

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE PEJA REGION, KOSOVO: A SPATIAL ASSESSMENT OF HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS

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Abstract: This paper investigates the role of historical and architectural heritage in the development of cultural tourism and regional sustainability in the Peja region (Western Kosovo). The research adopts a quantitative approach based on a structured questionnaire administered to 100 respondents in order to evaluate public perception, conservation challenges, and institutional involvement in heritage management, while also considering the spatial dimension of heritage distribution and accessibility. The findings indicate that heritage monuments represent a key asset for strengthening the tourism attractiveness and spatial competitiveness of the region, with several sites having the potential to be recognized as cultural geosites of high scientific, educational, and tourism value. However, major constraints persist, particularly low public awareness of conservation strategies (72% of respondents) and limited confidence in institutional engagement, with only 20% perceiving governmental and international contributions as sufficient. Although financial constraints are perceived differently among respondents, the results underline the necessity for integrated heritage management policies, improved information dissemination, and stronger community participation. The study highlights that effective heritage conservation is fundamental for sustainable territorial development and the long-term growth of cultural tourism in the Peja region, providing useful insights for spatial planning and integrated cultural tourism strategies. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of linking heritage conservation with local economic development and tourism planning. Greater cooperation between public institutions, local communities, and tourism stakeholders could enhance the sustainable use and promotion of heritage resources. These measures may also contribute to preserving regional identity while increasing the attractiveness of the Peja region as a cultural tourism destination.

Keywords: cultural heritage, cultural tourism, regional development, spatial planning, heritage conservation, Peja region in Kosovo

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INTRODUCTION

The Peja region is recognized as one of the most culturally rich areas in Kosovo, distinguished by its favourable geostrategic position and an extraordinary concentration of historical and architectural heritage (Tahiri et al., 2024; Tahiri et al., 2025). This cultural wealth has been shaped by continuous human settlement and interaction with the natural environment since early historical periods, leaving visible traces in the form of monuments, urban ensembles and traditional infrastructure. Historical monuments in Peja, including mosques, monasteries, bridges and fortresses, represent not only physical testimonies of important historical processes but also constitute spatial anchors of regional identity and tourism attractiveness (Tahiri et al., 2025). Cultural heritage is a concept of dynamic nature. As each culture has its own unique modes of expressions, belief systems, and values, it leads to the rich diversity of the global human family while demonstrating its lineage tracing back through the ages. Preserving cultural heritage is relevant in many contexts.

While linking communities to their past, it fosters a sense of identity and belonging among individuals and communities reinforcing cultural pride and continuity (Karjalainen, 2020). Located in western Kosovo, the Peja region contains a dense network of heritage sites originating mainly from medieval and Ottoman periods, including religious monuments, historic urban cores and traditional commercial complexes. The favourable geostrategic position of Kosovo and its rich natural resources have historically supported continuous development of life, resulting in an exceptional diversity of archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage (Tahiri et al., 2024). These heritage resources form a coherent cultural landscape that supports destination planning and sustainable tourism development at the regional level.

Despite its high heritage potential, the Peja region faces significant challenges related to monument preservation, strategic planning and community involvement. The preservation of cultural heritage is as vital as environmental protection, yet built heritage remains a non-renewable resource that once destroyed cannot be recovered.

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Weak conservation frameworks, insufficient policy implementation and limited public awareness continue to threaten the long-term sustainability of cultural assets. These challenges directly affect tourism development and the broader territorial growth of the region. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the historical and architectural monuments of the Peja region by examining their role in cultural tourism development, regional sustainability and community well-being. Furthermore, the research explores the interaction between heritage conservation, institutional engagement and tourism development within a regional planning framework. By providing empirical evidence from Kosovo, this study contributes to the broader academic discourse on cultural heritage management and sustainable tourism, while offering policy-oriented recommendations for strengthening heritage governance and promoting long-term territorial development in the Peja region (Tahiri et al., 2024; Tahiri et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage refers to both the material wealth (cultural property) and the intangible elements of a society or group, which connect the past with the present. This concept plays an essential role as a bridge between the past and the future, helping to develop specific approaches in the current context. Cultural heritage, which has a special significance for communities, is preserved for the benefit of future generations and represents an important territorial resource for regional development and tourism planning (Baum & Szvias, 2008).

The development of the idea of cultural heritage has been shaped through complex historical processes and continues to change over time. The values associated with cultural and natural heritage vary over time and among social groups, and these values help to create different categories of heritage, such as world, national and regional heritage that influence spatial identity and place-based development strategies (Davidson & Cope, 2001). Elements of cultural heritage carry symbolic significance and represent cultural and environmental identities, helping to form a sense of community and preserve traditional activities. The selection and protection of monuments play an important role in shaping the future of places, influencing cultural narratives and strengthening a social consensus about the past and present (Alfieri, 1994).

The evolution of the concept of cultural heritage has been the result of a long historical process, during which the way in which physical artefacts, such as buildings, works of art and landscapes, are valued has changed. These objects have acquired the status of “outstanding universal value” and have been perceived as the property of all humanity. Over time, it has been understood that the relationship between cultural heritage and the natural environment is unique and unrepeatable, leading to their conservation and protection as part of integrated landscape and spatial management frameworks. In the past, collecting cultural objects was considered a private activity, but during the medieval and early modern periods, collections became institutionalized, marking the beginning of formal heritage governance (Cvijanović et al., 2020).

In the 19th century, the concept of national heritage gained importance, resulting in the creation of museums and specialized institutions for monument protection, which later evolved into key actors of spatial and tourism development (Beqiraj, 2007). In the second half of the 20th century, international organizations such as UNESCO strengthened global cooperation in heritage protection, introducing instruments such as the World Heritage Convention and Memory of the World Programme. These initiatives enhanced the international visibility of heritage sites and contributed to their inclusion within global tourism networks and territorial branding strategies (Bislimi, 2006). Although heritage protection has expanded worldwide, critical debates have emerged regarding the commercialization of heritage and the so-called “heritage business”. While preservation remains the central objective, cultural heritage has also been misused for political and ideological purposes, which in some contexts has resulted in deliberate destruction and territorial conflicts (Creswell, 2003).

In the 21st century, cultural heritage is understood as a multidimensional resource studied by various scientific disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences and environmental sciences. Its management has proven most effective when governance models acknowledge diverse stakeholder interests and integrate heritage protection into spatial planning and sustainable regional development policies (Buhalis, 2003). Cultural and heritage tourism has become a major instrument of regional economic development, stimulating growth by attracting visitors motivated by historical, artistic, scientific and lifestyle experiences. Such tourism is fundamentally place-based, as it relies on the unique cultural landscapes, architectural forms and social traditions of destinations (Burkart & Medlik, 1981). Recognizing the strategic importance of cultural tourism, numerous international organizations provide technical and financial support for heritage-based development, including UNWTO, the European Commission, ERDF, UNESCO and the World Travel and Tourism Council. These institutions promote heritage conservation as a pillar of sustainable tourism development and territorial cohesion (Urry, 2005).

Types of cultural and architectural resources

Tourism resources include any element that can attract the interest of visitors and create a positive impact on their travel experience. These resources consist of both natural and cultural components that form the core of destination attractiveness. In this context, tourism resources represent not only attractions, but also strategic spatial assets that structure tourism flows and influence territorial development (Timothy, 2011).

Cultural and historical resources represent the heritage of past periods of social development and constitute a fundamental basis for cultural tourism. Cultural heritage includes the material and intangible wealth recognized by society, preserved in order to maintain cultural identity and transmit collective memory to future generations. These resources are commonly classified into material and spiritual components. Material elements include production systems and tangible cultural assets, while intangible elements encompass education, science, art, literature and social traditions, all of which contribute to the formation of distinctive cultural landscapes and place identity (Tahiri & Kovaci, 2017).

An important role in cultural and historical tourism is played by monuments, which frequently serve as the primary attractions of destinations and act as spatial focal points for tourism development. According to Howard (2003), heritage resources can be classified into six major categories:

- I. Cultural resources: including visual arts, folklore, traditional crafts and festivals.
- II. Historical resources: including historical monuments, heritage sites and past-related activities.
- III. Archaeological resources: including ancient settlements and excavation sites.
- IV. Religious resources: including sacred buildings, pilgrimage sites and religious practices.
- V. Ethnographic resources: including customs, traditions and everyday cultural expressions.
- VI. Ecological and landscape resources: including natural environments and architectural monuments.

Cultural resources encompass monumental works, visual arts, crafts and diverse forms of creativity, as well as cultural events that shape social life. These elements contribute to destination branding and enhance the symbolic and experiential value of tourism spaces, with visitors frequently attracted to festivals, theatres, historical monuments and museums (Ermela, 2011). Historical and architectural resources include architectural ensembles, historic urban centres, traditional neighbourhoods, cultural districts and the remains of ancient settlements.

These assets possess significant historical and cultural value and include civil, industrial, military and religious structures, as well as monuments of monumental art. Natural landscapes and designed landscapes also form an integral part of historical and cultural resources, together shaping the overall spatial character of tourism destinations (Fetah & Millaku, 2011). Archaeological resources represent a distinct category of heritage tourism attractions.

Archaeological sites function as open-air museums that facilitate the interpretation of human history and offer unique learning experiences for both specialists and general visitors. Such sites significantly contribute to the diversification of tourism products and the sustainable utilisation of territorial heritage (Ismaili, 2002).

Different forms of historical and cultural tourism provide the cultural foundation of tourism destinations. The diversification of cultural tourism reflects the growing specialization of tourist motivations and the increasing demand for authentic, place-based experiences linked to the cultural heritage of the territories visited. This diversification strengthens the competitive positioning and long-term sustainability of tourism regions (Hybels & Weaver, 2001).

Treatment and organization of cultural heritage and cultural institutions in Kosovo

The tourism industry plays a crucial role in driving global economic growth, contributing significantly to employment generation, cultural exchange, and community development (Krasniqi & Tahiri, 2025).

Cultural heritage in Kosovo is regulated and protected through a comprehensive legal framework, which includes the Law on Cultural Heritage and the Law on Spatial Planning, as well as additional legislative acts that ensure the protection and preservation of cultural assets. A special status is also granted to cultural heritage in the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, which emphasises the importance of preserving cultural identity and historical continuity. This legal structure provides the foundation for integrating heritage protection within national spatial development and tourism policies (Borovci et al., 2021). The management and preservation of cultural heritage are shared responsibilities among various public institutions, most notably the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, which plays a central role in formulating and implementing cultural policies. The Ministry cooperates with its subordinate agencies, research institutes and non-governmental organizations in executing projects aimed at the protection, restoration and promotion of cultural heritage.

Such institutional cooperation is essential for aligning heritage management with regional development strategies and sustainable tourism planning (Gössling, 2006). A key institution within this governance framework is the Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage (KCCH), which serves as a specialized advisory and regulatory body responsible for evaluating monuments and cultural assets and coordinating conservation efforts. The KCCH contributes to the strategic integration of heritage assets into territorial planning processes and destination management structures, ensuring that cultural heritage becomes an active component of regional development (Graham & Mather, 1995). In addition to institutional governance, numerous projects and initiatives are undertaken to raise public awareness of the importance of cultural heritage in Kosovo.

These activities include educational programs, community-based awareness campaigns and the promotion of cultural events that foster local participation (Høper, 2016). Through these mechanisms, cultural heritage functions not only as a historical asset but also as a driver of cultural tourism development, socio-economic revitalization and place-based identity formation. Kosovo's cultural heritage therefore represents a strategic territorial resource that requires continuous protection, promotion and adaptive management. The coordinated engagement of institutions, communities and individuals is essential to ensure that this heritage remains meaningful and economically productive for future generations, thereby supporting sustainable cultural tourism and long-term regional development (Jerliu, 2016).

Brief history and cultural heritage in the city of Peja

The city of Peja, located in the Dukagjini Plain in western Kosovo, occupies a strategic position in terms of political, economic, social and cultural development. Its geographical location along the Lumbardh (Bistrica) River, at the interface between mountainous landscapes and fertile lowlands, has historically shaped settlement patterns, trade routes and cultural exchange, thereby reinforcing the city's regional importance (Beqiraj, 2007). As a result, the Peja region contains a rich concentration of cultural and historical heritage, both tangible and intangible, representing multiple historical periods and cultural influences. Archaeological excavations in the south-western part of the city reveal remains of ancient buildings and cemeteries, demonstrating the continuity of human presence and urban development since early periods. Major heritage landmarks include the Patriarchate of Peja and the Deçan Monastery, which constitute not only religious monuments but

also key nodes within the regional cultural tourism network. The Ottoman heritage of Peja is particularly significant, comprising numerous architectural structures that illustrate the city's historical function as an administrative and commercial centre. According to the Sanjak of Shkodra records, Peja became the centre of the Sandžak of Dukagjin in 1540, further consolidating its regional influence (Beqiraj, 2007). Among the most prominent Ottoman monuments are the Bajrakli Mosque (also known as the Çarshia Mosque), built by Sultan Mehmet II, the Haxhi Bey Hamam, the Kursumli Mosque and a series of traditional towers, including the Zenel Bey Tower and the Sheremet Tower.

These monuments collectively form an urban heritage ensemble that structures the historical landscape of Peja and enhances its tourism appeal (Bislimi, 2006). Peja is also distinguished by its historic commercial complex, the “Çarshia e Vjetër” (Old Bazaar), which has long functioned as the socio-economic core of the city. Founded in the 14th century, the bazaar maintained artisanal production and trade traditions for centuries and represents an essential element of the city's cultural identity. In the 19th century, additional heritage landmarks emerged, such as the Haxhi Zeka Mill Complex and the Haxhi Zeka Tower in the village of Leshan, further enriching the regional heritage portfolio (Beqiraj, 2007).

The Old Bazaar, characterized by clusters of shops arranged around religious buildings and constructed from wood and stone, reflects the architectural typology of the period. The destruction suffered during the 1999 war and subsequent reconstruction processes significantly altered its original structure and resulted in the loss of part of its cultural value (National Heritage List, 2018). These transformations illustrate the vulnerability of urban heritage and the necessity of integrated conservation planning within post-conflict territorial development frameworks. In response, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments has implemented regeneration and revitalization projects aimed at safeguarding this historic urban core. In 1970, the Old Bazaar was officially declared a protected monument, underscoring its importance for the historical continuity, cultural identity and tourism development of the city of Peja (Ermela, 2011).



Figure 1. Old Bazaar of Peja (Source: Tripadvisor, “Old Bazaar of Peja” n.d.)

Urban area of the Old Bazaar

The Old Bazaar represents one of the most significant cultural heritage sites in Peja, Kosovo, forming a central component of the city's historical and architectural identity. It is officially classified within the “Architectural” heritage category and protected under decision number 02-50/70 (Richards, 2012). Beyond its formal designation, the Old Bazaar functions as a core spatial element that structures the historic urban landscape and reinforces the cultural image of the city. The Old Bazaar originated during the Ottoman period and preserves its traditional character through oriental-style buildings, narrow streets and compact urban form, which historically served as the epicentre of Peja's economic and social life. It operated as a multifunctional commercial space where artisanal production, trade and social interaction were closely intertwined. This spatial configuration continues to shape visitor movement patterns and contributes to the experiential quality of the destination, making the Old Bazaar a focal point for cultural tourism (Page et al., 2001).

The architectural and historical value of the Old Bazaar extends beyond its physical structures to its role as a living urban heritage landscape. It offers a distinctive environment for visitors, researchers and urban planners, illustrating the long-term transformation of Peja's urban fabric. As such, the Old Bazaar represents a key tourism asset that links heritage conservation with urban regeneration and destination development. Today, it is protected under national heritage legislation and is subject to ongoing preservation and restoration efforts aimed at safeguarding its authenticity and ensuring its continued contribution to cultural identity and tourism development (National Heritage List, 2018).

Research Methodology

Our study aims to conduct a detailed analysis of cultural heritage in the Peja Region, with a particular focus on historical and architectural monuments and their role in cultural tourism development and regional sustainability. To achieve the research objectives and ensure analytical reliability, a structured methodological framework was adopted, combining primary and secondary data sources within a quantitative research design. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to respondents in the Peja region. The questionnaire was designed in a clear and accessible format

to facilitate participation and ensure the accuracy of responses. The application of quantitative methods enabled the statistical examination of public perceptions regarding heritage conservation, tourism impacts and institutional involvement, providing measurable indicators for evaluating heritage-related regional development processes (Creswell, 2003).

Secondary data were obtained from scientific literature, official documents, policy reports and academic publications related to cultural heritage management, tourism development and regional planning, allowing the empirical findings to be contextualized within broader theoretical and policy frameworks. The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire containing 15 closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale. These questions were designed to assess perceptions of cultural heritage value, conservation challenges, tourism development and community engagement in the Peja region. The structure of the questionnaire reflects key dimensions of heritage-based regional development, including cultural, economic and institutional factors.

The empirical study was conducted using a sample of 100 respondents. Sample selection followed a combined methodological approach consisting of the following components:

1. **Selection criteria:** Respondents were selected based on their knowledge of cultural heritage and their engagement in cultural, social or regional activities. This ensured that the sample included individuals capable of providing informed assessments of heritage conservation and tourism development.

2. **Selection method:** A stratified random sampling strategy was employed. The Peja region was divided into several territorial and demographic strata reflecting its spatial and socio-cultural diversity. Respondents were randomly selected within each stratum to achieve balanced regional representation.

3. **Participant structure:** The sample included cultural heritage professionals, community members actively involved in heritage preservation and local residents with general awareness of cultural heritage issues. This combination produced a comprehensive perspective on the current state of cultural heritage in the region.

Table 1 presents the reliability assessment of the research instrument using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The obtained value of 0.779 indicates an acceptable level of internal consistency, confirming that the questionnaire reliably measures the intended constructs. This level of reliability is considered suitable for social science and tourism research and supports the validity of subsequent statistical analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2 presents the gender distribution of respondents in the study. Of the 100 respondents, 52% are female, while 48% are male. This distribution is relatively balanced, providing an equal representation of genders in the data analysis.

Table 2 and Figure 2 show that the gender distribution in the study is relatively balanced, with a slightly higher proportion of female respondents (52%) compared to male respondents (48%).

Table 1. Reliability of the measuring instrument

Alpha of Krombach	Number of questions
.779	15

Table 2. Gender of respondents

Valid		Frequencies	Percentage
	Female	52	52.0
	Male	48	48.0
	Total	100	100.0

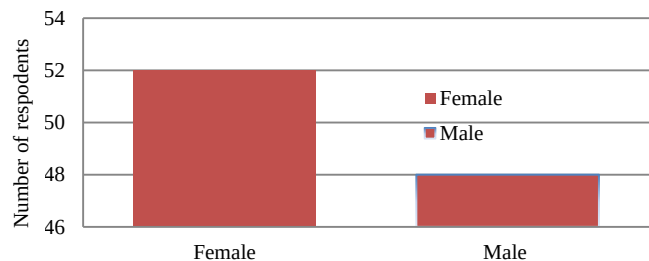


Figure 2. Gender of respondents

Table 3. Age distribution of respondents

Valid		Frequencies	Percentage
	18-25 years	36	36.0
	26-35 years	36	36.0
	36-45 years	16	16.0
	46-55 years	4	4.0
	56-65 years	8	8.0
	Total	100	100.0

Table 4. Education level distribution of respondents

Valid		Frequencies	Percentage
	Primary education	8	8.0
	Secondary education	20	20.0
	Bachelor studies	56	56.0
	Master studies	12	12.0
	PhD studies	4	4.0
	Total	100	100.0

Table 3 depicts the age distribution of respondents. The majority of respondents are young, with 36% of them falling into the 18-25 age group and an equal percentage of 36% being in the 26-35 age group. A smaller proportion are in the older age groups: 16% are aged 36-45, 4% are 46-55, and 8% are aged 56-65. This suggests that the study includes a significant proportion of young people. Table 4 shows the level of education of the respondents. The majority of them have higher education, with 56% having completed bachelor's studies and 12% having completed master's studies. Only 4% of the respondents have achieved a doctorate (PhD) level. A smaller percentage includes those with secondary education (20%) and primary education (8%). This indicates that the study has a good base of respondents with higher education.

H1. Historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region are key factors in attracting tourists and developing cultural tourism.

Figure 3 shows that 96% of respondents have visited historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region, while only 4% have not. This result suggests a high level of awareness and interest in monuments in this region.

Figure 4 depicts the respondents' perception of the role of monuments in attracting visitors to the Peja region. The vast majority (92%) believe that historical and architectural monuments contribute to the increase in the number of visitors, while 8% are not sure about this impact. This result highlights the importance of monuments for tourism in the region.

Figure 5 presents the respondents' assessment of the impact of cultural tourism on the local economy. 76% of them consider the impact as very positive, and 12% as positive. On the other hand, 4% remain neutral and a small percentage (4%) consider the impact to be negative or very negative. This suggests that cultural tourism is perceived as a key factor for improving the local economy. Figure 6 shows that 92% of respondents think that historical and architectural monuments are important for the development of tourism in the Peja region, while 8% are not sure. This result reinforces the connection between monuments and tourism development in this area. Figure 7 reflects the respondents' assessment of the efforts of the government and local institutions in the development of cultural tourism in Peja. Only 8% consider the contribution very good and 16% assess it as good. However, the majority of respondents (44%) are dissatisfied and 20% are very dissatisfied with the efforts of local institutions, suggesting a need for improvements in this area.

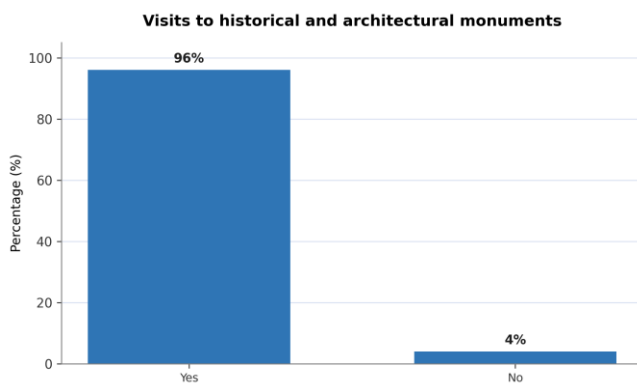


Figure 3. Respondents who have visited historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region

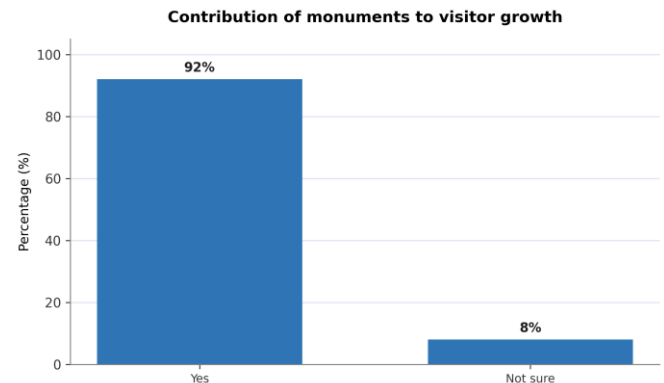


Figure 4. Respondents' perceptions of the contribution of historical and architectural monuments to increasing visitor numbers in the Peja region

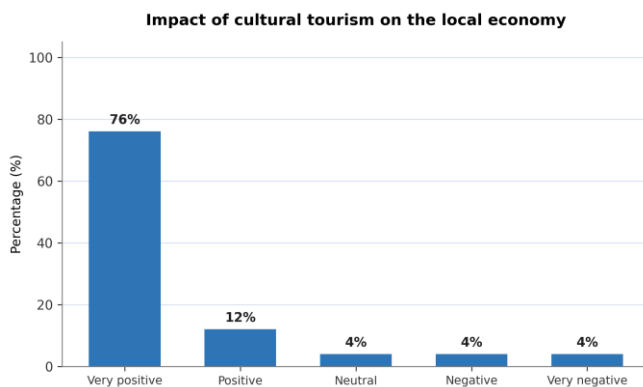


Figure 5. Respondents' assessment of the impact of cultural tourism on the local economy

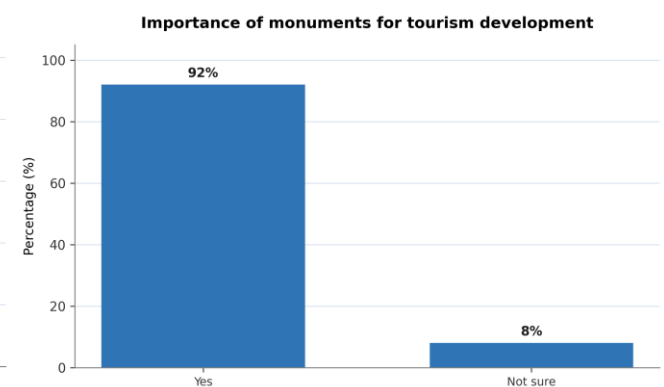


Figure 6. Respondents' perceptions of the importance of historical and architectural monuments for tourism development in the Peja region

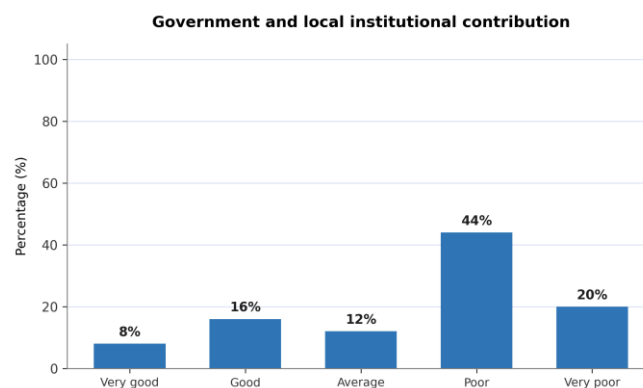


Figure 7. Respondents' assessment of government and local institutional contributions to cultural tourism development in the Peja region

Table 5 summarizes the results of hypothesis H1, which suggests that historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region contribute to the development of cultural tourism, increasing the number of visitors and having a positive impact on the local economy. Here is the interpretation of the results: Visits to Peja monuments: The question whether respondents

have ever visited historical and architectural monuments has a mean of 1.04, with a low standard deviation of .19695, indicating that the vast majority of respondents have visited these monuments, with responses focused on the “Yes” option (1.00). The contribution of monuments to the increase in the number of visitors: The mean of 1.16 indicates that the majority of respondents think that historical and architectural monuments contribute to the increase in the number of visitors to Peja. The standard deviation of .54532 suggests that the responses are quite consolidated and the agreement is high among respondents. Impact of cultural tourism on the local economy: This question has a mean of 1.48, indicating a generally positive perception of the impact of cultural tourism on the local economy.

Table 5. Results related to hypothesis H1. Historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region contribute to the development of cultural tourism, increasing the number of visitors and having a positive impact on the local economy

	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Std Deviation
Have you ever visited the historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region?	1.00	2.00	1.0400	.19695
Do you think that historical and architectural monuments contribute to increasing the number of visitors to the Peja region?	1.00	3.00	1.1600	.54532
How do you assess the impact of cultural tourism on the local economy?	1.00	5.00	1.4800	1.02966
Do you think that historical and architectural monuments are important for the development of tourism in the Peja region?	1.00	3.00	1.1600	.54532
Do you believe that the government and local institutions are contributing to the development of cultural tourism in the Peja region?	1.00	5.00	3.5200	1.21006
Valid N (listwise)				

The standard deviation of 1.02966 suggests that there is a greater spread in the opinions of respondents, with some considering the impact very positive and others being more neutral or negative. Importance of monuments for tourism development: This has a low mean of 1.16, suggesting that the vast majority of respondents see monuments as a very important factor for the development of tourism in Peja. The standard deviation of .54532 indicates a narrow distribution of responses. Contribution of government and local institutions: This question has a higher mean of 3.52, indicating that respondents are more divided regarding the role of government and local institutions. The standard deviation of 1.21006 indicates that there are different opinions on this issue, with some assessing the contribution as insufficient and others assessing it positively. The results show that historical and architectural monuments are perceived as important for the growth of tourism and the local economy in Peja, however there is a concern about the role and commitment of the government and local institutions in promoting and preserving cultural tourism.

H2. The lack of financial resources and institutional support is one of the main challenges for the conservation of historical monuments in the Peja region, while the involvement of the local community offers an opportunity for their improvement.

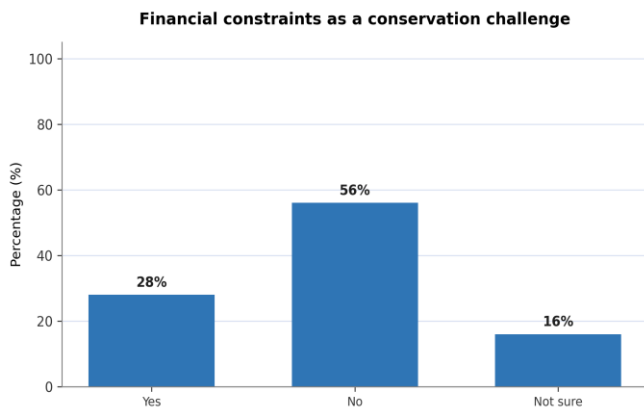


Figure 8. Respondents' perceptions of financial constraints as a challenge to monument conservation

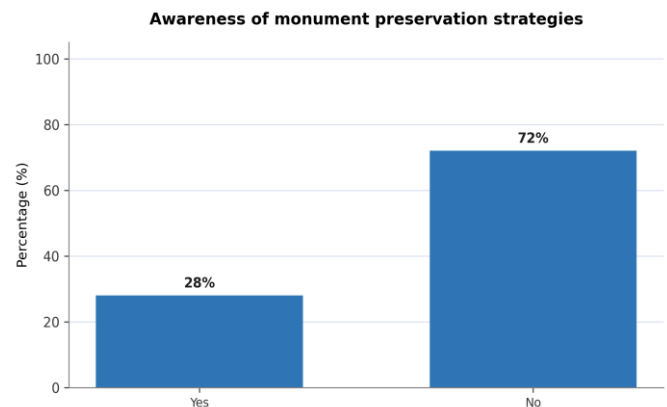


Figure 9. Respondents' awareness of strategies for preserving historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region

Figure 8 shows that 56% of respondents do not consider the lack of financial resources to be a challenge for the conservation of historical and architectural monuments, while 28% think that it is a problem. 16% are not sure.

This suggests that financial challenges may not be the main concern for most respondents, although some of them see it as an obstacle. Figure 9 shows that 72% of respondents do not have information on the strategies for the preservation of historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region, while only 28% have knowledge of these strategies. Local governments often have strategies for the preservation of historical monuments, but the challenge lies in the lack of public information. It is recommended to organize awareness-raising campaigns through local media, schools and cultural organizations to increase knowledge on the importance of preserving cultural heritage.

Furthermore, integrating educational modules in schools and organizing visits to monuments can contribute to raising awareness among younger generations.

Also, using digital platforms to publish information on monuments and conservation strategies provides an easy opportunity for the public to be informed and actively participate. Placing information boards near monuments with history and conservation guidelines will help visitors understand their cultural significance. Engaging the community in regular forums, where they can discuss and contribute to heritage issues, strengthens the connection with the monuments and helps in their conservation. Figure 10 shows that public awareness of the importance of preserving historical and architectural monuments is quite low. Only 8% of respondents assess it as high, while 60% think it is very low and 28% consider it low. These data show that there is a need for greater public awareness on this issue.

Figure 11 shows that only 20% of respondents believe that government institutions and international organizations are contributing enough to the preservation of monuments. 36% think that these institutions are not doing enough, while 44% are not sure. This result suggests a clear lack of trust in the institutions for the preservation of monuments. Figure 12 shows strong support for initiatives that promote the preservation of historical and architectural monuments. 52% of respondents would strongly support these initiatives, while 44% would support them to some extent. Only 4% of respondents would offer some support, suggesting a broad willingness to help preserve cultural heritage.

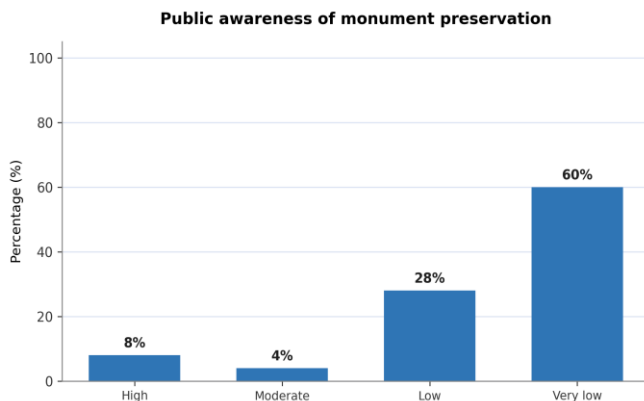


Figure 10. Respondents' assessment of public awareness of monument preservation

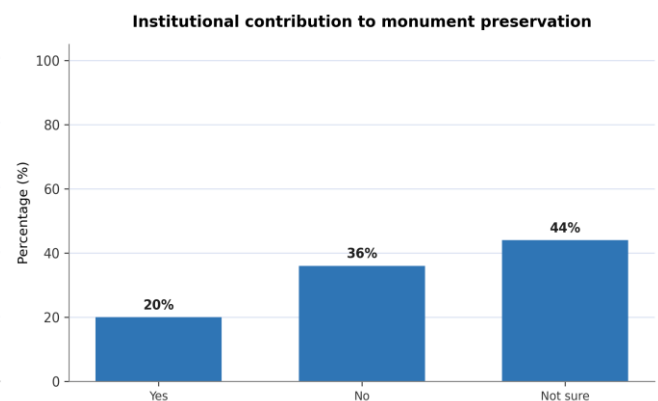


Figure 11. Respondents' assessment of institutional contributions to monument preservation

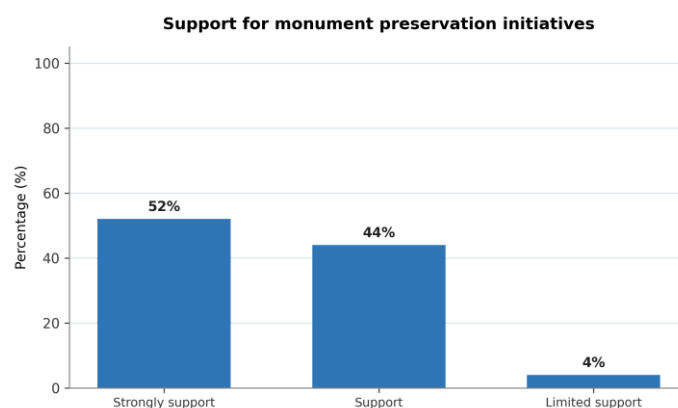


Figure 12. Respondents' support for monument preservation initiatives

Table 6 summarizes the results related to hypothesis H2, which suggests that the main challenges in the conservation of historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region include the lack of financial resources and the need for advanced conservation strategies, while opportunities for improvement are present. Here is the interpretation of the results:

Table 6. Results related to hypothesis H2. The main challenges in the conservation of historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region include the lack of financial resources and the need for advanced conservation strategies

	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Do you think that the lack of financial resources is a challenge for the conservation of historical and architectural monuments?	1.00	3.00	1.8800	.65567
Do you have information on strategies for preserving historical monuments and architecture in the Peja region?	1.00	2.00	1.7200	.45126
How do you assess public awareness of the importance of conserving historical and architectural monuments?	2.00	5.00	4.4000	.89893
Do you think that government institutions and international organizations are contributing enough to the preservation of monuments?	1.00	3.00	2.2400	.76700
Will you support initiatives that promote the preservation of historical and architectural monuments?	1.00	3.00	1.5200	.57700
Valid N (listwise)				

Lack of financial resources as a challenge: The mean of 1.88 indicates that the majority of respondents think that the lack of financial resources is a challenge for the conservation of historical and architectural monuments. The standard deviation of .65567 suggests a moderate distribution of opinions, with some being more certain about this issue and others being more undecided. Knowledge of monument conservation strategies: The mean of 1.72 indicates that the majority of respondents do not have much information about monument conservation strategies in the Peja region.

The standard deviation of .45126 indicates a high level of consistency in the responses. Public awareness of the importance of conservation: This question has a high mean of 4.40, which suggests that public awareness of the importance of conservation of historical and architectural monuments is perceived as very low. The standard deviation of .89893 indicates a moderate spread of opinions, with some seeing awareness as very low and others having an average rating.

Contribution of government institutions and international organizations: The mean of 2.24 indicates that most respondents are of the opinion that government institutions and international organizations are not contributing enough to the conservation of monuments. The standard deviation of .76700 indicates a moderate variability of opinions.

Support for initiatives that promote the conservation of monuments: The mean of 1.52 suggests a high support by respondents for initiatives aimed at the conservation of historical and architectural monuments. The standard deviation of .57700 indicates a considerable agreement in their answers.

Overall, these results show that the main challenges in monument conservation are the lack of financial resources and low public awareness, while government institutions and international organizations are not contributing enough. However, there is a great desire to support initiatives that promote the preservation of monuments.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the role of historical and architectural monuments in shaping cultural tourism development and regional sustainability in the Peja region. The empirical results allow several important conclusions to be drawn. The findings reveal a strong social recognition of heritage as a strategic tourism asset. An overwhelming majority of respondents (96%) have visited heritage sites, while 92% confirm their contribution to increasing visitor numbers. This demonstrates that cultural heritage represents a core component of destination attractiveness and territorial competitiveness in the Peja region.

A highly positive perception of the economic impact of cultural tourism was identified, with 76% of respondents evaluating this impact as very positive. These results confirm that heritage-based tourism functions as an effective driver of local economic development, employment creation and service diversification. Nevertheless, the study identifies significant structural challenges affecting the long-term sustainability of heritage management. While financial constraints are perceived inconsistently, the dominant weaknesses are institutional, informational and governance-related. The lack of public knowledge regarding conservation strategies (72%) and very low levels of public awareness (60% rating it as very low) reveal critical deficiencies in communication, education and stakeholder engagement.

Institutional performance is perceived as insufficient, with 44% of respondents expressing distrust in the contributions of governmental and international organizations. This institutional gap undermines coordinated heritage governance and weakens the integration of cultural heritage into regional planning and tourism development frameworks. Despite these constraints, the research highlights a major opportunity: strong community readiness to support heritage preservation initiatives. More than half of respondents (52%) express strong willingness to participate, indicating the presence of valuable social capital that can be mobilized for participatory heritage management. Overall, the study confirms that historical and architectural monuments in the Peja region represent a fundamental pillar of cultural tourism development and regional growth. However, unlocking their full development potential requires the strengthening of governance structures, improved public awareness and the systematic integration of heritage conservation within regional spatial and tourism planning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following policy-oriented recommendations are proposed:

1. Integrate cultural heritage conservation into regional spatial planning and tourism development strategies in order to ensure coherent territorial management and sustainable destination development.
2. Strengthen institutional coordination and governance capacity by enhancing cooperation between governmental bodies, heritage institutions, local authorities and tourism organizations.
3. Implement comprehensive public awareness and education programs, including school curricula, community workshops and media campaigns, to improve understanding of heritage value and conservation responsibilities.
4. Develop participatory heritage management mechanisms that actively involve local communities in planning, monitoring and decision-making processes related to heritage conservation.
5. Increase transparency and communication regarding conservation strategies and funding mechanisms to rebuild public trust in institutions and stimulate broader civic engagement.
6. Support heritage-based tourism products and experiences, such as cultural routes, heritage festivals and interpretative programs, to strengthen the regional tourism offer and enhance visitor experience.

The implementation of these recommendations will contribute to the sustainable management of Peja's cultural heritage, reinforce regional tourism development and support long-term socio-economic growth.

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Abbreviations: ERDF – European Regional Development Fund; KCCH – Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage; UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization

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