

Mapping the Interconnections of Community Participation Parameters in Heritage Conservation: A Bibliometric and Network Analysis

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Abstract: *In recent decades, scholarly discourse has increasingly underscored the importance of engaging local communities as collaborators in the conservation of cultural heritage. Nevertheless, in developing contexts such as India, the mechanisms by which communities participate in heritage processes remain inadequately theorized and empirically delineated. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a systematic review and bibliometric analysis of forty-four scholarly articles, sourced from diverse geographic and disciplinary contexts, to identify and map the key parameters influencing community participation (CP) in heritage conservation. Through text-mining, keyword classification, and network visualization, six interrelated parameters were identified: heritage, local community, range of stakeholders, funding, CP strategies, and safeguarding frameworks, which collectively shape participatory practices in heritage governance. Chronological and network analyses revealed that these parameters interact dynamically rather than linearly, reflecting an increasing integration of social, economic, and policy dimensions in participatory heritage research. This study further argues that each parameter comprises context-dependent variables that evolve according to local conditions, rendering them adaptable for future comparative and empirical investigations. This integrative framework contributes to a deeper understanding of how diverse CP patterns emerge and can be strategically aligned to support sustainable heritage management.*

Keywords: community participation (CP), heritage conservation, participatory governance, local community, bibliometric analysis

1. Introduction

Threats to heritage today include not only physical damage but also harm to social groups that value memories, traditions, or places as their heritage [1], [2], [3]. The concept of involving communities in heritage conservation can be traced back to the Nairobi Recommendation (UNESCO, 1976), the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 1979), and the Washington Charter (ICOMOS, 1987). Additionally, the Valletta Principles (ICOMOS, 2011) stressed the importance of protecting indigenous people by preserving their traditional practices, social settings, and lifestyles [4].

The 2015 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) incorporated heritage preservation as a part of the objective of fostering sustainable urban environments, underscoring the importance of community engagement in urban development processes [5]. This paradigm shift acknowledges that the loss of heritage impacts not only physical structures but also cultural practices and the well-being of communities, thereby advocating a more inclusive, community-oriented approach to conservation [5]. The Indian state assumes a predominant role in the nomination and safeguarding of both tangible and intangible heritage sites. However, it encounters numerous challenges in engaging local communities at the grassroots level [6]. The UN has emphasized the importance of raising awareness among communities at all levels regarding the preservation of their historical and cultural heritage, thereby aligning with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.4. Additionally, the creation of a new sustainable economic resource, derived from historical practices and transmitted to

the present through interactive activities among communities, contributes to achieving SDG 4, which focuses on lifelong learning [7].

Despite the emphasis on a participatory approach in World Heritage Documents, there are no specific indicators for evaluating the involvement of local communities in the nomination process [8]. It appears that the opinions of local communities are not prioritized by the World Heritage Center, which focuses more on the decisions of State Parties. These State Parties are accountable for every stage, such as compiling the tentative list, preparing the nomination dossier, and submitting annual reports, from the nomination of a property to the management of World Heritage Sites. Consequently, local communities, who are the primary stakeholders and true custodians of cultural and World Heritage Sites are often intentionally overlooked by some State Parties [9].

2. Materials and Methods

This study utilized a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the parameters of CP in heritage conservation initiatives. It comprises two stages: a systematic review of the literature and a bibliometric and network analysis of the selected papers.

The initial phase involved conducting a systematic review of the literature to gain a foundational understanding of community involvement in heritage conservation and identify the parameters influencing such participation.

For the analysis, metadata from selected academic publications were exported from Zotero, ensuring that all sources were accurately cited. A text-mining and keyword-based classification method was employed to pinpoint six essential parameters of CP in the heritage conservation literature. Following this, chronological and network visualizations were created using open-source Python libraries to illustrate the connections between the parameters, publication dates, and contributing authors.

2.1 Systematic Literature Review

Recently, the role of CP in heritage conservation has become increasingly prominent. This study undertakes a literature review of studies published between January 2016 and September 2025, ensuring a contemporary and relevant analysis. The data were extracted from Dimensions (Research Platform), concentrating on English-language articles within the fields of History, Heritage, and Archaeology, as these areas are intrinsically linked to community involvement in heritage conservation. A pivotal aspect of conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) is the careful selection of keywords to guarantee comprehensive data coverage. The primary research question guiding this study was: *What are the major parameters of CP in the process of heritage conservation?* To explore this question, the keywords 'Community Participation' AND 'Heritage Conservation' WITH 'Place-based Community' were used in the data search process.

2.2 Paper Selection Process

The process of selecting 44 papers from Dimensions involved two stages of elimination. Initially, a keyword analysis was conducted, which narrowed down the pool to 313 articles spanning from 2016 to 2025, illustrating the yearly publication frequency. The subsequent phase entailed examining the titles and abstracts to identify the data relevant to the research question. Through this review, six parameters were found in the literature that affect CP in heritage conservation: heritage, local community, range of stakeholders, funding, CP strategies, and safeguarding frameworks.

2.3 Literature Mapping and Network Graph related to the identified CP Parameters

The analytical process involved both quantitative and qualitative analyses of bibliographic data derived from Zotero Exports. Using Python-based tools, text-mining techniques were employed to process the titles and abstracts of the collected publications. A set of predefined keywords, representing six analytical parameters, was used to classify each paper according to thematic relevance. This keyword-driven classification facilitated multi-label tagging, allowing individual studies to contribute to more than one parameter when overlapping themes were identified. Subsequently, chronological mapping visualized the temporal distribution of publications across parameters, while a network graph illustrated the interconnections between papers and parameters to reveal patterns of thematic convergence. This combination of computational text analysis and network visualization provided a comprehensive understanding of how scholarly discourse on CP in heritage conservation has

evolved and intersected over time, as well as how these parameters affect CP in heritage conservation.

3. Results

3.1 General Observations of the SLR

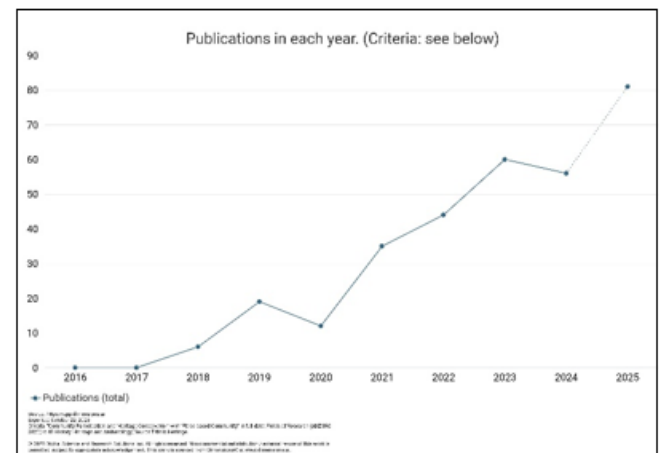


Figure 1: Literature of CP in Heritage Conservation from 2016 to 2025

The discipline of heritage conservation is increasingly incorporating CP and place-based methodologies. The notable increase observed (Fig. 1) post-2021 indicates a growing acknowledgement of the social and participatory aspects of heritage, potentially influenced by global heritage policies, such as UNESCO's emphasis on community involvement, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 11.4) concerning cultural heritage, and the post-pandemic reevaluation of local engagement and identity.

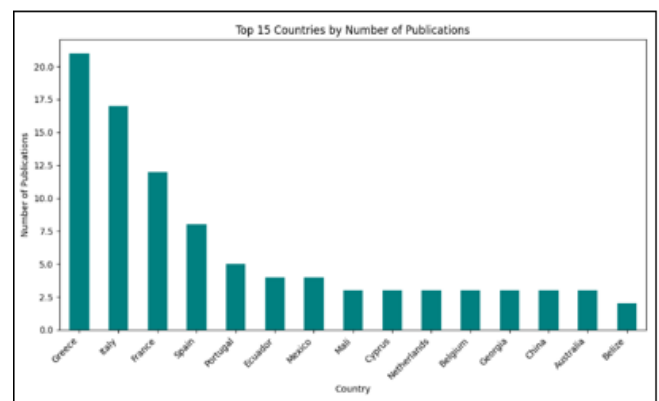


Figure 2: Country wise publication of CP in Heritage Conservation

The dataset (Fig. 2) reveals a predominance of European research in studies related to heritage and community, particularly in the Mediterranean region. There is an encouraging trend of diversification, with scholars from Latin America, Asia, and Oceania participating increasingly in recent years.

The absence or minimal representation of India in the top 15 lists suggests that the country's research output in this specific field was comparatively limited. Although India is rich in cultural heritage, numerous ongoing initiatives related to community-led heritage conservation practices exist, yet

documentation and data on these research platforms are lacking.

3.2 Parameters identified from the SLR

From the systematic literature review (SLR), six principal parameters were identified as foundational to CP in heritage conservation. These parameters include heritage, local community, stakeholders, funding, CP strategies, and safeguarding frameworks. They serve as constants essential to every instance of CP in heritage conservation, while being influenced by certain variables that facilitate diversity in participation patterns. The dependent variables associated with each parameter are further enumerated below (Fig. 3):

3.2.1 Heritage

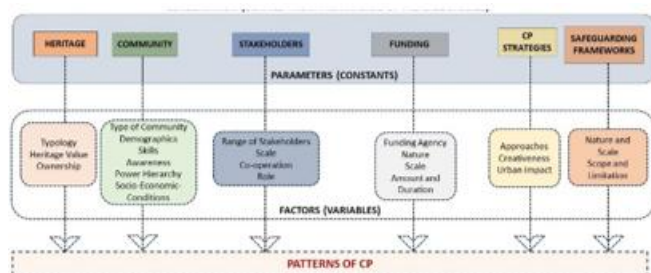


Figure 3: Identified Parameters and Factors of CP in Heritage Conservation

The association between heritage and CP is influenced by the qualitative aspects of certain factors (variables) outlined below.

- Typology: Tangible/ intangible/ scale
- Heritage values: Socio-economic values/ significance
- Ownership: Private/ public

3.2.2 Local Community:

The structure of the local community varies in each instance, and its variables display diverse patterns of CP in heritage conservation, which include:

- Type of Community (place-based/ common-interest/ culture/ practice/ resistance)
- Demographics
- Skills
- Awareness of heritage
- Power-hierarchy
- Socio-economic conditions
- Driver of CP (single/ group/ expert-driven)
- Common Interest

3.2.3 Stakeholders:

The variables of stakeholders also contribute to CP in heritage conservation, which are:

- Range of stakeholders: (property owners/ NGOs/ experts/ govt. agencies/ pvt. companies/ research institutes/ religious groups)
- Scale of stakeholders (local/ regional/ international)
- Co-operation between stakeholders
- Role of Stakeholders (awareness/ research/ expertise/ funding)

3.2.4 Funding

Executing any heritage conservation project is nearly impossible without funding, making it a crucial parameter in CP, which further depends on:

- Funding Agency
- Nature and scale of Funding
- Amount and duration of Funding

3.2.5 CP Strategies:

A well-crafted CP strategy can lead to successful participation, which further relies on:

- Approach of CP Strategy: (top-down/ collaborative/ bottom-up)
- Creativeness
- Urban Impact

3.2.6 Safeguarding Frameworks:

Every successful heritage conservation effort is achievable with certain legal or supportive frameworks, which further depend on:

- Nature and Scale of the Framework: Bye-Laws/ charters/ legal Frameworks
- Scope and Limitations of the Framework

Each instance of CP within the heritage conservation process exhibits a distinct pattern, influenced by both constant and variable dynamics. The variables of each pattern may vary significantly, contingent upon the context and complexity of the heritage and the local community. The figure below illustrates the relationship between the variables and constants of CP in heritage conservation.

3.3 Literature Mapping and Network Analysis of the Identified Parameters

3.3.1 Chronological mapping

Chronological mapping (Fig. 4) illustrates the temporal and thematic distribution of scholarly contributions addressing the six identified parameters of CP in heritage conservation from 2014 to 2025.

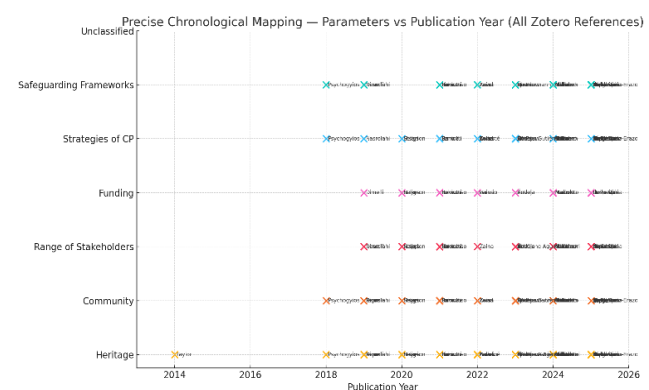


Figure 4: Chronological Mapping of CP Parameters

The dataset indicates a substantial increase in research activity post-2018, aligning with a growing global emphasis on sustainable heritage management and community inclusion. The parameters Heritage and Community exhibit the highest frequency and consistency throughout the period, underscoring their centrality in heritage discourse and sustained interest in linking conservation with social well-being. The Range of Stakeholders and Strategies of CP

became prominent from 2020 onward, reflecting an expanding focus on governance models, co-production processes, and participatory tools. In contrast, Funding and Safeguarding Frameworks appear less frequently but remain conceptually critical, as they underpin the enabling conditions and policy structures for sustained engagement. Notably, the presence of multi-year clusters suggests interdisciplinary convergence, with several authors contributing to more than one parameter, revealing the interconnected nature of heritage governance, participation, and sustainability in the recent literature.

3.3.2 Network Analysis

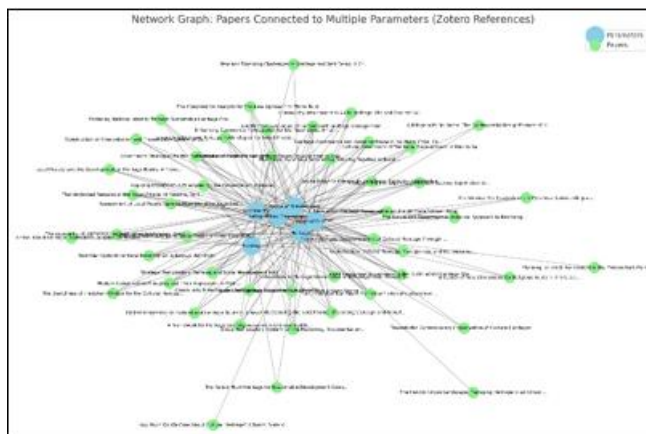


Figure 5: Network Visualization of CP Parameters

The network visualization depicted in Fig. 5 illustrates the connections between individual papers and six analytical parameters related to CP: heritage, community, range of stakeholders, funding, strategies of CP, and safeguarding frameworks. Blue nodes signify parameters, whereas the green nodes represent papers, linked wherever a thematic alignment was observed. The network revealed that most publications intersect with several parameters, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of modern heritage studies. Heritage, Community, and Strategies of CP emerged as central hubs, each drawing numerous connections, suggesting that these themes are at the heart of participatory heritage research. Conversely, Funding and Safeguarding Frameworks, while more peripheral, play structurally important roles, acting as enabling dimensions that connect to multiple core nodes, especially in studies focused on governance and adaptive reuse. The dense interconnections also indicate a growing methodological convergence in recent years, where participatory, policy, and economic frameworks are increasingly integrated into a unified operational discourse on sustainable heritage management.

4. Discussion

This study identifies six principal parameters influencing patterns of CP in heritage conservation: heritage, local community, range of stakeholders, funding, strategies of CP, and safeguarding frameworks. The inaugural systematic application of these parameters to CP provides a substantial theoretical contribution and foundation for understanding the patterns of CP within the heritage conservation process. These parameters are interrelated, with each exhibiting

additional dependent factors that vary across contexts. This discussion provides a deeper understanding of the literature.

4.1 Heritage

In contemporary academic discourse, heritage is conceptualized as a complex resource that integrates physical structures, cultural practices, collective memory, and the dynamics of urban life [10]. Consequently, meaningful CP necessitates perceiving heritage as an active system interwoven with social and economic processes, rather than viewing it as an isolated monument [11], [12]. Research conducted in island and historic-city settings underscores that the integration of Historic Urban Landscape perspectives facilitates the alignment of conservation objectives with the residents' livelihoods and local market dynamics. This alignment subsequently enhances the legitimacy of conservation efforts and fosters resident participation in management and interpretative activities [11], [12]. Empirical case studies indicate that when heritage values are closely tied to everyday activities such as commerce, craftsmanship, and intangible traditions, communities are more inclined to engage in heritage conservation efforts because they perceive a direct connection to their identity and livelihood [7].

4.2 Local Community

Numerous empirical studies have indicated that CP is influenced by residents' awareness, perceived advantages, and involvement in decision-making processes [13], [14], [15]. The case study of Yazd illustrates that when local inhabitants are neither adequately informed nor consulted, a significant proportion may oppose the inscription and report no enhancement in their quality of life following the designation [9]. Studies in the fields of post-conflict residential reconstruction and small-scale community archaeology demonstrate that initiatives involving participatory education, capacity building, and local employment significantly bolster community engagement in heritage projects [13], [16]. In short, CP is enhanced when individuals comprehend the implications of heritage interventions, receive tangible benefits such as employment and services, and are engaged as active partners in shaping outcomes rather than being treated as passive subjects of conservation.

4.3 Stakeholders

The literature consistently emphasizes that effective participation necessitates a comprehensive and well-coordinated network of stakeholders [17], [18], [19]. Reviews and case studies of governance models indicate that decision-making processes dominated by a single actor or characterized by a strictly top-down approach tend to marginalize local voices and lead to weaker implementation [20], [21], [22]. In contrast, multi-actor partnerships, encompassing municipal authorities, civil society, private entities, and community groups, promote more resilient and locally appropriate solutions [10], [17]. Several case studies, including those on heritage reuse projects, hydraulic systems, and karst and urban sites, demonstrate that aligning stakeholders across various scales (local, regional, and national) and sectors (public, private, and civil) enhances the capacity for coordinated conservation, financing, and benefit

sharing. This alignment facilitates more profound CP [7], [10], [23].

4.4 Funding

The literature has consistently highlighted funding as a pivotal enabling parameter [24], [25], [26]. Diverse financial mechanisms and partnership frameworks, including public-private-people (P3/P4) models and foundation-supported cross-sector initiatives, provide an essential economic foundation for the sustainability of long-term, community-focused heritage projects [26], [27]. Analyses of extensive projects in Lombardy, foundational initiatives, and partnership evaluations indicate that when projects integrate public funding, private investment, and dedicated community resources, they can expand interventions beyond individual monuments to encompass area-wide cultural and social programs that maintain local engagement [17], [26]. Research in field studies and community archaeology suggests that jobs created by heritage initiatives and ongoing financial support for skill development are crucial for sustaining local engagement beyond the initial stages of projects [10], [13]. Without stable and participatory financing arrangements, community involvement is often sporadic and fragile.

4.5 Strategies of CP

The literature reviewed emphasizes that strategic planning influences the depth and success of CP more than simply extending an invitation [14], [28]. Effective projects utilize phased, collaborative approaches, moving through stages such as context analysis, joint visioning, co-design, implementation, and participatory monitoring [10], [14], [16]. They also make use of practical participatory tools, such as photovoice, co-diagnostic workshops, community-led monitoring, and digital documentation to institutionalize the agency of residents and integrate participation in governance frameworks [3], [10], [23]. Comparative analyses of post-disaster reconstruction and glocal digital heritage systems revealed that participatory strategies, which incorporate educational components, iterative feedback mechanisms, and the transparent integration of community inputs into both policy and design, significantly enhance local stakeholders' sense of ownership and their capacities for long-term stewardship. These findings underscore the importance of structured, process-oriented participation frameworks, as opposed to tokenistic or sporadic consultations, in transforming community interest into sustained engagement [3], [16].

4.6 Safeguarding Frameworks

Finally, safeguarding frameworks, comprising policy instruments, management plans, and legally established conservation guidelines, constitute the institutional foundation that ensures that CP is both credible and enforceable [29], [30], [31], [32]. The literature reviewed on ICOMOS-IFLA principles, landscape management, and adaptive reuse indicates that explicit frameworks that integrate both tangible and intangible heritage values while incorporating mechanisms for monitoring, benefit-sharing, and dispute resolution are essential for fostering community trust and sustained engagement [7]. However, numerous studies suggest that when safeguarding frameworks lack

clarity about community responsibilities, involvement tends to be shallow [33], [34]. In contrast, management plans that clearly define stakeholder roles, allocate resources effectively, and establish transparent monitoring systems encourage significant and lasting local participation in heritage governance. [2], [7], [10].

5. Conclusion

This research illustrates that CP in heritage conservation has transformed into a complex and interconnected domain, where studies increasingly link cultural identity, governance, and sustainability [35], [36]. Chronological analysis highlighted a clear temporal transition: since 2018, academic work has shifted from descriptive narratives to strategic, participatory, and governance-focused methods that incorporate communities as active participants in conservation efforts. The network analysis verified that Heritage, Community, and Strategies of CP function as conceptual centers, while Funding, Range of Stakeholders, and Safeguarding Frameworks act as supportive structures that facilitate long-term engagement and policy consistency. Notably, the six identified parameters are not fixed categories but context-sensitive variables whose significance and arrangement may differ across cultural, institutional, and geographical contexts. Each parameter includes dependent sub-variables, such as local governance style, socio-economic structure, or resource availability, that affect how participation is expressed and developed. Therefore, these parameters can be further refined or expanded in future research to capture the contextual subtleties and emerging participatory practices. This integrative mix of parameters and factors offers a diagnostic framework for identifying patterns in how local communities engage with heritage conservation, from consultation and co-design to stewardship and policy co-production. Collectively, the findings highlight that sustainable heritage management depends on strategically aligned, participatory systems supported by clear policy frameworks, diverse funding, and culturally embedded safeguarding mechanisms. Future research should expand this framework through comparative and longitudinal studies to enhance the understanding of how participatory processes adapt across different regions and governance contexts.

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