

Community Participation in Sustainable Tourism Heritage Management: The Case of Cidade Velha, Cabo Verde

Participação Comunitária na Gestão do Património de Turismo Sustentável: O Caso de Cidade Velha, Cabo Verde

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the constraints on community participation in World Heritage and tourism management in Cidade Velha, Cabo Verde. It addresses a central question: to what extent does community participation influence the sustainable governance of World Heritage sites and local tourism development? The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating document analysis with a quantitative research approach where a survey was conducted among residents. We use maximum likelihood to estimate a structural equation model to assess the degree and effectiveness of community participation in the management and development of heritage-related tourism. The findings reveal a significant gap between institutional intentions and effective local engagement, suggesting considerable scope for improvement in participatory governance. Residents' evaluation of management depends not on the process of their own participation, but rather on the outcomes linked to heritage status. On the other hand, the perception of a well-managed site helps them to recognise the tourism impact on the population. The willingness to participate in future management initiatives operates independently of past habits or current management evaluations. This indicates that the community's desire to engage is likely driven by broader socio-economic realities and the pursuit of future tangible outcomes, rather than just a reward for good governance. Overall, the study highlights the potential of community-based and entrepreneurial approaches to strengthen heritage governance, foster sustainable tourism, and promote inclusive local development in Cidade Velha as a World Heritage site.

KEYWORDS: Cidade Velha; Community participation; Heritage governance; Sustainable tourism; World Heritage

RESUMO: O presente artigo analisa os constrangimentos à participação da comunidade na gestão do Património Mundial e do turismo na Cidade Velha, em Cabo Verde. Procura responder à seguinte questão central: em que medida a participação da comunidade influencia a governação sustentável dos sítios classificados como Património Mundial e o desenvolvimento do turismo local? O estudo adota uma metodologia mista, combinando a análise documental com uma abordagem quantitativa, através da aplicação de um inquérito por questionário aos residentes. Recorre-se ao método da máxima verosimilhança para estimar um modelo de equações estruturais, com o objetivo de avaliar o grau e a eficácia da participação da comunidade na gestão e no desenvolvimento do turismo associado ao património. Os resultados revelam uma discrepância significativa entre as intenções institucionais e o envolvimento efetivo da comunidade local, sugerindo uma ampla margem para o reforço da governação

participativa. A avaliação que os residentes fazem da gestão depende não do seu próprio processo de participação, mas dos resultados associados ao estatuto de Património Mundial. Por outro lado, a perceção de uma gestão eficaz do sítio contribui para que reconheçam o impacto do turismo na população. A disponibilidade para participar em futuras iniciativas de gestão manifesta-se de forma independente das experiências de participação anteriores ou da avaliação da gestão atual. Tal indica que a vontade da comunidade em envolver-se é impulsionada, sobretudo, por realidades socioeconómicas mais amplas e pela expectativa de benefícios concretos no futuro, mais do que pelo reconhecimento de uma boa governação. Em síntese, o estudo evidencia o potencial das abordagens baseadas na participação comunitária e no empreendedorismo para reforçar a governação do património, promover um turismo sustentável e fomentar um desenvolvimento local mais inclusivo na Cidade Velha enquanto sítio classificado como Património Mundial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cidade Velha; participação da comunidade; governação do património; turismo sustentável; Património Mundial.

Introduction

Since the inclusion of “community” as the fifth pillar of the strategic objectives of the World Heritage Convention in 2012, a range of local and global initiatives have emerged to strengthen the role of local communities in the management, preservation and conservation of heritage sites (UNESCO, 2012). Local communities are increasingly recognised as key actors in the governance of World Heritage sites, contributing directly to sustainable development (Brown & Hay-Edie, 2014).

Cidade Velha, located 12 km from the capital of Cabo Verde, is the urban centre of the municipality of Ribeira Grande de Santiago. Over the past three decades, both central and local authorities have implemented various participatory approaches aimed at improving the management of this national heritage site and World Heritage site, albeit with limited success. Since its designation as National Heritage in the early 1990s and its inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009, several national initiatives have sought to enhance community participation in its management.

Understanding the relationship between community participation, World Heritage, and tourism development is particularly relevant for small urban centres such as Cidade Velha, which, in addition to

being a World Heritage site, is located within a resource-constrained municipality. The local community faces significant socio-economic challenges, including limited income-generating opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and constraints on urban development and citizen empowerment, issues that are paradoxically intensified by the city's heritage status.

Community participation has long been at the heart of heritage governance debates, particularly since the seminal work of S. R. Arnstein (1969), who summarised the dilemma of participatory processes in her well-known phrase: "I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you participate, they profit". The call for citizen participation in heritage protection can be traced back to the 1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Article 5 of this Convention urges each State Party to "adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community" (UNESCO, 1972).

This principle establishes a reciprocal relationship: heritage should contribute to community life, while the community should actively engage in its protection and preservation. The idea was reinforced in the 1987 Washington Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas. Yet, for African societies, participatory governance is far from new, as it has deep pre-colonial roots in community assemblies and in the traditional role of elders as mediators of collective decision-making.

Tourism, described in the 1976 Brussels Charter as an "irreversible social, human, economic and cultural fact", constitutes a key vehicle for cultural exchange and an essential driver of sustainable development in heritage sites. In Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as Cabo Verde, where tourism remains the primary source of revenue, cultural, historical and archaeological tourism plays a crucial role in diversifying markets and generating fiscal space to support preservation policies. Nevertheless, tourism can also produce negative effects, such as environmental degradation, cultural commodification, or the erosion of local identity, when not managed sustainably.

The subject of this study lies at the intersection of politics, economics and sociology, more specifically within the field of tourism and heritage governance. Governance, as defined by R. A. W. Rhodes (1996), refers to "governing with and through networks", encompassing cooperative, inter-organisational relationships and decision-making processes that involve multiple economic, social and political actors in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public policies.

The World Bank (1992) defines governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development, later refined as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised (Kaufmann et al., 2010).

Tourism, on the other hand, is understood here in accordance with the UNWTO definition as the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of a remunerated activity within the place visited. As G. Lohmann and A. Panosso Netto (2017) emphasise, tourism is a socio-cultural phenomenon encompassing motivations, transport, accommodation, hospitality, and a wide range of economic, cultural, social and environmental interactions generated by human mobility.

Tourism in World Heritage contexts continues to expand, intensifying the need to better understand its patterns, drivers, and impacts on local economic development, as well as the role of community participation in heritage management. Integrating community participation into tourism and heritage governance represents a strategic pathway for communities in heritage sites to leverage tourism flows in support of social inclusion and sustainable development.

In this research, tourism is treated as a scientific field closely related to heritage science. Although tourism is a relatively recent area of academic inquiry, it has attracted increasing interdisciplinary attention since the early twentieth century (McMurry, 1930; Jones, 1933; Brown, 1935). Heritage science, meanwhile, emerged in the early 2000s as a cross-disciplinary field concerned with the study and preservation of cultural heritage (Strlič, 2018; Nanetti, 2021). The intersection of these two domains gives rise to heritage tourism, understood as visits to places that embody the past or relate to intangible cultural manifestations, a perspective that is central to this study.

1. Framework for Citizen Participation

Several theoretical perspectives have emerged to explain and classify models of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969; Barber, 1984; Pretty, 1995; Fung, 2006; Callahan, 2007; Fraser, 2005; Yung & Chan, 2011). These frameworks share a common concern: understanding how citizens engage in decision-making processes and how power, legitimacy, and inclusion are distributed within governance systems.

The theoretical foundation of citizen participation is often traced back to Arnstein's (1969) seminal "Ladder of Citizen Participation", which identifies eight levels of involvement, ranging from manipulation, a mere illusion of participation, to citizen control, where citizens hold full authority over policy and management decisions. Arnstein's typology remains a key reference for assessing the degree of genuine empowerment in participatory processes.

B. R. Barber (1984) views participation as an essential instrument of “strong democracy”. He argues that participatory politics enhance the moral force of communities, fostering civic virtue and a sense of collective responsibility. In contrast to thin democracy, where citizens’ engagement is limited to voting, strong democracy entails continuous and deliberative involvement, transforming private individuals into active citizens and private interests into public goods. J. N. Pretty (1995), working in the field of sustainable agriculture, proposes a seven-level typology of participation, ranging from manipulative and passive forms of participation to self-mobilisation, in which communities independently initiate and manage development processes. His framework underscores the progressive nature of participation and its close relation to empowerment and autonomy.

A. Fung (2006) develops an analytical framework for institutional design in participatory governance, structured around three key dimensions: who participates, how participants exchange information and make decisions, and how deliberation connects to policy outcomes. He identifies several mechanisms for participant selection, including self-selection, random selection, stakeholder representation, and professional recruitment, each influencing the inclusiveness and legitimacy of decision-making processes. H. Fraser (2005) introduces four approaches to community participation, namely service-based, organisation-based, community-based, and citizen-based. Each approach reflects a different distribution of power and representation, ranging from passive service recipients to active agents of social and political change.

The collaborative governance perspective extends these debates by shifting attention to the shared responsibilities of state and non-state actors in collective decision-making. C. Ansell and A. Gash (2007) define collaborative governance as a governing arrangement in which public organisations engage directly with non-state stakeholders in a formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative process. K. Emerson et al. (2012) refine this approach by emphasising inter-institutional learning, conflict resolution, and mechanisms that lower barriers to citizen collaboration. Nabatchi (2012) further integrates the concept of public value into participatory design, identifying eight key elements: level of cooperation, communication mode, degree of shared authority, participatory mechanisms, informational tools, participant selection, recruitment, and iteration.

Taken together, these frameworks illustrate that participation is not a single act but a multidimensional process that combines power-sharing, deliberation, and co-production of public outcomes. This conceptual foundation provides the analytical lens through which community participation in heritage and tourism governance in Cidade Velha is analysed in this study.

This article makes three original contributions to the literature on heritage governance and sustainable tourism. First, it provides one of the few empirical studies on community participation in a UNESCO World Heritage Site in a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), contributing evidence from the under-researched context of Cabo Verde. Second, it develops and tests an analytical model linking community involvement, perceptions of heritage management, perceived tourism impacts and willingness to participate through Structural Equation Modelling. Third, it demonstrates that residents' evaluations of heritage management are shaped less by procedural participation itself than by the tangible socio-economic outcomes associated with heritage status, challenging assumptions frequently found in participatory governance literature.

2. Empirics on Community Participation, World Heritage and Tourism Development

Building on the main theoretical approaches to citizen participation, this section examines the relationship between the three key dimensions of this study: community participation, World Heritage, and tourism development. Academic literature has highlighted the tensions between tourism-driven development and local socio-economic realities in Cidade Velha. J. Lopes and A. Pereira (2017) emphasise that, despite investments in heritage valorisation, local populations often derive limited and uneven benefits from tourism dynamics.

Citizen participation is widely recognised as a form of citizen power. The meaningful involvement of communities in both the preservation of World Heritage sites and the formulation of tourism policies enhances the legitimacy, effectiveness, and social value of public action. Building on the frameworks discussed above, this section develops an analytical foundation for understanding community participation in tourism development within heritage contexts such as Cidade Velha.

Since the adoption of the 1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 1976 Brussels Charter, the interaction between community participation and tourism in World Heritage sites has attracted increasing attention from both international organisations and academia. The 2025 UNESCO Operational Guidelines explicitly call on States Parties to adopt participatory approaches that strengthen the involvement of key stakeholders in site management and protection.

Cidade Velha, as an urban World Heritage site, presents a specific challenge: reconciling heritage conservation with urban development and community empowerment. The Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) (2017) defines community involvement in urban heritage as the active inclusion and

collaboration of people, institutions and organisations that are interested in, affected by, or responsible for urban heritage in its preservation, management and promotion for the benefit of local communities (Göttler & Ripp, 2017).

Academic literature on community participation in World Heritage management (Li et al., 2020a; González et al., 2018; Li et al., 2020b; Mokoena, 2017; Caneloro & Tartari, 2023) and tourism development (Simmons, 1994; Tosun, 2006; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Thetsane, 2019; Adebayo & Butcher, 2021) has expanded considerably over the past decade.

J. Li et al. (2020a), through a systematic review of 60 publications, compare Chinese and international practices in heritage management participation. P. A. González et al. (2018), within the ParticiPat project, examine participatory governance in Spanish heritage sites, highlighting how participation functions as an instrument of legitimacy and collaborative decision-making. In the African context, N. Mokoena (2017) explores community involvement in rural South Africa, while G. Caneloro and M. Tartari (2023) analyse how the community-based cooperative Vivi Calascio revitalised a rural area through heritage-led sustainable development.

Within tourism studies, D. G. Simmons (1994) examines public participation in tourism planning in Huron County, Canada, assessing citizen involvement through interviews, surveys, and focus groups. His three evaluation criteria - participation, efficiency, and output - provide a valuable framework for assessing participatory mechanisms. C. Tosun (2006), analysing the Turkish case of Cappadocia, investigates who should make decisions, how communities should be involved, and what roles they should play in tourism planning. His findings indicate that perceptions of participation vary according to actors' power and expectations: while local governments tend to support community engagement, central authorities and private stakeholders are less favourable. R. M. Thetsane (2019), in Lesotho, examines community perceptions of imposed roles in tourism planning, whereas A. Gampiccoli and M. Saayman (2018) link Community-Based Tourism (CBT) with the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model to explain evolving.

Several empirical analyses of the influence of community participation on heritage tourism management have emerged in recent years (Nian et al., 2022; Esichaikul & Chansawang, 2022; Wijayanti et al., 2023), as tourism has become a differentiated sector for heritage sites, and there are several challenges for their effective participation in sustainable tourism in developing countries (Reindrawati, 2023).

S. M. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) and M. M. Su and G. Wall (2014), examine community participation in heritage tourism in Iran and China, respectively, and C. Aas, A. Ladkin and J. Fletcher (2005) propose a collaborative model linking heritage management and tourism development, using Luang Prabang (Laos) as a case study. This integrative approach is particularly relevant for Cidade Velha, where tourism, heritage, and community coexist in a delicate balance that demands inclusive governance and sustainable strategies.

A. Wijayanti et al. (2023) explore six specific dimensions of perception, such as diversity of heritage, economic impact, conservation programmes, tourism experience, stakeholder engagement, and strategies of heritage tourism development. The study uses quantitative correlation in Banaran Village in Indonesia, finding that the participation of individuals was driven by the community's perception of management.

On the other hand, S. Nian et al. (2022) explore the satisfaction of tourism communities in World Heritage sites based on residents' perception of the Mount Sanqinshan National Park in China. The study of S. Nian et al. (2022) presents us with very interesting results: perception of benefits has a significant positive influence on place attachment and community satisfaction; the perceived cost has a significant negative influence on place attachment; and place attachment has a partial effect on tourism benefit and satisfaction, and a significant positive effect on community satisfaction.

Very similar to our study is the one by R. Esichaikul and R. Chansawang (2022), which, using a qualitative and quantitative research methodology, analyses community participation in cultural heritage management with regard to sustainable tourism management. Their results show that sustainable management of the Sukhothai Historical Park has had a positive influence on the economic life of the region and on the conservation of the World Heritage Site.

In Nigeria, S. O. Oladeji, O. Grace and A. A. Ayodeji (2022), exploring the relationship between the sociodemographic characteristics of the community and the level of their participation in the management of heritage in Ekiti and Ondo States, and between community participation in management and the value attached to the heritage site, highlight that sociodemographic factors are very important for both the level of involvement and the value the community gives to cultural heritage.

Furthermore, A. M. Lestari et al. (2025), building on the relationship between community participation and tourism management, present a case study which, in methodological terms, helps us understand what may constitute best practice for our own study. They use partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to explore this relationship and find that motivation, opportunity, and

ability have a significant impact on tourism village management. They also find that the main force behind good management is motivation indicators such as the perception of preserving culture and the environment, and employment and economic opportunity.

Taken together, as synthesized by J. D. Zambrano-Mieles et al. (2025), these studies underscore that sustainable tourism in World Heritage sites requires the empowerment of local communities not only as beneficiaries but also as co-managers and decision-makers. Effective governance in such contexts depends on the development of participatory frameworks that align preservation objectives with socio-economic development, ensuring that tourism serves both as a tool for cultural valorisation and as a vector for inclusive growth.

3. The Case of Cidade Velha in Cabo Verde Islands

Cidade Velha, located on Santiago Island in Cabo Verde, has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 26 June 2009. More than the birthplace of the nation, it stands as a living testament to the country's history and its contribution to the wider world, from its pivotal role in the transatlantic slave trade to the emergence of Creole culture. As noted by D. Pereira (2017), Cidade Velha was not merely a slave trading post, but a strategic hub within the early processes of Atlantic globalisation, functioning as a site of circulation, transformation, and intercultural exchange.

Officially classified as an urban area and serving as the administrative centre of the municipality of Ribeira Grande de Santiago, Cidade Velha retains socio-economic characteristics typical of rural contexts, including limited infrastructure and an economy based on agriculture and fishing activities (Fundação João Lopes, 2015).

For decades, questions have persisted on how best to involve residents in the preservation of their heritage and how such engagement can generate tangible benefits from both domestic and international tourism. The OWHC emphasises that community involvement must include both those who are interested and those who are affected. In Cidade Velha, this raises two essential questions: Who is affected, and how? Who is interested, and how are they involved?

To address these questions, it is crucial to trace the evolution of community participation in Cidade Velha over the last three decades.

Cidade Velha has long received particular attention from both national and international heritage authorities. The first UNESCO mission to the site took place in 1978, three years after independence, and

contributed to the establishment of initial measures and policies for the preservation and conservation of national heritage (Government of Cabo Verde, 2008).

In 1990, through Decree-Law No. 121/III/90 of 8 December, the Government of Cabo Verde declared Cidade Velha a National Heritage Site. In collaboration with Spanish cooperation, restoration works were initiated on historic monuments, marking the first significant step towards the preservation and valorisation of the city's cultural legacy. This initiative attracted growing public and institutional attention to Cidade Velha, contributing to an increase in tourism flows. It was also accompanied by the first proposal for the inscription of Cidade Velha on the World Heritage List in 1992, which was unsuccessful mainly due to the state of preservation and conservation of the historic monuments.

Cidade Velha remained part of the municipality of Praia until 2005, when, through Law No. 63/VI/2005 of 9 May, the municipality of Ribeira Grande de Santiago was created, granting the locality administrative autonomy and closer proximity to local decision-making processes (Cabo Verde, 2005). Despite its cultural importance, it continued to hold limited economic and political significance. Within the framework of ongoing conservation efforts, an architectural recovery and urban rehabilitation programme was implemented between 2001 and 2008, involving the Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza Vieira, who developed proposals for the revitalisation of the historic urban fabric, residential rehabilitation, and public space development, some of which were implemented while others remained at the planning stage (Government of Cabo Verde, 2008). Following the establishment of the municipality, the first municipal elections were held, accompanied by the development and implementation of local planning instruments.

On 16 March 2009, shortly before UNESCO's World Heritage inscription, three key legal instruments were enacted to reinforce preservation measures: Resolutions nº 5, 6, and 7/2009, the latter establishing the Management Committee for the Historic Centre of Cidade Velha, which represented the first structured attempt to introduce a formal management system for the site.

This Management Committee was composed of the National Institute of Research and Cultural Heritage (IIPC), representatives from the Municipality of Ribeira Grande authorities, the Committee for the inscription of Cidade Velha on the World Heritage List, and three local personalities of recognised merit appointed by the Minister of Culture. To ensure broad representation, a consultative commission was also established, with the participation of national institutions whose interests and activities are based in Cidade Velha, the Order of Architects and Engineers of Cabo Verde, and local associations. This was the first real attempt to establish a management system for Cidade Velha, a collaborative governance

model managed by heritage experts while incorporating the needs of local communities and the knowledge of a broad range of national institutions. The timing of its creation suggests that it was aligned with UNESCO requirements in the process of inscribing the site as a World Heritage property.

The Committee was responsible for providing expert opinions on matters within its field related to cultural heritage, proposing measures that balance the protection and valorisation of cultural heritage with the improvement of the quality of life for local residents. On 26 June 2009, Cidade Velha became Cabo Verde's first site to be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (ii), (iii), and (vi), as it demonstrates outstanding universal value (UNESCO, 2009), following decades of research, restoration efforts, and institutional coordination (Torres Neiva, 2010).

The increase in tourism flows and interest continued with the declaration of Cidade Velha as a World Heritage Site in 2009 by UNESCO. It is arguable whether the population has been fully engaged in the management of the site and has been able to take advantage of these tourism flows for economic empowerment.

Despite efforts by central and local governments since the 1990s, top-down approaches, such as the Alta Curadoria da Cidade Velha (2012-2022), have failed to meaningfully integrate community voices into the management and preservation of the site. Recently, the Institute for Cultural Heritage, recognising that such top-down approaches are not adequately responsive to either central and local government or the community, has attempted to implement neighbourhood elections (2021-present) to introduce a new management model. The results of such an initiative are yet unclear, making the analysis presented in this paper particularly important.

This article explores the community's perception of past initiatives and whether grassroots leadership can bridge the gap between policy and preservation, based on a collaborative governance perspective. It also examines the relationship between tourism, heritage, and community participation.

4. Methodology

For this research, we integrate document analysis with a quantitative research approach. We also use secondary data analysis to understand the connection between community participation, heritage, and tourism management in Cidade Velha. The first helps us to understand our research problem, while the second helps us to assess the degree of citizen participation in the management of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Cidade Velha.

The survey was conducted in the community during February 2026 among people residing in Cidade Velha. The sample was drawn from the total number of households in Cidade Velha, a total of 1,757 households (INE, 2021), which corresponds to a sample of 316 for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, or 96 for a 95% confidence level and a 10% margin of error.

To collect data, questionnaires were administered by the researchers with the assistance of university students from the community, in order to facilitate responses, as some of the questions were not straightforward. The questionnaire consisted of five sections, combining direct yes/no questions with Likert scale items, including multiple rankings on perceptions and attitudes towards different aspects of heritage management, community participation, and tourism management.

The first section gathers personal socio-demographic information, such as age, gender, education, marital status, and residence status. Because the questionnaire was conducted on an online platform using Microsoft Forms, respondents whose fixed residence was not in Cidade Velha would not complete the survey at this stage. The second section is a short section that helps to understand the respondents' work and economic situation. The third section addresses the population's knowledge of World Heritage. The fourth and fifth sections deal with perceptions of heritage and tourism management, respectively.

We were able to obtain 101 responses to our questionnaire, of which 7 respondents did not have a fixed residence in Cidade Velha, resulting in 94 valid responses. For the empirical analysis, we use a Structural Equation Model (SEM), estimated by the Maximum Likelihood (ML) method.

The structural equation model was designed based on the theoretical frameworks of participatory governance, community empowerment and sustainable tourism discussed in the literature review. Community involvement in heritage management (IHM) was operationalised through residents' participation in meetings and heritage-related activities. Community interest in participating in heritage management (IPHM) reflects the empowerment dimension, capturing residents' willingness to engage in future governance initiatives. Perceived heritage status impacts (IHS) measure residents' perceptions of development opportunities and socio-economic benefits associated with World Heritage designation. Perceptions of heritage management (PHM) capture the evaluation of governance effectiveness, while direct tourism impacts (DTI) represent perceived tourism-related outcomes. Together, these constructs allow the empirical assessment of the relationships between participation, governance, heritage benefits and tourism development.

5. Data and Results Analysis

The sample primarily consists of females (52%), aged between 18 and 50 years (60%), and holding secondary education or above (65%). Most respondents are students (25.5%) or work in public administration (25.5%), and receive a monthly income ranging between 10,000 and 65,000 Cape Verdean escudos.

We observe that males have relatively higher incomes than females, with 35.6% of men earning more than 35,000 CVE, compared to 28.6% of women. The predominant marital status is single (63%). Most respondents reside in São Sebastião (46.8%) and Santo António (23.4%), the two most populated neighbourhoods, and the majority (54.3%) work in fields other than heritage and tourism.

The majority of the respondents (90%) have knowledge that Cidade Velha is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but a smaller percentage (64%) were able to identify exactly the date of its classification. This suggests that the title is internalised as a symbol of pride, but the institutional details of this classification are not well understood by the local community.

Variable/category	Freq.	Percent	Cum
Gender	.	.	.
Female	46	53.5	53.5
Male	40	46.5	100
Age	.	.	.
Less than 18	7	8.1	8.1
Between 18 and 25	19	22.1	30.23
Between 26 and 35	15	17.4	47.7
Between 36 and 49	18	20.9	68.6
Between 50 and 65	20	23.3	91.9
Over 65	7	8.1	100
Education	.	.	.
Primary	18	20.9	20.9
Secondary	38	44.2	65.1
TVET	8	9.3	74.4
Higher	22	25.6	100
Marital status	.	.	.
Married	19	22.1	22.1
Divorced	3	3.5	25.6
Cohabiting	5	5.8	31.4
Single	54	62.8	94.2
Widowed	5	5.8	100
Employment status	.	.	.
Unemployed	6	7	7
Student	21	24.4	31.4
Retired	6	7	38.4
Private sector	8	9.3	47.7
Domestic worker – unpaid	3	3.5	51.2

Domestic worker – paid	1	1.2	52.33
Public administration	23	26.7	79.1
Self-employed – with employee	11	12.8	91.9
Self-employed – without employee	7	8.1	100
Income	.	.	.
None	23	26.7	26.7
Less than 10	4	4.7	31.4
Between 10 and 17	13	15.1	46.5
Between 17 and 35	18	20.9	67.4
Between 35 and 65	13	15.1	82.6
Between 65 and 99	7	8.1	90.7
Above 100	8	9.3	100

Table 1: Summary statistics of sociodemographic variables
Source: Author's own elaboration based on survey data collected in Cidade Velha (2026).

One of the key findings from our data analysis is that there was a gap between intention and the actual involvement of the community in heritage management and activities for tourism planning, with 62% of the respondents stating that they have not participated in any meetings or activities organised by heritage management institutions. Although they want to be involved, as can be seen from the high number of people who are willing to participate and the high availability to participate in future activities, only 24.5% of the respondents attended between 1 and 3 meetings, 5.3% between 3 and 5 meetings, and only 4.3% attended more than 6 meetings. This suggests that the current governance model may not be using the most appropriate proximity approach for this community.

When questioned on whether heritage status has increased the opportunity of Cidade Velha to attract more tourists, we can see that almost 80% of the respondents acknowledge that it does attract more tourism. However, 49% of the respondents state that tourism has brought no direct benefit to their households. This divergence illustrates empirically a value chain problem: the population has awareness of tourism flows, but does not have the economic empowerment tools to take advantage of them.

We now present the results of the structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis, including original coefficients, bootstrap estimates, and the statistical significance of the relationships between constructs. We divide our variables into community involvement in heritage management (IHM - Q5), community perception of heritage management (PHM), community perception of the impact of heritage status (IHS), community interest in participating in heritage management (IPHM), and direct tourism impact (DTI). In the SEM, we examine both direct and indirect effects. Thus, the logic of our model is as follows: IHM (community involvement) and IHS (status perception) act as drivers for PHM (community perception), which then influences IPHM (interest) and DTI (tourism impact).

The primary structural paths, or our hypotheses, are as follow:

- IHM → PHM: Active Involvement in management directly improves a community's perception of how the heritage is being handled;
- IHS → PHM: The perceived Impact of Heritage Status (e.g., being a World Heritage Site) acts as a frame for how the community judges the quality of management;
- PHM → IPHM: A positive perception of management is a prerequisite for Interest in Participating in future management efforts;
- IHM → IPHM: Past involvement (IHM) creates a habit or sense of community that increases future interest (IPHM);
- PHM → DTI: When management is perceived as effective, the community is more likely to recognise and report Direct Tourism Impacts; and
- IPHM → DTI: Higher interest in participation often correlates with a greater awareness of tourism's economic and social benefits.

We estimate these relationships using a Structural Equation Model (SEM) with the Maximum Likelihood estimator. The LR test presents a p-value of 0.9094, which indicates that our theoretical model fits the observed data very well. The covariance structure of our hypotheses does not significantly deviate from the actual data. We are aware that, in the process of cleaning the data, the sample size was reduced to 86, which is very small and reduces the statistical power of our model.

Variables	(1) PHM	(2) DTI	(3) IPHM
IHS - Opportunities for local development	0.210** (0.105)		
IHS - Economic benefits and employment creation	0.331*** (0.0965)		
IHM - Number of meetings or activities in the last year	-0.160 (0.120)		0.171 (0.141)
PHM - Heritage management in Cidade Velha		0.349** (0.172)	-0.0859 (0.110)
IPHM - Public consultation and forums		0.105 (0.170)	
Constant	1.264*** (0.389)	0.0446 (0.882)	3.909*** (0.370)

Var(e)	0.780***	2.698***	1.072***
	(0.119)	(0.411)	(0.164)
Observations	86	86	86
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1			

Table 2: Structural Equation Model (SEM) - Estimation Method: ML

Source: Author's own elaboration based on survey data collected in Cidade Velha (2026); SEM (ML estimation).

We presented three main analyses. First, we look at what drives the individual evaluation of heritage management (PHM), testing whether past participation (IHM) and the perceived impact of heritage (HIS) influence how people evaluate current management. Our results confirm that the perceived impact of heritage status strongly and positively drives the evaluation of heritage management, with a coefficient of 0.21 and a p-value of 0.047. As for past participation in activities related to heritage, it does not significantly affect how individuals evaluate management. This result shows that the community does not judge the quality of management based on their involvement, but rather on the tangible impacts that heritage status brings to their lives or to the site.

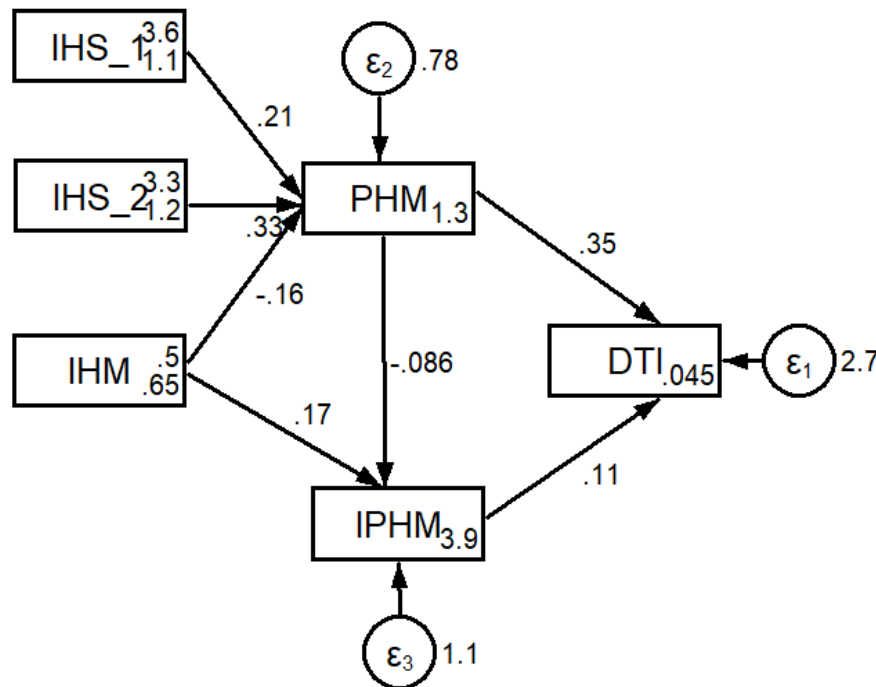


Figure 1: Structural Equation Model (SEM) of Tourism Impact Factors

Source: Author's own elaboration based on survey data collected in Cidade Velha (2026); SEM (Maximum Likelihood estimation).

The second path looks at the factors that drive the willingness to participate (IPHM), testing whether the evaluation of management (PHM) and past involvement (IHM) make people more willing to participate in future management initiatives. Neither the evaluation of management nor past involvement affects future participation. Furthermore, past involvement does not seem to create a statistically significant “habit” of participation. People's desire to participate in the future is likely driven by external variables not captured in this specific equation (we did try economic variables, but they still were not significant).

Lastly, we test whether the evaluation of management (PHM) and the willingness to participate (IPHM) influence how the community perceives the impact of tourism (DTI). Here, we find that a positive evaluation of heritage management significantly increases the perceived impact of tourism, with a coefficient of 0.35 and a p-value of 0.043, while willingness to participate does not affect how tourism impacts are perceived (coefficient of 0.10 and p-value of 0.536). This means that when the community feels the heritage is being handled effectively, they are significantly more likely to recognise and report the impact of tourism.

Conclusion

Community participation in heritage tourism management is as important as community perceptions of the socio-economic benefits derived from heritage preservation and tourism. This study examines the relationship between community participation, heritage governance, and tourism development in Cidade Velha, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2009.

The empirical findings of this study provide a critical reassessment of how communities engage with World Heritage management, challenging the conventional assumption within participatory governance frameworks that procedural involvement alone guarantees satisfaction (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; Fung, 2006). The results show that community evaluations of heritage management are shaped not by prior participation in administrative processes, but by the tangible impacts and socio-economic outcomes generated by heritage designation.

This perception of benefit emerges as a central pillar of heritage governance. It is not merely a catalyst for community satisfaction, but a fundamental condition for the sustainable preservation of the

site. The structural model indicates that when management is perceived as effective, particularly through the delivery of tangible outcomes, the community becomes significantly more attuned to recognising and reporting the broader impacts of tourism. This enhanced awareness reinforces the role of local communities as active stewards of heritage, contributing directly to environmental and cultural sustainability.

Furthermore, the study reveals a highly pragmatic resident population. The results provide important insights into how the community of Cidade Velha perceives heritage management. Their evaluation of management depends not on their own participation in administrative processes, but rather on the outcomes associated with heritage designation. On the other hand, the perception of a well-managed site contributes to a greater recognition of tourism impacts on the local population. The willingness to participate in future management initiatives operates independently of past involvement or current evaluations of management. This suggests that the community's desire to engage is shaped by broader socio-economic realities and the expectation of future tangible benefits, rather than merely being a response to effective governance.

Although the findings provide valuable insights into the relationship between community participation, heritage governance and tourism development, some limitations should be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size and the absence of qualitative interviews limited the possibility of exploring residents' lived experiences, motivations and perceptions in greater depth. Future research may adopt a sequential mixed-methods design combining Structural Equation Modelling with semi-structured interviews or focus groups, allowing for a richer understanding of the social dynamics underlying community participation in heritage governance.

Ultimately, these findings underscore that, for heritage preservation to be truly sustainable, management authorities must move beyond current participatory approaches and adopt more outcome-oriented governance models. The findings also highlight the importance of entrepreneurial approaches as a mechanism for transforming heritage recognition into tangible socio-economic benefits. Given that residents' evaluations of heritage management are strongly influenced by perceived development opportunities and economic outcomes, community-based tourism enterprises, local guide associations, cultural interpretation services, handicraft initiatives, gastronomy-related businesses, and cooperative management schemes may provide practical pathways through which local communities can participate more actively in the heritage economy. Such approaches may contribute simultaneously to economic

empowerment, heritage preservation, and the long-term sustainability of tourism development in Cidade Velha.

To secure both active community engagement and the long-term protection of heritage sites, policy frameworks should prioritise the equitable generation, distribution and communication of tangible benefits, ensuring that heritage status translates into real and lived value for local populations. This is particularly relevant for small island developing states, where structural socio-economic constraints shape the relationship between participation and perceived benefits.

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