

THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS ON PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL EVENTS

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the influence of individual characteristics (gender, age, area of residence) on public participation in cultural events, using the composite variable "Public Participation in Cultural Events and Evaluation of Cultural Events" (PPEC). Based on a sample of 367 respondents from Romania, structural equation modeling (SEM) tested three hypotheses, which assumed that gender, age, and area of residence directly influence cultural participation. The results indicate that no hypothesis was statistically validated ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that individual characteristics do not have a significant impact on participation in cultural events. These findings partially contradict the specialized literature but are aligned with studies that highlight the importance of contextual factors, such as accessibility and cultural education. The study contributes to understanding cultural behavior in Romania and proposes directions for future research.

Keywords: cultural participation, individual characteristics, cultural management, cultural events, structural modeling

1. Introduction

Public participation in cultural events reflects cultural vitality and social cohesion, illustrating how individuals engage with the heritage and artistic expressions of their communities. In Romania, such participation remains limited, with only 34% of citizens engaging in cultural activities in 2021, according to the Cultural Consumption Barometer (INCFC, 2021). This figure is significantly lower than the European average of 59% (Eurostat, 2021), highlighting the need for an in-depth analysis of the factors shaping cultural behavior. Although characteristics such as gender, age, and place of residence are frequently considered determinants of participation, their influence remains a contested topic in the scholarly literature.

The objectives of our research are as follows:

- to analyze the influence of individual characteristics (gender, age, and place of residence) on public participation in cultural events, using the composite variable PPEC.
- to test an empirical model evaluating the direct relationship between these variables and cultural participation.

- to identify implications for cultural management based on the analysis results, aiming to optimize strategies for engaging audiences.

2. Literature review and examples of best practices

Academic research has extensively investigated the influence of demographic factors on cultural participation, yielding diverse findings. Falk and Katz-Gerro (2016) demonstrate that women and urban residents participate more frequently in cultural events, benefiting from better access to infrastructure and social norms that encourage such activities. A pertinent example is the "Edinburgh Fringe" Festival in the United Kingdom, analyzed by Prentice and Andersen (2003). Attracting over 2 million visitors annually, this festival illustrates that a diverse cultural offer and affordable pricing can diminish the importance of demographic factors, drawing a varied audience with minimal differences related to gender or age. However, the researchers note that education level and income continue to exert considerable influence, suggesting a complex interplay among these variables.

Peterson and Kern (1996) highlight the relationship between age and cultural preferences, observing that younger individuals gravitate toward contemporary events, while older individuals are more drawn to traditional manifestations. The Spanish program "Cultura para Todos," examined by García and Fernández (2016), exemplifies these trends. This initiative, which provides free museum access to disadvantaged groups, shows that urban residence facilitates participation, whereas gender and age have a limited impact, underscoring the critical role of accessibility. Data from Spain indicate that over 70% of participants were from urban areas, yet the program's diverse offerings successfully attracted individuals across all age groups.

In the Romanian context, local research suggests that demographic factors are often overshadowed by structural barriers. Popa and Ștefănescu (2015) find that financial and geographical accessibility influence participation more than gender or age, a pattern evident in Romania's "Night of Museums" event. According to the National Network of Museums in Romania (2021), this event drew over 1 million visitors in 2021, with balanced participation across genders and geographic areas, largely due to free access. These studies emphasize that, while demographic factors may shape cultural behavior, socio-economic context and cultural management strategies play a decisive role.

This study aims to analyze the impact of individual characteristics (gender, age, and place of residence) on participation in cultural events in Romania, employing an empirical model based on data collected from 367 respondents. By integrating scholarly literature and case studies, the research investigates whether these demographic characteristics are significant predictors of participation, contributing to the development of cultural management strategies tailored to the Romanian context (Bachelard & Burlea-Schiopoiu, 2010).

3. Development of Research Hypotheses

Participation in cultural events is influenced by a multitude of factors, with scholarly literature frequently highlighting the role of individual characteristics such as gender, age, and place of residence in shaping cultural behavior (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016; Peterson & Kern, 1996). In the Romanian context, where cultural participation is notably low (34% in 2021, according to the Cultural Consumption Barometer), understanding these influences is critical for developing effective cultural management strategies. The objectives and hypotheses of this study were

formulated based on findings from studies such as the “Edinburgh Fringe” (Prentice & Andersen, 2003) and “Cultura para Todos” (García & Fernández, 2016), which suggest that demographic factors may have variable impacts, mediated by accessibility and context. These objectives aim to empirically analyze the relationship between individual characteristics and cultural participation, while the hypotheses test the direct influence of each factor, drawing inspiration from international literature and local realities.

The study tests three hypotheses, grounded in scholarly literature and relevant case studies:

H1: Gender directly influences public participation in cultural events ($G \rightarrow PPEC$)

The literature suggests that women participate more frequently in cultural events due to social norms and a greater interest in artistic activities (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016). For instance, at the “Edinburgh Fringe” Festival, Prentice and Andersen (2003) note that women constitute over 60% of the audience, although these differences diminish when the cultural offer is diverse. In Romania, the “Night of Museums” (RNMR, 2021) attracts a balanced gender distribution, suggesting that accessibility can mitigate gender influences. This hypothesis tests whether gender has a significant effect in the Romanian context.

H2: Age directly influences public participation in cultural events ($V \rightarrow PPEC$)

Peterson and Kern (1996) argue that age shapes cultural preferences, with younger individuals drawn to modern events and older individuals favoring traditional ones. In Spain, “Cultura para Todos” (García & Fernández, 2016) demonstrated that all age groups participate actively when access is free, though younger individuals are more engaged in interactive events. Mihai et al. (2018) observed that entrepreneurial activities can serve as a motivational factor by combining business endeavors with cultural ones, thereby influencing individuals’ participation in cultural events. Burlea-Schiopoiu and Popovici (2024) analyzed Generation Z’s engagement in entrepreneurial activities, suggesting that participation in cultural events may be influenced by age. In Romania, the Sibiu International Theatre Festival (FITS) predominantly attracts audiences aged 25–45 (Bejan & Anghel, 2020), yet the diversity of its offerings reduces age-related differences. This hypothesis examines whether age significantly influences participation.

H3: Place of residence directly influences public participation in cultural events ($ZR \rightarrow PPEC$)

Place of residence is considered a key predictor due to access to cultural infrastructure (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016). In “Cultura para Todos,” urban areas recorded higher participation (70%), but free programs also attracted rural audiences. In Romania, the Cultural Consumption Barometer (2021) indicates higher participation in urban areas (38% museum visits) compared to rural areas (15%), yet the “Night of Museums” has balanced these disparities. This hypothesis tests the relevance of place of residence in the Romanian context.

These hypotheses are grounded in studies that suggest the influence of demographic factors, as well as case studies that highlight the role of context in mitigating these effects, providing a robust foundation for empirical analysis.

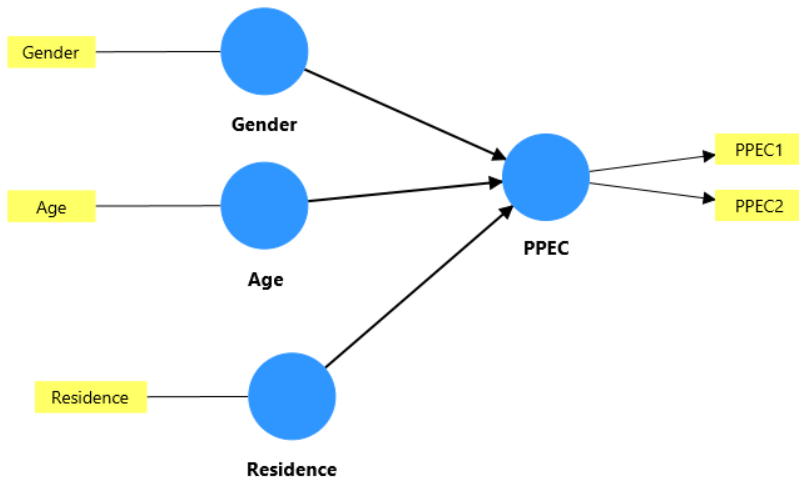


Figure 1. Model of Factors Analyzing Public Participation in Cultural Events

4. Methodology

4.1. Sample Description

The study was conducted on a sample of 367 respondents from Romania, selected through non-random sampling. The demographic characteristics are as follows:

- Gender: 72.8% female (267), 27.2% male (100).
- Age: 2.5% aged 18–25 years (9), 9.5% aged 26–35 years (35), 14.4% aged 36–45 years (53), 44.1% aged 46–55 years (162), 29.4% over 55 years (108).
- Place of residence: 85% urban (312), 15% rural (55).

The distribution reflects a predominance of female, urban, and middle-aged respondents, which may influence the results.

Table 1. Demographic Structure by Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	267	72.8	72.8	72.8
Male	100	27.2	27.2	100.0
Total	367	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Demographic Structure by Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25 yrs	9	2.5	2.5	2.5
26-35 yrs	35	9.5	9.5	12.0
36-45 yrs	53	14.4	14.4	26.4
46-55 yrs	162	44.1	44.1	70.6
over 55 yrs	108	29.4	29.4	100.0
Total	367	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Demographic Structure by Place of Residence

Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
85.0	85.0	85.0
15.0	15.0	100.0
100.0	100.0	

4.2. Variables

Dependent Variable: PPEC, a composite variable measuring the frequency of participation and the perception of the quality of cultural events.

Independent Variables: Gender (dichotomous: female/male), Age (ordinal categories), Place of Residence (dichotomous: urban/rural).

4.3. Analysis Methods

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS software, version 3.3.3, a robust method for testing causal relationships between latent and observed variables. SEM was selected due to its ability to model complex relationships and simultaneously evaluate the direct effects of the independent variables (gender, age, place of residence) on the dependent variable (PPEC). This approach is commonly employed in studies on cultural behavior, as demonstrated by Falk and Katz-Gerro (2016), who applied SEM to analyze the determinants of cultural participation in Europe, highlighting the influence of demographic and socio-economic factors.

The analysis process involved several stages:

Model Specification: A structural model was developed to test the direct relationships between the independent variables and PPEC, based on the formulated hypotheses (H1, H2, H3). The model was configured to estimate direct effects without mediating variables, given the exploratory nature of the study.

Parameter Estimation: The Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) algorithm was used, suitable for moderate-sized samples and models with categorical variables, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). The algorithm calculated the original effect values (O), sample mean (M), standard deviation (STDEV), and T statistics.

Significance Evaluation: The validity of the hypotheses was tested using p-values, with a statistical significance threshold set at $p < 0.05$, and the T statistics ratio ($O/STDEV$), where values greater than 1.96 indicate statistical significance at a 95% confidence level.

Model Reliability

The reliability and validity of the model were assessed using specific PLS-SEM indicators, in line with standards from the literature (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2015). For the composite variable PPEC, the reliability and validity indicators are as follows:

Cronbach's Alpha: A value of 0.726 exceeds the minimum threshold of 0.7, indicating acceptable internal consistency for the PPEC construct.

Composite Reliability (rho_a și rho_c): Values of 1.367 (rho_a) and 0.855 (rho_c) confirm the high reliability of the construct, with rho_c surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.8. Although rho_a is supra-unitary, this can occur in PLS-SEM due to variable weightings and does not indicate significant issues, as noted by Hair et al. (2017).

Average Variance Extracted (AVE): A value of 0.750, above the 0.5 threshold, demonstrates convergent validity, indicating that PPEC explains over 75% of the variance of its items, similar to constructs used by García and Fernández (2016) in analyzing cultural participation.

Table 4. Parameters of the Selected Model's Reliability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
PPEC	0.726	1.367	0.855	0.750

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which measures the distinction between constructs. The HTMT values for PPEC in relation to gender (0.107), age (0.032), and place of residence (0.038) are below the threshold of 0.85, confirming that PPEC is distinct from the independent variables, in accordance with the criterion established by Henseler et al. (2015).

Table 5. Assessment of Discriminant Validity

	Gender	PPEC	Age	Residence
Gender				
PPEC	0.107			
Age	0.094	0.032		
Residence	0.137	0.038	0.043	

Collinearity was examined using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) indicator. The VIF values for gender (1.000), age (1.000), place of residence (1.000), PPEC1 (1.481), and PPEC2 (1.481) are below the threshold of 5, indicating the absence of multicollinearity among the variables, thereby ensuring the robustness of the model's estimates.

Table 6. Assessment of Collinearity

	VIF
Gender	1.000
PPEC1	1.481
PPEC2	1.481
Age	1.000
Residence	1.000

The fit of the model was evaluated using the following indicators:

Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): A value of 0.042, below the threshold of 0.08, indicates a good model fit, as per Hu and Bentler (1999).

Discrepancy Measures (d_ ULS and d_ G): Values of 0.027 (d_ ULS) and 0.020 (d_ G) are low, supporting the model's fit..

Chi-square: A value of 45.012 is acceptable for a model with 367 observations, although it is not a primary indicator in PLS-SEM.

Normed Fit Index (NFI): A value of 0.921, close to 1, confirms an excellent model fit.

Table 7. Assessment of Model Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.042	0.042
d_ ULS	0.027	0.027
d_ G	0.020	0.020
Chi-square	45.012	45.012
NFI	0.921	0.921

These indicators demonstrate that the model is reliable and valid, aligning with standards used in studies such as Falk and Katz-Gerro (2016), who applied PLS-SEM to analyze cultural participation, and Popa and Ștefănescu (2015), who recommend multivariate methods for complex cultural contexts. The analysis results ($p > 0.05$ for all hypotheses) credibly reflect the lack of influence of demographic factors, supported by the methodological robustness of the model. The findings suggest that the model is reliable in detecting the absence of influence from demographic factors, consistent with studies such as DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004), which found that in contexts with limited cultural access, demographic factors have a reduced impact.

The PLS-SEM approach is supported by the scholarly literature for analyzing cultural behavior. For instance, Falk and Katz-Gerro (2016) employed SEM to model cultural participation across 24 European countries, confirming the method's reliability in diverse contexts. Similarly, García and Fernández (2016) applied PLS-SEM to assess the impact of accessibility on participation, demonstrating the method's ability to handle categorical variables and moderate-sized samples. In the Romanian context, Popa and Ștefănescu (2015) advocate for multivariate methods to analyze cultural participation due to the complexity of the factors involved. These studies validate the choice of PLS-SEM for this research, ensuring a solid methodological foundation.

5. Results and Preliminary Conclusions

The following table presents the SEM results:

Table 8. SEM Results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Gender -> PPEC	0.105	0.105	0.058	1.816	0.069
Age-> PPEC	-0.003	0.000	0.064	0.047	0.963
Residence -> PPEC	0.026	0.024	0.056	0.471	0.638

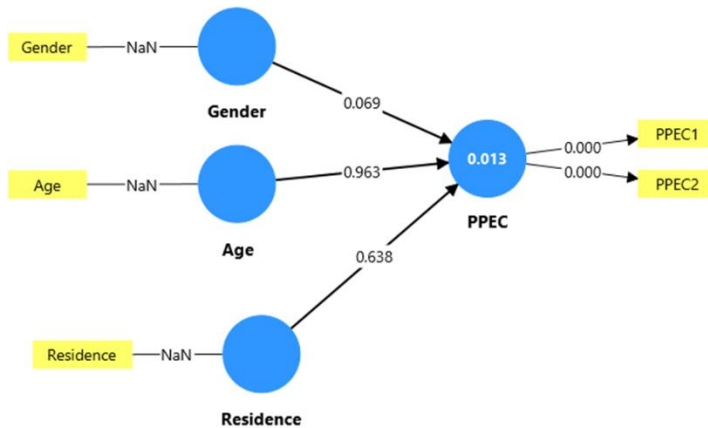


Figure 2. Hypothesis Analysis

- **H1 (Gender → PPEC):** The hypothesis is not validated, with a p-value of 0.069 (> 0.05). The effect of gender is positive but weak ($O = 0.105$), suggesting an insignificant tendency for women to participate more frequently in cultural events. The T-value of 1.816, below the threshold of 1.96, confirms the lack of statistical significance.
- **H2 (Age → PPEC):** The hypothesis is rejected, with a p-value of 0.963, indicating the absence of any significant effect of age on participation ($O = -0.003$). The extremely low T-statistic (0.047) underscores the irrelevance of this variable in the model.
- **H3 (Place of Residence → PPEC):** The hypothesis is not validated, with a p-value of 0.638. The effect of place of residence is minimal ($O = 0.026$), and the T-value of 0.471 confirms that urban-rural differences do not significantly influence cultural participation.

The analysis results indicate that individual characteristics (gender, age, place of residence) do not have a significant impact on participation in cultural events within the analyzed sample, partially contradicting expectations based on the scholarly literature. For instance, Falk and Katz-Gerro (2016) argue that women and urban residents participate more frequently in cultural activities due to better access to infrastructure and supportive social norms. In this study, the weak tendency for women to participate more ($O = 0.105$) does not reach statistical significance, possibly due to the imbalanced sample distribution (72.8% female). This finding aligns with observations by García and Fernández (2016) in Spain's "Cultura para Todos" program, where free museum access reduced gender differences, suggesting that contextual factors, such as accessibility, may overshadow demographic influences.

The lack of influence of age (H2) is surprising, given that Peterson and Kern (1996) identified distinct cultural preferences across age groups. In the Romanian context, the Sibiu International Theatre Festival (FITS), analyzed by Bejan and Anghel (2020), predominantly attracts audiences aged 25–45, but the diversity of its offerings mitigates generational differences. The sample in this study, dominated by respondents aged 46–55 (44.1%), may explain the null effect of age, suggesting homogeneity in cultural behavior within this dominant age group.

Regarding place of residence (H3), the results partially contradict findings from the Cultural Consumption Barometer 2021, which reports higher participation in urban areas (38% museum visits) compared to rural areas (15%). The lack of a significant effect in this study may be attributed to the high proportion of urban respondents (85%), which limits data variability. Events such as the “Night of Museums” (RNMR, 2021), which attracted over 1 million visitors from both urban and rural areas due to free access, support the idea that geographical barriers can be overcome through effective cultural management strategies.

These preliminary results suggest that, in the Romanian context, demographic factors are less relevant than contextual variables, such as financial accessibility, cultural education, or the quality of events. Popa and Ștefănescu (2015) emphasize that the underfunding of Romania’s cultural sector (e.g., 2.5 million RON for minorities in 2021) and lack of infrastructure limit participation, regardless of individual characteristics. The sample distribution, which does not fully reflect the diversity of the Romanian population, may contribute to these findings, indicating the need for a more representative sample to confirm the generalizability of the results.

6. Final Conclusions and Future Research Directions

This study demonstrates that individual characteristics—gender, age, and place of residence—do not significantly influence participation in cultural events in Romania, as evidenced by the SEM analysis, which rejected all three tested hypotheses ($p > 0.05$). These findings partially contradict the scholarly literature, which emphasizes the role of demographic factors (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016), but align with research highlighting the importance of contextual factors, such as financial accessibility, cultural education, and the quality of cultural offerings. In the Romanian context, where cultural participation is low (34% in 2021, Cultural Consumption Barometer), these findings suggest that structural barriers and cultural management strategies play a more significant role than the individual characteristics of the audience.

6.1. Scientific Studies and Case Studies Supporting the Findings

- “Night of Museums” (Romania): The report by the National Network of Museums in Romania (RNMR, 2021) indicates that the “Night of Museums” attracted over 1 million visitors in 2021, with balanced participation across genders, ages, and places of residence. Bejan and Anghel (2020) note that free access and intensive promotion were the primary drivers of success, reducing the influence of demographic factors. This case supports the study’s results, highlighting that accessibility is a more relevant predictor than gender or place of residence.

- “Cultura para Todos” Program (Spain): García and Fernández (2016) found that free museum access diminished differences related to gender, age, and place of residence, with participation driven by event availability. In Spain, over 70% of participants were from urban areas, but the diverse offerings attracted all demographic groups, confirming the study’s conclusion that contextual factors take precedence.

- Transilvania International Film Festival (TIFF, Romania): Analyzed by Popa and Ștefănescu (2015), TIFF attracted over 130,000 participants in 2021, regardless of demographic characteristics, due to the diversity of its offerings and effective promotion. This case illustrates that cultural management strategies prioritizing accessibility and appeal can outweigh the influence of demographic factors.

- European Study on Cultural Participation: DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004) demonstrate that in countries with limited cultural access, such as Romania, demographic factors have a reduced impact, with education and income emerging as primary predictors. This study validates the findings, suggesting that the underfunding of Romania's cultural sector contributes to the limited influence of demographics.

6.2. Implications for Cultural Managers

The results of this study provide cultural managers in Romania with strategic directions to enhance public participation, focusing on overcoming structural and contextual barriers rather than demographic segmentation. Specific implications include (Balan & Burlea-Schiopoiu, 2017):

Increasing Financial and Geographical Accessibility: Drawing inspiration from the "Night of Museums," managers should implement free or subsidized events, particularly in rural areas where participation is low (15% museum visits, Cultural Consumption Barometer 2021). Partnerships with local authorities and private sponsors can support such initiatives, reducing reliance on limited public funding.

Promoting Cultural Education: The "Cultura para Todos" program demonstrates that educational initiatives increase public interest, regardless of age or gender. In Romania, workshops and cultural awareness campaigns, such as those at the Sibiu International Theatre Festival (FITS), can encourage participation among youth and marginalized groups, counteracting the effects of limited cultural education.

Diversifying Cultural Offerings: TIFF illustrates the success of a varied program, including films, concerts, and workshops, attracting a heterogeneous audience. Cultural managers should develop programs catering to diverse interests, from traditional to contemporary events, to maximize inclusivity (Burlea-Schiopoiu & Rainey, 2013).

Using Data for Targeted Strategies: The study's findings, corroborated by the Cultural Consumption Barometer 2021, suggest that managers can leverage statistical analyses to identify specific barriers (e.g., accessibility, insufficient promotion) and develop tailored strategies. For instance, digital promotion, inspired by TIFF's platforms, can engage younger audiences, who represent only 2.5% of the study's sample.

6.3. Future Directions and Limitations

The lack of influence of demographic factors may be partly attributed to the sample distribution (72.8% female, 85% urban), which limits the generalizability of the results. Future research should include a more representative sample and explore additional variables, such as education, income, or cultural preferences, which may mediate participation. Additionally, comparative studies with other countries, such as Spain or the United Kingdom, could clarify whether the findings reflect Romanian cultural specificities or broader trends.

6.4. Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the literature on cultural participation by highlighting the limited role of demographic factors in the Romanian context, providing an empirical basis for reorienting cultural management strategies. By integrating relevant case studies, the research underscores that the success of cultural participation hinges on strategies prioritizing access, education, and diversity, offering cultural managers a practical framework to revitalize Romania's cultural sector. In a global context marked by diversity and economic challenges, these

conclusions emphasize the need for innovative approaches to transform culture into a driver of social cohesion and sustainable development.

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