, and institutional dimensions of decision-making regarding cultural heritage. From this perspective, cultural heritage management cannot be isolated from broader processes of urban and territorial development. Particular importance is attached to balancing the preservation of cultural values with the adaptation of the existing building stock to changing social, environmental, and functional requirements (Vidal et al., 2026; Erben, 2025).

Contemporary international research is therefore gradually establishing a framework in which cultural heritage is understood as a dynamic, socially constructed, and value-laden phenomenon closely linked to identity, territorial development, and governance. Within this context, planned socialist cities can also be interpreted as complex socio-spatial systems in which material structures, historical memory, divergent interpretations of the past, territorial identity, and contemporary development needs intersect.

Formulation of the Conceptual Model

The conceptual framework establishes the theoretical and methodological foundation for the empirical section of a scientific article. Individual theoretical concepts serve not only an interpretive function but also provide the basis for operationalising the phenomena under investigation, formulating research questions and hypotheses, and selecting appropriate research methods. Their operationalisation enables theoretical categories to be transformed into empirically measurable dimensions and indicators, thereby creating a link between the theoretical and empirical components of the research.

The first theoretical starting point is Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, which is translated in the empi-

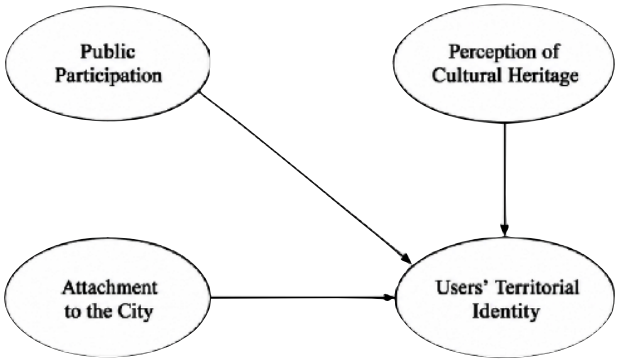
rical research into a historical-spatial analysis of the architectural and urban complex of Nová Dubnica. Attention is focused on the evolution of the town's urban structure, the relationship between the material form of space and the planning and ideological representations of socialist urbanism, and the ways in which space is used, interpreted, and socially reproduced. This analytical perspective makes it possible to examine the historically formed spatial structure as a foundation for contemporary processes of interpreting, preserving, and managing cultural heritage.

The second theoretical starting point is the concept of territorial capital, which enables the identification of a territory's tangible and intangible resources and the analysis of cultural heritage as a component of its development potential. In the empirical part of the study, this concept is operationalised through the identification of tangible and intangible elements of territorial capital, the analysis of strategic and planning documents, and the assessment of opportunities to activate these resources for cultural heritage conservation, sustainable management, and the sustainable development of the territory. Particular attention is devoted to the relationships among the territory's cultural values, institutional capacities, social resources, and the city's development potential.

The third theoretical starting point is the concept of territorial identity, which provides a framework for examining the relationship between users and the city, particularly its architectural and urban environment. In the empirical part of the study, this concept is operationalised through an analysis of place attachment, identification with the city, perceptions of its cultural and spatial values, and attitudes towards cultural heritage. These dimensions are examined primarily through a questionnaire survey and, within a broader interpretive context, are compared with qualitative findings from the empirical research.

The fourth theoretical starting point is participatory cultural heritage management, which provides an analytical framework for examining the cultural heritage governance system within the context of a planned city. In the empirical part of the study, this framework is operationalised through the identification of key stakeholders, analysis of their roles and mutual cooperation, examination of users' attitudes towards participation, and assessment of the conditions and barriers affecting their involvement in processes of cultural heritage protection, interpretation, and management. This analytical dimension also encompasses an assessment of the potential for applying heritage governance principles and transitioning from predominantly institution-led protection towards more participatory forms of cultural heritage management.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Source: own research results

Based on the theoretical and methodological premises outlined above, an empirical research methodology was designed, grounded in the principle of methodological triangulation (see Figure 1).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The aim of the scientific article is to identify and quantify the key factors determining public participation in regional territorial development. The research was conducted in the first half of the 2026 calendar year in the Slovak Republic.

Data collection

The aforementioned theoretical-methodological definition of the domains under study served as the direct basis for designing and constructing the measurement instrument used to collect primary data. The individual dimensions-territorial identity, perception of cultural heritage, civic participation, and assessment of city management-were operationalized into specific indicators and measurable questionnaire items. This approach enabled the collection of empirical data required to subsequently verify structural relationships and evaluate the established research hypotheses.

In the initial phase, the questionnaire was developed based on a critical literature review, the practical experience of key municipal representatives, and the scientific expertise of the authors. Since the authors, who are practicing architects, reside directly in the region, they possessed deep contextual insight. These factors were also reflected in the pilot study, which engaged not only local residents but also key decision-makers responsible for the overall development of the territory. This scientific article is part of the dissemination activities for the international research project titled "Analysis of the cultural heritage management of the architectural and urban complex of Socialist Realist development in Nová Dubnica (N.D.)".

The output of the first phase was the refinement of the questionnaire to enhance its clarity and comprehension for both local residents and visitors. Subsequently, the primary data collection was executed. Respondents were selected using a random sampling approach. Data collection was conducted via an online questionnaire, with respondents being contacted in person, by telephone, and via email. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and the questionnaire was administered in the Slovak language. The questionnaire was created in Slovakia. An analysis of the sample size confirmed that the total of 453 participants was sufficient for conducting and evaluating the quantitative research.

The sample size exceeded the minimum required threshold for the research sample. Demographic characteristics of the respondents were also recorded to enhance the representativeness of the sample. Over 9.5% of the approached respondents completed the questionnaire, which corresponds to the average response rate for quantitative survey-based research. On the other hand, the overall response rate remained higher than the standard margin of error (5%).

Questionnaire and variables

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 25 questions. It was composed of several distinct sections: demographic characteristics (4 items); statements regarding the following factors: i. territorial identity of space users (5 items); ii. attachment to the city (5 items); iii. perception of cultural heritage (6 items); and public participation (5 items). The statements in the questionnaire were selected randomly. The questionnaire was administered via computer. It included a control statement to verify the consistency of the participants' attitudes. The statements were rated using an identical 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, ..., 5 – strongly agree). The questionnaire contains the following statements:

Territorial identity of space users (TI): I have a personal connection to N.D. (TI1); I am glad to be connected to N.D. (TI2); N.D. is more to me than just a place to live or use services (TI3); I care about how N.D. develops in the future (TI4); I feel a responsibility to preserve the town's unique character (TI5).

Attachment to the city (AC): I feel comfortable in the center of N.D. (AC1); Some places in N.D. are personally important to me (AC2); I consider the city's public spaces an important part of life in N.D. (AC3); The square, pedestrian areas, and inner courtyards create a distinctive atmosphere in the city (AC4); N.D. is a place to which I have formed a bond (AC5).

Perception of cultural heritage (CH): The original architecture of N.D. possesses value that should be preserved (CH1); I consider the original layout of the town center to be of high quality even today (CH2); It is important to preserve the original appearance of the historic town center (CH3); Building renovations should respect their original architectural character (CH4); The public spaces of N.D. are an important part of its value (CH5); The architecture and urban design of N.D. can contribute to the town's development (CH6).

Public participation (PP): Residents should have the opportunity to express their views on significant changes in the town center (PP1); The public should be more involved in decision-making regarding the future of the heritage zone (PP2); I would be interested in participating in a discussion about the future of the N.D. town center (PP3); Cooperation between the town, experts, and residents can improve the protection of the historic center (PP4); Residents are familiar with the town's day-to-day issues, and their opinions should be taken into account during decision-making (PP5).

Statistical hypotheses and statistical methods

The following statistical hypotheses (SHs) were formulated to the aim of the scientific article:

- SH1: Territorial identity of space has a statistically significant positive effect on the public participation.
- SH2: Attachment to the city has a statistically significant positive effect on the public participation.
- SH3: Perception of cultural heritage has a statistically significant positive effect on the public participation.

Several statistical methods were employed to evaluate the formulated research hypotheses. In the first step, descriptive statistics were used to obtain an initial assessment of participants' attitudes toward selected questionnaire statements. In the second step, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire were verified. In the third step, confirmatory factor analysis was applied, followed by structural equation modeling (SEM). This method was selected to evaluate the significance of the proposed model (see Fig. 1) as a whole, quantify the relationships between factors, and identify the key factors determining public participation.

Structure of participants

The research sample consisted of 453 participants (n = 453) who participated in a survey focused on issues of territorial identity, the perception of cultural heritage, and cultural heritage management. The structure of participants are presents in the table 1.

Table 1: Demographics structure of participants

Demographic characteristics	Absolute perception	Relative perception
Gender		
Women	214	47.2%
Male	231	51.0%
I do not wish to state	8	1.8%
The highest education level		
Basic education	36	7.9 %
Secondary education	174	38.4 %
University education (1st level)	71	15.7 %
University education (2st level	153	33.8 %
University education (3st level	19	4.2%
Age		
18-35 years old	120	26.5%
36-55 years old	202	44.6%
56 and more years	131	28.9%
Relationships with city		
I live in the historic part of the town	67	14.8 %
I live in another part of N.D.	52	11.5 %
I work or run a business in N.D.	51	11.3 %

I regularly use the town's services	26	5.7 %
I visit the town occasionally	257	56.7 %

Source: own research results

RESULTS

The basic evaluation of items using the descriptive characteristics (as is mean (M), standard error (SE), standard deviation (SD), standard variance (SV), kurtosis (K), and skewness (S)) are present in the Tab. 2.

The basic descriptive statistics (see Table 2; M values) indicated that the research participants showed the highest level of agreement with the statements associated with the PP factor. Another finding was that the greatest variability in participants' responses was observed for the TI factor (see Table 2; SE and SD values). Furthermore, the skewness and kurtosis values suggest that the assumption of normal distribution was satisfied (see Table 2; S and K values), as all values fell within the acceptable range of −2 to +2.

The results of verification of reliability and validity (item loading (IL), correlation item-total correlation (CI-TC), communalities (C), Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), average variance explained (AVE)) are presented in table 3.

The results (see Table 3) confirmed that the constructs (TI, AC, CH, PP) exhibit good to very good composite reliability, as the CR values are higher than the recommended threshold of 0.700. Furthermore, the findings (see Table 3) indicate convergent validity, since the AVE values exceed 0.500. Internal consistency is also good to very good, as evidenced by the CA values.

The results of verification confirmation factor analysis (IL, C) and verification of multicollinearity (using Variance Inflation factor (VIF)) are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Rotated factor matrix, multicollinearity and communalities

Items	Factors				VIF	C
	TI	CH	PP	AC		
TI1	0.871				3.145	0.845
TI2	0.861				4.778	0.832
TI3	0.888				3.312	0.866
TI4	0.786	0.329			4.000	0.775
TI5	0.823				4.047	0.786
AC1				0.604	2.988	0.795
AC2				0.812	4.259	0.793
AC3		0.350		0.654	3.895	0.810
AC4		0.385		0.519	3.412	0.817
AC5				0.845	4.022	0.829
CH1	0.333	0.780			3.472	0.781
CH2	0.428	0.750			3.543	0.784
CH3		0.810			3.747	0.807
CH4		0.813			3.149	0.771
CH5		0.812			3.742	0.808
CH6	0.314	0.791			3.366	0.780
PP1			0.782		2.092	0.680
PP2			0.833		2.510	0.762
PP3	0.573		0.529		1.765	0.691
PP4			0.807		2.545	0.744
PP5			0.774		2.083	0.722

Note: IL value is presented if the values is higher than 0.300. Extraction method: Principal components analysis (PCA). Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Source: own research results

The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed strong relationships between the observed items and their respective latent factors. The proposed measurement model accounted for 78.4% of the total variance in the questionnaire items. Specifically: TI – 33.4% variance; CH – 23.2% variance; PP – 16.1% variance and AC – 5,7% of variance. Eigenvalues after rotation is as follows: TI – 7.009; CH – 4.882; PP – 3.379 and AC – 1.205. The VIF values of the items (see Table 4) indicated the absence of problematic multicollinearity. Therefore, the undesirable effect of multicollinearity was rejected.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker (FL) criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT; see Table 5).

The discriminant validity assessment based on the FL criterion and HTMT ration demonstrated satisfactory results (see Table 5). Specifically, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded its correlations with all other constructs. These findings indicate that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs, thereby confirming adequate discriminant validity of the measurement model.

The next figure (see Figure 2) presents the empirical results of causal relationships between selected factors (latent variables; PP – dependent latent factor; TI, AC, CH – independent latent factors).

SEM model has a following characteristics (see figure 2): 231 number of distinct sample moments; 44 number of distinct parameters to be estimated; 187 degree of freedom. SEM model contains the following type of variables: 46 – variables in the model; 21 observed variables; 25 unobserved variables; 24 exogenous variables; 22 endogenous variables. The evaluation of quality of SEM model with using FIT summary characteristics are present in table 6.

The results reported in Table 6 suggest that the proposed SEM model exhibits satisfactory reliability and can be considered appropriate for testing the hypothesized relationships. All assessed fit summary indices were above their respective minimum recommended values, providing evidence of an adequate overall model fit. Consequently, the proposed model may be regarded as statistically acceptable and theoretically justified.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of items in the questionnaire

DS	TI1	TI2	TI3	TI4	TI5	AC1	AC2	AC3	AC4	AC5
M	3.316	3.419	3.221	3.742	3.364	3.667	3.435	3.713	3.815	3.331
SE	0.067	0.063	0.067	0.059	0.062	0.052	0.062	0.048	0.051	0.063
SD	1.423	1.334	1.424	1.249	1.316	1.102	1.325	1.031	1.075	1.347
SV	2.026	1.779	2.026	1.559	1.732	1.214	1.755	1.063	1.156	1.815
K	-1.144	-0.957	-1.168	-1.402	-0.854	-0.360	-0.902	0.012	0.318	-1.001
S	-0.338	-0.402	-0.251	-0.768	-0.449	-0.587	-0.452	-0.607	-0.870	-0.379
DS	**CH1**	**CH2**	**CH3**	**CH4**	**CH5**	**CH6**	**PP1**	**PP2**	**PP3**	**PP4**	**PP5**
M	3.978	3.786	4.057	4.192	3.982	3.985	4.265	4.079	3.055	4.146	3.914
SE	0.051	0.051	0.052	0.049	0.053	0.051	0.050	0.046	0.064	0.049	0.052
SD	1.079	1.083	1.108	1.037	1.131	1.084	1.056	0.983	1.360	1.044	1.113
SV	1.163	1.173	1.227	1.076	1.278	1.175	1.116	0.967	1.849	1.089	1.238
K	0.084	-0.769	0.368	1.068	0.082	0.073	1.658	0.307	-1.093	1.203	-0.049
S	-0.870	-0.406	-1.036	-1.275	-0.943	-0.881	-1.507	-0.917	-0.063	-1.315	-0.874

Note: DS – Descriptive statistics. Source: own research results

Table 3: Reliability and validity of items in the questionnaire

Items	Territorial identity of space users					Attachment to the city				
	TI1	TI2	TI3	TI4	TI5	AC1	AC2	AC3	AC4	AC5
IL	0.931	0.924	0.936	0.891	0.902	0.867	0.878	0.899	0.864	0.877
CI-TC	0.890	0.879	0.898	0.831	0.846	0.785	0.813	0.831	0.776	0.811
C	0.866	0.853	0.876	0.795	0.814	0.752	0.771	0.809	0.746	0.768
CA			0.952					0.921		
CR			0.964					0.944		
AVE			0.841					0.769		
Items	**Perception of cultural heritage**						**Public participation**			
	CH1	CH2	CH3	CH4	CH5	CH6	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5
IL	0.884	0.878	0.896	0.870	0.897	0.882	0.801	0.866	0.631	0.860	0.815
CI-TC	0.830	0.822	0.846	0.811	0.848	0.828	0.648	0.756	0.485	0.748	0.680
C	0.781	0.771	0.803	0.756	0.805	0.778	0.642	0.750	0.398	0.740	0.664
CA			0.944						0.843		
CR			0.956						0.883		
AVE			0.782						0.607		

Source: own research results

Table 5: Rotated factor matrix, multicollinearity and communalities

Factors	Fornell-Larcker criterion				Factors	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio			
	TI	CH	PP	AC		TI	CH	PP	AC
TI	0.914				TI	1			
CH	0.703	0.908			CH	0.852	1		
PP	0.820	0.751	0.976		PP	0.870	0.890	1	
AC	0.857	0.842	0.730	0.977	AC	0.807	0.884	0.844	1

Source: own research results

Table 6: Fit summary characteristics

Summary FIT	Chi-square	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	NFI	RMR
SEM model	0.038	1.964	0.043	0.977	0.979	0.909	0.044
MV	<0.05	<-2.0;2.0>	<0;0.05>	<0.95	<0.95	<0.90	<0;0.05>

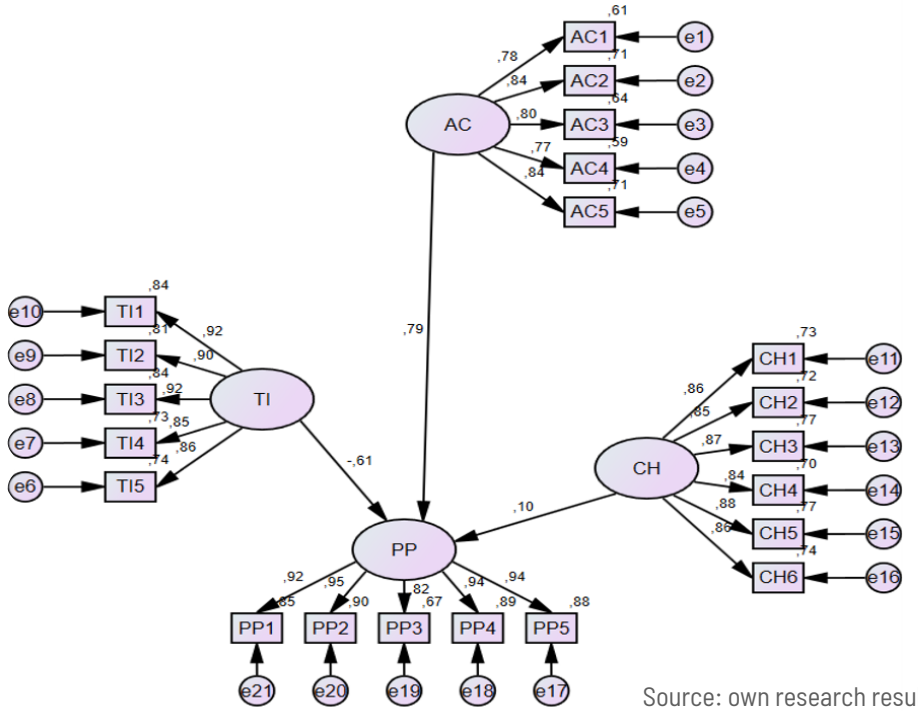
Note: Minimum values (MV) of Summary Fit Characteristics: GFI - Goodness of Fit; CMIN/DF – The minimum discrepancy; CFI - Comparative Fit index; RMSEA - Roat Mean Square Error of Approximation; NFI - Normed fit index. Source: own research results.

Table 7: Verification of causal relationships between factors (direct effects)

SH	Direct causal relationship	Estimates (β)		Standard error	t-test	p-value	Verification of SHs
		Unstand.	Stand.				
SH1	TI –> PP	1.041	0.612	0.042	24.622	0.000***	Supported
SH2	AC –> PP	1.766	0.798	0.078	22.605	0.000***	Supported
SH3	CH –> PP	0.211	0.104	0.034	6.251	0.000***	Supported

Note: SH – Statistical hypothesis; β – estimation of coefficient; Unstad. – Unstandardised estimation; Stand. – Standardised estimation; * α = 0.05; ** α = 0.01; *** α = 0.001. Source: own research results.

Figure 2: SEM model with standardized path estimations



Source: own research results

The evaluation of hypothesis are present in table 7.

All tested statistical hypotheses were significant at the α = 0.001 significance level. The hypothesized causal relationships between the independent constructs (TI, AC, and CH) and the dependent construct (PP) were supported. Therefore, statistical hypotheses SH1, SH2, and SH3 were accepted.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the quantitative research support the theoretical assumptions according to which the relationship between territorial identity, perceptions of cultural heritage, and the management of architectural and urban heritage represents a complex socio-spatial process. This process cannot be explained solely through traditional approaches based on the legislative protection of heritage sites (Colomer, 2024). The findings are consistent with contemporary theoretical approaches in critical heritage studies, according to which cultural heritage is not created exclusively through expert assessments of historical objects (Hidalgo-Sánchez et al., 2022), but also through social interpretation, the everyday use of space, and the relationships between local communities and the territories they inhabit (Augustiniok et al., 2025).

One of the significant findings of the study is the predominantly positive perception of the architectural and urban values of Nová Dubnica. Respondents strongly supported the protection of the original architecture, preservation of the urban structure, respect for the architectural character of buildings during renovation, and the importance of public spaces. Consequently, the town's architectural and urban heritage is currently perceived not merely as an object of cultural and historical preservation (Freire, 2026), but also as an integral component of its identity, the quality of the urban environment, and its development potential (Juliana et al., 2025). These empirical findings are consistent with the theoretical assumptions of values-based heritage management, which emphasises the importance of socially constructed values in the protection and management of cultural heritage.

The results also confirmed the importance of selected aspects of territorial identity in relation to respondents' attitudes towards cultural heritage. Statistically significant positive relationships were identified between indicators of territorial identity and support for the protection of the architectural and urban heritage of the historic city centre. Within the SEM model, respondents' interest in the further development of the city and their sense of personal responsibility for preserving its distinctive character emerged as particularly important predictors of support for heritage protection. Selected aspects of territorial identity were also significantly associated with respondents' declared personal interest in participation. These findings are consistent with the partial conclusions reported by Šegota et al. (2024) and Gursoy et al. (2019).

However, the quantitative analysis did not reveal a statistically significant predictive relationship between the observed indicators of institutional communication and respondents' declared personal interest in participation. This result highlights the need to distinguish between factors associated with personal willingness to participate and the systemic conditions under which participation takes place. In the context of the study area, institutional communication therefore did not emerge as an independent statistically significant predictor of declared personal interest in participation (Datta, 2026).

The quantitative part of the research also highlighted the problem of fragmented cooperation and differing stake-

holder positions. Local government, heritage protection authorities, experts, property owners, investors, and the public participate in heritage protection processes with different competencies, resources, interests, and capacities to influence decision-making. These findings underline the need for more stable coordination mechanisms and a longer-term strategic framework (Dražeta et al., 2026) that would enable professional heritage protection to be integrated with the social, economic, and development needs of the city (Bugheanu et al., 2026).

Respondents do not perceive architectural and urban cultural heritage merely as an object of preservation but also recognise its development potential. This finding supports the concept of territorial capital, within which cultural heritage can be understood as a resource capable of strengthening territorial identity, urban attractiveness, social cohesion, and cultural and economic development. Realising this potential requires the integration of cultural heritage preservation with strategic and spatial planning (Mareï & Heitz, 2026), the creation of appropriate economic and institutional conditions, the development of professional capacities, and the active involvement of relevant stakeholders (Mehta et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this scientific article was to identify and quantify the key factors determining public participation in regional territorial development.

The main finding of the research is that the territorial identity of space users, attachment to the city, and perceptions of cultural heritage represent statistically significant determinants of public participation.

By integrating cultural heritage and regional development, the study addresses the fragmentation identified in the existing literature and quantifies the relationships among the examined constructs through a validated structural model. A key theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating the role of civic participation as an important mechanism linking heritage-related factors with broader socio-economic development outcomes. The application of the model in the Slovak Republic further provides evidence from the specific post-transformation context of Central and Eastern European countries, thereby extending the empirical basis of participatory approaches to cultural heritage management. From a methodological perspective, the study contributes through the validation of measurement models for latent variables and provides a basis for further quantitative research in regional and heritage studies.

The empirical findings are relevant to local and national authorities as well as business support organisations, as they indicate underutilised potential in linking cultural heritage management with the active involvement of local residents. The findings may also be relevant to business entities, since activities associated with stronger public participation in the local environment, when combined with cultural heritage, may contribute to competitive advantage and enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The study has several limitations. First, the geographical scope was limited, as respondents were drawn from a single country. Second, the findings were based on respondents' subjective attitudes and perceptions. Third, the hypotheses were verified using a limited range of statistical techniques. Fourth, data were collected through an online questionnaire, which may have influenced the composition of the sample. Finally, given the breadth and complexity of the topic, a single period of data collection provides only a partial view of the relationships examined.

Future research should therefore extend data collection to other countries in the region, include larger and more diverse samples, and adopt a longitudinal design covering multiple time periods. An equally important direction for future research is to link the examined relationships with regional economic indicators, the business and economic potential of individual regions, and the sustainable development of both regional and national economies.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Conceptualization, J.B. and P.B.; methodology, M.R.; software, M.R.; validation, J.B..; formal analysis, P.B.; investigation, J.B., resources, J.B. and P.B.; data curation, M.R.; writing – original draft preparation, J.B., P.B. and M.R.; writing – review and editing, J.B.; visualization, P.B.; supervision, J.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

No primary participant data were generated. All synthesized evidence comes from publicly available publications cited in the manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AI DISCLOSURE

OpenAI Codex (GPT-5) was used for language editing, document formatting, visualization editing and consistency checks. The authors verified all AI-assisted output and final wording and retain full responsibility for the originality, accuracy and integrity of the submitted manuscript.

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