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## THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL HERITAGE EDUCATION TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL PARTICIPATION BASED ON THE KNOWLEDGE AND OPINIONS OF LOCAL PEOPLE

*O POTENCIAL DA EDUCAÇÃO DO PATRIMÔNIO CULTURAL PARA FORTALECER A PARTICIPAÇÃO SOCIAL A PARTIR DO CONHECIMENTO E DAS OPINIÕES DAS POPULAÇÕES LOCAIS*

*EL POTENCIAL DE LA EDUCACIÓN SOBRE EL PATRIMONIO CULTURAL PARA FORTALECER LA PARTICIPACIÓN SOCIAL BASADA EN EL CONOCIMIENTO Y LAS OPINIONES DE LA POBLACIÓN LOCAL*

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**ABSTRACT:** The article defines culture as the distinctive way of life, thought, and traditions that shape a society's identity. Cultural heritage education aims to preserve and transmit these values to future generations by engaging with historical sites, language, local traditions, and cultural diversity. Social participation, understood as individuals' active involvement in societal processes, plays a crucial role in safeguarding cultural elements, while cultural heritage education provides the knowledge needed to sustain them. Together, they strengthen belonging and responsibility toward cultural preservation. The study investigates the relationship between cultural heritage education and social participation, examining whether such education enhances community involvement. Residents of Nicosia, Famagusta, Kyrenia, and Güzelyurt participated, using a structured interview form for data collection. Findings show that participants possess limited knowledge of cultural heritage education yet receiving it increases awareness and fosters greater social participation.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural heritage education. Strengthen social participation. Knowledge.

**RESUMO:** O artigo define cultura como o modo de vida, pensamento e tradições distintivos que moldam a identidade de uma sociedade. A educação para o patrimônio cultural visa preservar e transmitir esses valores às gerações futuras por meio do contato com sítios históricos, idioma, tradições locais e diversidade cultural. A participação social, entendida como o envolvimento ativo dos indivíduos nos processos sociais, desempenha um papel crucial na salvaguarda dos elementos culturais, enquanto a educação para o patrimônio cultural fornece o conhecimento necessário para sustentá-los. Juntos, esses elementos fortalecem o senso de pertencimento e a responsabilidade em relação à preservação cultural. O estudo investiga a relação entre a educação para o patrimônio cultural e a participação social, examinando se essa educação aumenta o envolvimento da comunidade. Moradores de Nicósia, Famagusta, Kyrenia e Güzelyurt participaram do estudo, utilizando um formulário de entrevista estruturada para a coleta de dados. Os resultados mostram que os participantes possuem conhecimento limitado sobre educação para o patrimônio cultural, mas que recebê-la aumenta a conscientização e promove maior participação social.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação em patrimônio cultural. Fortalecimento da participação social. Conhecimento.

**RESUMEN:** El texto define la cultura como el estilo de vida, el pensamiento y las tradiciones distintivos que configuran la identidad de una sociedad. La educación sobre el patrimonio cultural busca preservar y transmitir estos valores a las generaciones futuras mediante la interacción con los sitios históricos, el idioma, las tradiciones locales y la diversidad cultural. La participación social, entendida como la participación activa de los individuos en los procesos sociales, desempeña un papel crucial en la salvaguarda de los elementos culturales, mientras que la educación sobre el patrimonio cultural proporciona el conocimiento necesario para mantenerlos. Juntos, fortalecen la pertenencia y la responsabilidad hacia la preservación cultural. El estudio investiga la relación entre la educación sobre el patrimonio cultural y la participación social, examinando si dicha educación mejora la participación comunitaria. Participaron residentes de Nicosia, Famagusta, Kyrenia y Güzelyurt, utilizando un formulario de entrevista estructurada para la recopilación de datos. Los hallazgos muestran que los participantes poseen un conocimiento limitado de la educación sobre el patrimonio cultural, pero recibirla aumenta la conciencia y fomenta una mayor participación social.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación sobre el patrimonio cultural. Fortalecimiento de la Participación social. Conocimiento.

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## INTRODUCTION

Culture, one of the most fundamental elements of social order, is also a multi-layered concept that shapes the beliefs, traditions, and value systems of nations. The idea of culture has a multidimensional scope. As one of the fundamental building blocks of societies, culture can be seen as a set of values. Culture is also a perception of artifacts, products, and life (Çakırca, 2020, p. 189). Culture is a shared memory and way of life that gives societies their national character, distinguishing them from other nations. This national character is significantly shaped by cultural heritage, which nourishes collective consciousness with values from the past and reinforces social belonging. It stands out in this context as an element that ensures the continuity of culture.

Cultural heritage encompasses a wide range of areas, including archaeology, traditional handicrafts, language and literature, historical structures, and cultural events. Cultural heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible aspects of culture. Tangible or material heritage refers to things that can be physically touched, such as monuments, buildings, paintings, and objects. Intangible heritage, on the other hand, refers to cultural values such as music, dance, literature, religious ceremonies, legends, epics, and stories that are passed down from generation to generation and that societies carry from the past into the present (Öztürk et al., 2021, p. 176).

Preserving these heritage values and passing them on to future generations is of great importance for the preservation of social memory and the sustainability of culture. The “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” adopted by UNESCO in 2003, includes not only the protection of these heritage values but also their preservation and transmission to future generations. In 2003, UNESCO adopted the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.” Turkey became a party to this convention in 2006 and began contributing to efforts aimed at preserving and protecting intangible cultural heritage. The agreement ensures that all cultural elements are valued equally.

On the other hand, the convention emphasizes the idea that cultural values are not only the product of the country in which they are located, but also a standard product of all humanity (Soylu & Şahin, 2023, p. 360). Therefore, supporting the healthy transmission of cultural heritage to future generations is of great importance today, not only through specific conservation policies but also through educational activities. This is where cultural heritage education comes into play. Cultural heritage education aims to introduce individuals to their own culture and transmit it to future generations. Furthermore, by providing individuals with the opportunity to understand their roots by exposing their past, cultural heritage education strengthens the sense of belonging of people living within society and fosters a stronger connection to the values of the region they live in. Generations receiving

education become more active citizens by participating in various civil society organizations to preserve these values.

Furthermore, social bonds are strengthened through cultural heritage education, as individuals become more aware of their heritage and participate in various activities related to their own culture. This educational process encompasses fundamental objectives such as raising awareness of cultural heritage, redefining values, and strengthening intergenerational communication. It is an essential element for the sustainability and preservation of cultural heritage.

The globalization process, which is now unstoppable, is increasingly viewed as a threat, particularly to local cultures and traditions. "Globalization can homogenize local cultures and lead to the loss of cultural values and identities" (Akbaş, 2024, p. 2). In this context, ensuring the sustainability of cultural heritage is not solely the responsibility of those working in this field or government institutions. The inclusion of all segments of society in the process is crucial for the sustainability of cultural heritage. In this context, social participation requires the involvement of individuals and communities in cultural decision-making, planning, and implementation processes. "The inclusion of local people in the process and their conscious action are crucial for the transmission of cultural heritage and natural structures to future generations" (Güneş et al., 2019, p. 2). Such participatory approaches help share cultural heritage with broader audiences. It also plays a critical role in strengthening cultural identity.

This research was conducted to demonstrate the impact of cultural heritage education on social participation and, consequently, its importance in preserving culture and passing it on to future generations. Within the scope of the research, the concepts of culture and cultural heritage will be examined within the framework of conservation and sustainability principles, drawing on the views of local people. The role of cultural heritage education in this process will be thoroughly evaluated.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research model*

In this study, which employed a mixed-methods approach, data were collected using 10 quantitative and two qualitative questions.

Mixed methodology is a method in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected, and both designs are used together. In this method, where two designs are used in a single study, the aim is to provide a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by utilizing the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative designs. (Alkan et al., 2019)

## Sample

The research sample consisted of 45 individuals residing in various regions of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The selection of 45 participants provides a suitable framework for both identifying general trends and examining individual opinions in depth. Furthermore, 45 participants are enough participants to achieve data saturation in a semi-structured interview.

## Data collection and analysis

An interview form was used to obtain data that will form the basis of the research. The interview form consisted of 10 structured questions and two semi-structured questions prepared by the researchers. Six of the structured questions had three options, and four had five options, with participants asked to select the option they considered correct. The semi-structured questions sought the opinions of local people about cultural heritage and social participation. After the survey questions were prepared, opinions were obtained from two experts (tourism and folklorists), and the survey was restructured based on these opinions.

Descriptive analysis was employed to analyze the obtained data, and descriptive statistics were utilized to quantify the findings. The purpose of a descriptive study is to present the findings to the reader in an organized and interpreted form.

## RESULTS

Tables (1 to 10) were prepared based on the participants' responses to the questions developed by the researchers, and the obtained data were analyzed and interpreted. The study's qualitative data are also presented at the end.

### Quantitative data of the study

**Table 1**

*Have you ever received training on cultural heritage?*

	f	%
Yes	14	31.1
No	22	48,9
I'm thinking of getting an education.	9	20

Note. Elaborated by authors.

The 48.9% of survey participants reported that they had not received any cultural heritage training prior to the survey. 31.1% of survey participants stated that they had received

cultural heritage training. The number of participants who expressed interest in receiving cultural heritage training was 20%. This suggests that some participants who had not received training also have an interest in cultural heritage.

**Table 2**

*Do you have information about cultural heritage training?*

	f	%
Yes, I have detailed information.	8	17,8
I have partial information.	31	68,9
No, I have no information.	6	13.3

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

Only 17.8% of the individuals surveyed have detailed information about cultural heritage. 68.9% of participants indicated that they have partial information. Only 13.3% of participants were uninformed. These data suggest that a large proportion of participants in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus have a general understanding of cultural heritage education.

**Table 3**

*Does cultural heritage education raise public awareness about heritage?*

	f	%
Yes	42	93,3
No	0	0
I'm not sure.	3	6.7

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

The data obtained from the survey show that 93.3% of participants agree that cultural heritage education will raise greater public awareness about heritage. 6.7% of participants are unresponsive to whether the training in question raises public awareness about heritage.

**Table 4**

*Does receiving cultural heritage education make one feel more connected to cultural values?*

	f	%
Yes	32	71.1
No	3	6.7
Partially	10	22.2

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

The 71.1% of participants believe that cultural heritage education increases commitment to cultural values. 6.7% of survey participants stated that cultural heritage education has no impact on individuals' commitment to cultural values. The remaining 22.2% believe that cultural heritage education partially increases commitment to cultural values. This data also demonstrates the crucial importance of cultural heritage education in fostering cultural awareness.

**Table 5**

*Do you think cultural heritage education increases social participation?*

	f	%
Yes	38	84,4
No	1	2.2
I'm undecided.	6	13.3

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

The 84.4% of the participants who responded to this question believe that cultural heritage education plays a crucial role in promoting social participation. However, 2.2% of the participants in the survey believe that heritage education does not increase social participation. The remaining 6 participants (13.3%) are undecided about whether cultural heritage education increases social participation.

**Table 6**

*Do individuals become more willing to participate in cultural activities after cultural heritage education?*

	f	%
Yes	35	77,8
No	3	6.7
Partially	7	15,6

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

The 77.8% of the survey participants believe that individuals who receive cultural heritage education are more likely to participate in cultural activities. However, 15.6% of the participants are undecided on this issue. Three respondents (6.7%) who responded to this question believed that cultural heritage education did not increase their desire to participate in cultural activities. Based on the data obtained from the study, it is found that as people become more informed about their own cultural values, their desire to participate in cultural activities also increases.

**Table 7**

*To whom should this type of training be provided?*

	f	%
To the students	6	13.3
To the Adults	7	15,6
To the Public personnel	4	8,9
To the civil society organizations	6	13.3
To all segments of society	41	91,1

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

A careful examination of Table 7 reveals that a very high percentage of participants (91.1%) believe that all segments of society should receive cultural heritage education. This result reflects a general awareness of the importance of cultural heritage education. Some residents who participated in the study stated that this training should be provided to adults, others to students and civil society organizations, while still others suggested it should be offered to public personnel.

**Table 8**

*What do you consider "cultural heritage education"?*

	f	%
This is a specialized training program that provides technical information solely on the preservation of historical artifacts.	1	2.2
This is a course that covers the presentation of historical information in school textbooks.	0	0
This is a specialized training program provided only to those who work as guides in museums.	0	0
This is education provided to help society recognize, understand, and pass on cultural values to future generations.	43	95,6
This includes all activities aimed at learning traditional clothing, food, and dance.	1	2.2

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

A careful examination of the responses to this question reveals that almost all participants (95.6%) are knowledgeable about cultural heritage education. This data demonstrates that nearly all participants are vastly knowledgeable about the elements covered by cultural heritage education. However, it is also observed that there are participants (4.4%) who believe that the scope of this training is solely related to history, traditional clothing, food, and dance.



**Table 9***What do you think "social participation" is?*

	f	%
Exercising political rights, such as voting only during election periods.	0	0
It is the active participation of individuals in decision-making, planning, implementation, and evaluation processes related to society.	40	88,9
Participating in every government event as an observer is sufficient.	1	2.2
Sharing opinions on social media is sufficient for social participation.	2	4.4
Social participation refers only to working in volunteer organizations.	2	4.4

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

Regarding this question, which aimed to measure individuals' knowledge levels about social participation, 88.9% of the survey participants correctly answered the option: "Social participation is the active participation of individuals in decision-making, planning, implementation, and evaluation processes related to society." However, it was observed that five people were not knowledgeable about the scope of social participation.

**Table 10***Which do you think most accurately and comprehensively defines the relationship between cultural heritage and social participation?*

	f	%
Public participation is participating in cultural heritage events as an audience.	0	0
The protection of cultural heritage belongs to experts; the public does not need to participate in this process.	1	2.2
The process of protecting and preserving cultural heritage is possible with the active participation of the public; this participation also strengthens social belonging, responsibility, and solidarity.	43	95,6
Public participation is limited to social and political issues unrelated to cultural heritage.	1	2.2
Cultural heritage and public participation are two completely independent fields.	0	0

*Note.* Elaborated by authors.

Almost all participants (95.6%) correctly answered this question, saying, "The process of protecting and preserving cultural heritage is possible with the active participation of the public; this participation also strengthens social belonging, responsibility, and solidarity." Based on this answer, a significant proportion of participants are aware of the role and importance of the public in protecting and preserving cultural heritage. There are also very few participants who think that the protection of cultural heritage is a job for experts

(2.2%) and that social participation is limited to social and political issues unrelated to cultural heritage (2.2%).

## **DISCUSSION**

### *Sample participant views on what can be done to increase the social impact of cultural heritage education*

(P1) To increase the social impact of cultural heritage education, it is crucial to increase the number of cultural heritage-related courses in schools and to support these courses with practical, local examples. Furthermore, local governments, museums, and cultural offices need to organize public events, exhibitions, workshops, and talks to raise public awareness. Reaching young people through media, including documentaries, short films, and social media campaigns, will also be effective. Furthermore, spaces should be created where cultural heritage bearers (craftspeople, artists, folk storytellers, etc.) can share their experiences, and their inclusion in educational processes should be encouraged.

(P2) To increase the social impact of cultural heritage education, awareness can be raised through projects that involve local communities, such as cultural heritage festivals and restoration events.

(P3) Documentaries on this topic can be produced and broadcast on various television channels. Artists in the country who are well-respected by society can be asked to lend their support to this cause. Education can be provided in schools, starting from primary school, to ensure it is passed on to future generations. Additionally, cultural heritage tours can be organized. Finally, government officials responsible for cultural heritage should be qualified and passionate about their work.

(P5) Education programs should be expanded; in other words, organizing them in the form of trips would be a good idea. Additionally, activities such as volunteer projects can be organized, and the community can be encouraged to participate.

(P7) Cultural heritage should be introduced and instilled in individuals at a young age. This topic should be constantly addressed in schools and on trips.

(P21) To increase the social impact of cultural heritage education, this topic should be integrated into the educational curriculum, supported with practical and digital methods, local people and young people should be included in the process, collaboration should be established with NGOs and public institutions, media and art should be utilized, teachers should be trained, and inclusive projects should be developed.

(P27) Creating local projects and workshops. Students can be brought together with local communities to learn about and foster cultural values. Activities involving community

participation and volunteering can be organized. Citizens can be included in the process by creating community-based volunteer projects to preserve cultural heritage.

(P42) Interactive experiences about historical sites and artifacts can be offered through mobile applications and augmented reality technologies. Cultural heritage can be incorporated into school programs.

### *Participants' views on the responsibility they feel for protecting cultural values*

(P1) Yes, there is an individual responsibility to protect cultural values. Because cultural heritage is a shared value that every individual, not just the state or institutions, should defend. I strive to fulfill this responsibility by preserving our traditions and customs, supporting local products and handicrafts, participating in cultural events, and raising awareness in my community. I also take care not to damage cultural heritage sites, respect historical sites, and strive to raise awareness on these issues on social media.

(P3) I feel it. Because everyone may have different cultural values, but these values will persist as long as we pass them on to future generations. We have many values that are on the verge of being forgotten. We must protect these values and our culture, which reflect and express who we are.

(P4) I feel a responsibility. Culture is a nation itself, and this is the way for future generations to understand themselves and to keep their language and culture alive. As young people, we serve as a bridge to pass on the legacy we inherited from our ancestors to future generations. I see myself that way. Passing on cultural heritage to future generations and fostering a conscious youth is essential to me. Otherwise, we will be preparing for the collapse of a nation that has been destroyed over the years with our own hands.

(P6) Yes, I do. Preserving cultural values means protecting the past. It is our shared duty not to destroy that bridge between yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

(P12) I feel a sense of responsibility. Because it is in our power to pass on that heritage from one generation to the next, keeping it alive, culture defines the uniqueness of a nation, so every person should be aware of this and pass it on.

(P18) All individuals in society are responsible for preserving cultural values. Otherwise, as our cultural ties decline, we will create different experiences and new phenomena for future generations, depending on the country in which we live. We can undertake this responsibility by organizing an event at a school as part of our social responsibility. We can provide children, our future, with information not only through books but also through hands-on experiences, travel, and study, giving them responsibilities and passing on their cultural heritage to future generations.

(P30) Yes, I do. I strive to fulfill this responsibility by learning about traditions and customs, preserving them, and passing them on to future generations. I believe that maintaining cultural values in harmony with modern life is crucial for keeping our social identity.

## CONCLUSION

This study, which aimed to investigate the impact of cultural heritage education on social participation, yielded significant findings. It was determined that the local population participating in the study was generally aware of the importance of cultural heritage education; however, they had not received sufficient training in this area.

Based on the research findings, it was determined that the majority of the participants had not received any cultural heritage education and were only partially aware of it. It was determined that receiving cultural heritage education raises awareness about heritage and makes individuals more committed to cultural values. It was determined that cultural heritage education increases social participation and creates a sense of belonging to their country and culture. Individuals who receive cultural heritage education are more willing to participate in cultural activities. It was also determined that cultural heritage education should be provided to everyone in society. Based on the qualitative data, the participants are open to becoming more aware of cultural heritage education, but they have not received sufficient training.

A close examination of the opinions expressed by the individuals participating in the study reveals that, despite their lack of adequate training, they are generally both aware and sensitive about cultural heritage. It is safe to say that they place great importance on preserving historical awareness, including traditions, customs, handicrafts, and folklore, all elements of cultural heritage that form the cornerstones of society, and that they are knowledgeable about how to pass these on to future generations.

An examination of the responses to the last two questions reveals that the participants in the study proposed remarkable and highly effective methods to increase the impact of cultural heritage education. This is a significant indicator that the Turkish Cypriot community, in general, is continuously improving its knowledge in this area. Such conscious approaches create a considerable wealth in terms of cultural diversity and national identity and contribute to the sustainability of cultural heritage.

Based on the research results, we confidently state that cultural heritage education brings together different segments of society, fostering unity and solidarity around shared values and cultural elements. Such education, disseminated to the general public, increases individuals' interest in cultural heritage and encourages active participation. Thus, it contributes to the development of awareness and a sense of responsibility throughout society, ensuring

significant involvement in both the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. In conclusion, cultural heritage education plays a crucial role in both enhancing social awareness and conveying the cultural richness of relevant societies to future generations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Various measures can be taken to enhance the potential of cultural heritage education in strengthening social participation. These include:

- Integrating cultural heritage education into curricula starting from primary school;
- Organizing workshops and field trips on this topic for students;
- Introducing culture through drama and storytelling in schools;
- Providing in-service training on this topic, especially for teachers and some public officials.

When all these recommendations are considered and implemented, social participation in the context of cultural heritage can be easily increased. Through this increased social participation, cultural values can be more safely passed on to future generations.

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