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LOCAL FESTIVALS AND TERRITORIAL RESILIENCE: A SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS IN BULGARIA

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Abstract: This article examines the role of local festivals as a factor contributing to the territorial resilience of local communities in Bulgaria. Building upon the concepts of community resilience, territorial capital, social capital, and place-based development, the study explores how local festivals extend beyond their cultural and symbolic functions to become mechanisms for strengthening social cohesion, stimulating local economies, and enhancing the adaptive capacity of communities. The empirical analysis is based on data from a nationally representative sociological survey conducted in 2023 among 800 respondents living in settlements where local festivals are regularly organized. The analytical framework combines exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Games–Howell post hoc tests to identify the principal dimensions of the perceived impact of local festivals and to examine spatial differences across settlement types. Comparative analysis further reveals statistically significant spatial differences in public perceptions across settlement types, with the perceived contribution of local festivals to social cohesion, local development, and the adaptive capacity of communities increasing as settlement size decreases. These findings highlight the importance of the spatial context for interpreting the role of local festivals and provide empirical evidence supporting their integration into regional and local development policies. The findings demonstrate that local festivals generate multidimensional effects encompassing social cohesion, institutional cooperation, economic vitality, and community resilience. Factor analysis identifies several latent dimensions describing the contribution of festivals to local development, while comparative analysis reveals significant territorial differences. Residents of small towns and villages perceive local festivals as substantially more important for strengthening community solidarity, supporting local economic activities, preserving cultural identity, and addressing demographic challenges than residents of the capital city. These results suggest that the developmental functions of local festivals become increasingly

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significant as settlement size decreases. The study contributes to the growing literature on territorial resilience by proposing an empirical framework that conceptualizes local festivals as a form of territorial capital. It demonstrates that their developmental role is spatially differentiated and closely related to the socio-economic characteristics of local communities. The findings also provide evidence supporting the integration of local cultural initiatives into regional and local development policies aimed at strengthening the resilience and long-term sustainability of peripheral territories.

Keywords: local festivals; territorial resilience; local communities; social capital; territorial capital.

МЕСТНИТЕ ПРАЗНИЦИ И ТЕРИТОРИАЛНАТА УСТОЙЧИВОСТ: ПРОСТРАНСТВЕН АНАЛИЗ НА ОБЩЕСТВЕНИТЕ ОЦЕНКИ В БЪЛГАРИЯ

Камелия Петкова

Статията изследва ролята на местните празници като фактор за укрепване на териториалната устойчивост на локалните общности в България. В нея местните празници са интерпретирани не само като културни събития, а и като социален феномен, който изпълнява важни социални, икономически и адаптивни функции и допринася за устойчивото развитие на населените места. Теоретичният анализ ги поставя в контекста на концепциите за социален капитал, локална идентичност, териториален капитал и устойчиво местно развитие, като аргументира тяхната роля за укрепването на социалната кохезия, гражданската ангажираност и местната идентичност. Емпиричната част се основава на данни от национално представително социологическо изследване, проведено през 2023 г. сред 800 респонденти, живеещи в населени места, в които се организират местни празници. Чрез експлораторен факторен анализ са идентифицирани основните измерения на възприеманото въздействие на местните празници, а посредством дисперсионен анализ са изследвани пространствените различия в обществените оценки между различните типове населени места. Резултатите показват, че местните празници изпълняват важни социални, икономически и адаптивни функции, като тяхното значение е най-силно изразено в малките градове и селата. Сравнителният анализ разкри статистически значими пространствени различия в обществените оценки. Възприеманият принос на местните празници за социалната кохезия, локалното развитие и адаптивния капацитет на общностите се увеличава с намаляването на размера на населеното място. Получените резултати разширяват съществуващите знания за връзката между местните празници и териториалната устойчивост и предоставят емпирични аргументи в подкрепа на интегрирането им в политиките за регионално и местно развитие. Научният принос на изследването се изразява в предлагането на пространствена интерпретация на обществените оценки за въздействието на местните празници. Въз основа на получените резултати се аргументира тяхната роля като стратегически ресурс за укрепване на териториалната устойчивост на локалните общности.

Ключови думи: местни празници; териториална устойчивост; локални общности; социален капитал; териториален капитал.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, local festivals have increasingly been recognised not only as a means of preserving cultural heritage and local traditions but also as an important resource for the sustainable development of local communities. Beyond their cultural and tourism-related functions, they perform significant social, economic, and institutional roles by encouraging residents' participation, strengthening the sense of place attachment and belonging, and creating opportunities for local economic development. This shift in scholarly interest reflects the broader conceptualisation of sustainable local development, within which cultural practices and community-based initiatives are increasingly viewed as factors enhancing the vitality and adaptive capacity of local communities (Göçer et al., 2024).

At the same time, the concept of community resilience has become firmly established in the academic literature and has gradually evolved into one of the leading analytical frameworks in regional development research. Rather than being understood solely as the ability to recover from crises, resilience is increasingly interpreted as a dynamic process based on the mobilisation of social, cultural, economic, and institutional resources that enable communities to adapt to changing conditions while preserving their identity and long-term development potential (Phillips et al., 2024). Within this context, local festivals constitute a particularly valuable object of study. They create opportunities for interaction among residents, public institutions, local businesses, and civil society organisations, encourage voluntary participation, and strengthen social ties within the community. Furthermore, a growing body of research demonstrates that active participation in festivals enhances place attachment and reinforces local identity, thereby contributing to the long-term development and resilience of local communities (Xu et al., 2025).

Despite the growing scholarly interest in this topic, most existing studies rely on single case studies, qualitative analyses, or investigations focusing primarily on the tourism and economic impacts of festivals. Nationally representative quantitative studies examining how residents themselves perceive the contribution of local festivals to community development and resilience remain relatively rare. This gap is even more pronounced in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where empirical research on the subject remains limited.

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the role of local festivals as a factor contributing to the resilience of local communities in Bulgaria using data from a nationally representative sociological survey. Particular attention is paid to public perceptions of the social, cultural, and economic effects of local festivals, as well as to the factors shaping these perceptions

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Recent research on local festivals demonstrates a clear broadening of their analytical scope. While earlier studies primarily viewed festivals as cultural events associated with the preservation of traditions, cultural heritage, and the tourism attractiveness of particular places, contemporary scholarship increasingly interprets them as social practices that influence local identity, residents' participation, social capital, and the resilience of local communities. This shift is particularly evident in studies on cultural tourism and rural communities, where cultural practices are regarded as resources that enable communities to adapt to change without compromising their local identity (Göçer et al., 2024).

The literature identifies three main approaches to the study of local festivals. The first conceptualises festivals as mechanisms for preserving and reproducing cultural heritage, local memory, and community symbols (Derrett, 2003; Getz, 2010; Richards, 2015). The second focuses on their economic and tourism-related effects, including attracting visitors, stimulating local consumption, supporting small businesses, and enhancing the visibility of places (Getz & Page, 2016; Richards, 2018; Göçer et al., 2024). The third approach, which has gained increasing prominence in recent years, examines festivals as mechanisms for strengthening social ties, encouraging civic participation, and enhancing community resilience (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Dias & Fernandes, 2024; Phillips et al., 2024; Ali-Knight et al., 2023). The present study is most closely aligned with this third perspective, as it places the contribution of local festivals to the vitality and resilience of local communities at the centre of the analysis rather than focusing on the events themselves.

This perspective is closely linked to the development of the concept of community resilience. Phillips et al. (2024) argue that the concept has gradually evolved from its narrower understanding as the capacity to recover from natural disasters towards a broader social and psychosocial framework encompassing local resources, social networks, participation, adaptation, and community development capacity. They also emphasise that, despite its widespread application, there is still no consensus regarding its operationalisation, highlighting the importance of empirical research in this field (Phillips et al., 2024).

Within this framework, social capital is regarded as one of the core dimensions of resilient communities. It encompasses trust, networks of mutual support, participation in local initiatives, and the capacity for collective action. Research on civic participation and community resilience demonstrates that residents' involvement in local processes can strengthen community ties, support local planning, and improve the alignment between public policies and community needs (Dias & Fernandes, 2024).

Local festivals provide a particularly suitable setting for observing these processes because they combine cultural, social, and organisational activities. They create recurring spaces for interaction among local authorities, cultural

institutions, businesses, civil society organisations, volunteers, and residents. In this way, festivals function not merely as cultural events but also as mechanisms for mobilising local resources and fostering trust among different actors within the community.

An important strand of recent research also explores the relationship between festivals and place attachment. Xu et al. (2025) demonstrate that festival participation, cultural motivation, and perceptions of authenticity can strengthen attachment to place. Although their study focuses on a specific festival context, it is particularly relevant to the present research because it confirms that festivals can reinforce the emotional and symbolic relationships between people and place (Xu et al., 2025).

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified scholarly interest in the role of festivals during periods of crisis by drawing attention to processes of disruption, recovery, adaptation, and innovation (Ali & Balme, 2023). Research on the festival sector indicates that the pandemic not only interrupted the organisation of numerous events but also stimulated new forms of organisation, partnerships, digitalisation, and local collaboration (Ali-Knight et al., 2023). These developments have encouraged researchers to view festivals as integral components of broader community and institutional ecosystems rather than merely as cultural events.

Table 1.

Main Research Directions in Contemporary Studies on Local Festivals and Territorial Resilience

Research Direction	Main Focus	Representative Publications
Cultural Heritage and Local Identity	Preservation of traditions, local memory, authenticity, and symbolic attachment to place	Göçer et al. (2024); Xu et al. (2025)
Tourism and Local Development	Cultural tourism, economic activity, place visibility, and the development of local resources	Göçer et al. (2024)
Social Capital and Civic Participation	Trust, local networks, civic participation, volunteering, and interaction among local actors	Dias & Fernandes (2024); Phillips et al. (2024)
Community Resilience	Adaptation, collective capacity, resource mobilisation, and sustainable community development	Phillips et al. (2024); Ali-Knight et al. (2023)
Place Attachment	Sense of belonging, emotional attachment to place, and local identity	Xu et al. (2025)

Source: Compiled by the author based on the cited literature.

As shown in the contemporary literature (Table 1), local festivals are increasingly associated with processes that extend beyond cultural reproduction and tourism development. They are viewed as spaces for social participation,

trust-building, strengthening local identity, and mobilising local resources. Nevertheless, existing research is largely based on individual case studies, specific festival settings, or qualitative approaches. Nationally representative quantitative studies examining how residents themselves assess the contribution of local festivals to community development and resilience remain limited.

In the Bulgarian scholarly literature, local festivals are likewise recognised as an important resource for preserving cultural heritage, strengthening local identity, and fostering community cohesion. Studies of Bulgarian festivals demonstrate that they function not only as cultural events but also as mechanisms for promoting places, reinterpreting local traditions, and reinforcing residents' sense of belonging to their communities (Hristova, 2022; Karadzhov, 2025; Keliyan, 2022, 2023; Santova, 2025; Vasileva-Grueva, 2019).

Against this background, the present study examines local festivals as a potential factor contributing to the resilience of local communities, with particular emphasis on residents' perceptions of their social, cultural, and economic effects. Accordingly, resilience is not conceptualised as an objective characteristic of a territory but rather as a subjective assessment of the extent to which local festivals contribute to community vitality, local identity, social cohesion, and the development of the locality.

RESEARCH METHODS

The present study is based on data from a nationally representative sociological survey conducted in 2023 as part of the project Local Festivals: A Resource for Local Communities in Coping with Crises, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund under the Ministry of Education and Science. The empirical data were collected through a standardised questionnaire administered using face-to-face interviews. The sample comprises 800 adult respondents residing in settlements where local festivals are organised. The sampling design ensured national coverage and representation of different types of settlements. All participants were informed about the objectives of the study, and the survey was conducted in accordance with the principles of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

For the purposes of this article, two thematic sections of the questionnaire developed within the nationally representative survey were analysed. The first section comprised eight indicators measuring residents' perceptions of the impact of local festivals on community life, including the creation of opportunities for commercial activities, increasing the visibility of the settlement, improving local infrastructure, creating new jobs, expanding opportunities for interethnic interaction, reducing loneliness and social isolation, strengthening cooperation between local authorities, cultural institutions, and citizens, and fostering hope and confidence in the future. The second section included ten indicators measuring the perceived contribution of local festivals to addressing local community challenges, including the promotion of tourism, local economic

activity and consumption, infrastructure improvement, mitigation of depopulation, post-crisis recovery, preservation of local traditions, and reduction of social isolation.

Two statistical techniques were employed for data analysis: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Exploratory factor analysis was applied to identify groups of interrelated indicators representing common dimensions of the perceived impact of local festivals. One-way ANOVA was subsequently used to examine whether these dimensions differed significantly across settlement types, namely Sofia, regional centres, other towns, and villages.

The latent structure of the two thematic blocks of indicators was examined using Exploratory Factor Analysis based on Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with orthogonal Varimax rotation. This procedure identifies groups of indicators that cluster together to form common underlying dimensions. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and factor loadings of at least 0.40 were retained for interpretation. The analysis identified three latent dimensions of the perceived impact of local festivals in the first thematic block and four latent dimensions describing different aspects of the contribution of local festivals to the territorial resilience of local communities in the second thematic block.

To analyse spatial differences, factor scores calculated using the regression method were employed as dependent variables in a one-way ANOVA, with settlement type (Sofia, regional centre, town, and village) serving as the independent variable. This procedure made it possible to determine whether statistically significant differences existed among the different settlement types. Prior to conducting the analysis, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was assessed using Levene's test. As this assumption was violated, pairwise comparisons were performed using the Games–Howell post hoc test, which is appropriate when variances are unequal and group sizes differ. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < 0.05$, indicating that the probability of the observed differences occurring by chance was less than 5%. The combined application of exploratory factor analysis and analysis of variance made it possible not only to identify the principal dimensions of the perceived impact of local festivals but also to examine their spatial variation across different types of settlements.

RESULTS

To assess the role of local festivals as a factor contributing to the territorial resilience of local communities, the analysis was organised into several consecutive stages. In the first stage, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to examine the underlying structure of public perceptions regarding the impact of local festivals on community life. The objective was to identify the principal

latent dimensions underlying residents' perceptions of the contribution of local festivals to the development of their communities. The subsequent stages of the analysis examined the perceived mechanisms through which local festivals contribute to addressing the main social, economic, and demographic challenges faced by local communities, as well as the dimensions of territorial resilience associated with these events.

Latent Dimensions of the Perceived Impact of Local Festivals on Local Communities

To examine whether the perceived effects of local festivals could be grouped into broader conceptual dimensions, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) based on Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was applied to the eight statements included in the survey question: "In your opinion, what is the impact of local festivals on the local community?"

The preliminary assessment confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis, indicating an acceptable level of intercorrelation among the eight analysed items and supporting the extraction of broader latent dimensions. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.662, exceeding the minimum recommended threshold of 0.60, while Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 273.544$; $df = 28$; $p < 0.001$)[2], confirming the appropriateness of applying factor analysis.

Three factors describing the perceived impact of local festivals on local communities were extracted, representing social dimensions, symbolic and image-related impacts, and economic effects. Together, these three factors explained 62.41% of the total variance, indicating that they accounted for nearly two-thirds of the variation in respondents' perceptions. The individual factors explained 22.84%, 21.13%, and 18.44% of the variance, respectively. The resulting factor structure demonstrates that the perceived impact of local festivals is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing several distinct yet interrelated aspects of local community development.

The first factor represents the social dimension of local festivals, including enhanced opportunities for interaction among different social and ethnic groups, strengthened cooperation between public institutions and local residents, and the reduction of social isolation. These findings suggest that local festivals are perceived not merely as cultural events but also as mechanisms for strengthening social cohesion and local social capital.

The second factor reflects the symbolic and image-related impact of local festivals. Increased visibility of the settlement, the creation of a more favourable environment for local commerce, and the development of more optimistic

[2] χ^2– Bartlett's test chi-square statistic; df– degrees of freedom; p– significance level, with $p < 0.001$ indicating that there is less than a 0.1% probability that the observed result occurred by chance.

expectations about the future portray local festivals as instruments for enhancing community vitality and improving the public image of the locality.

The third factor captures the economic effects of local festivals, primarily associated with job creation and improvements in local infrastructure. Although this factor comprises a smaller number of indicators, it clearly demonstrates that respondents perceive economic outcomes as a distinct dimension of the contribution of local festivals to local development (Table 2).

Table 2.

Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Perceived Impact of Local Festivals

Factor	**Main Variables**	**Explained Variance (%)**	**Preliminary Interpretation**
Factor 1	Cooperation between local authorities, cultural institutions, and citizens; interaction among different ethnic groups; reduction of loneliness and social isolation	22.84	Social Cohesion
Factor 2	Hope for the future; visibility of the settlement; opportunities for commercial activity	21.13	Local Vitality and Attractiveness
Factor 3	Job creation; infrastructure improvement	18.44	Economic Development

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the nationally representative sociological survey Local Festivals: A Resource for Local Communities in Coping with Crises, 2023.

The resulting factor structure indicates that the different dimensions of the impact of local festivals are perceived as distinct yet interrelated components of local community development.

Dimensions of Territorial Resilience Fostered by Local Festivals

Following the identification of the principal dimensions of the perceived impact of local festivals on community life, the next stage of the analysis examined the mechanisms through which these festivals contribute to addressing the main social, economic, and demographic challenges facing local communities. To this end, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to the ten indicators included in Question 17: "How does the festival help address the problems of your settlement?" These indicators measure public perceptions of the contribution of local festivals to addressing specific challenges faced by local communities.

The preliminary assessment confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The analysis identified four factors with eigenvalues greater than one, representing distinct mechanisms through which local festivals contribute to strengthening the territorial resilience of settlements. The resulting factor structure

demonstrates that public perceptions are not centred on a single dimension of resilience but instead encompass several relatively distinct dimensions reflecting the diverse functions performed by local festivals.

Table 3.

Empirical Dimensions of Territorial Resilience Fostered by Local Festivals

Dimension	Main Indicators	Interpretation
Economic Activation of the Territory	Development of tourism; stimulation of local consumption; promotion of local commerce; infrastructure improvement	Local festivals are perceived as instruments for stimulating economic activity and enhancing the competitiveness of the settlement.
Community Adaptive Capacity	Recovery from depopulation; overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; recovery following natural disasters	Local festivals are perceived as resources that enhance communities' capacity to adapt to different types of crises and strengthen their ability to recover from adverse events.
Socio-Cultural Resilience	Preservation of local traditions; reduction of loneliness and social isolation	Local festivals strengthen local identity, social ties, and residents' sense of belonging to the community.
Employment	Job creation	Local festivals are perceived as a potential source of expanding employment opportunities at the local level.

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the nationally representative sociological survey Local Festivals: A Resource for Local Communities in Coping with Crises, 2023.

As shown in Table 3, local festivals perform functions that extend well beyond their traditionally recognised cultural and recreational roles. The most prominent dimension of territorial resilience is economic vitality, which encompasses tourism development, the promotion of local commerce, increased consumption of local products, and improvements in infrastructure. This factor structure indicates that respondents perceive local festivals as important instruments for stimulating local economic activity and enhancing the economic vitality of settlements. In this respect, local festivals function not only as cultural events but also as mechanisms for mobilising local resources, attracting visitors, and encouraging entrepreneurial activity.

The second dimension brings together indicators related to the community's capacity to adapt to different types of crises. The grouping of recovery from depopulation, overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and recovery following natural disasters within a single factor suggests that respondents perceive local festivals as resources that strengthen the adaptive capacity of local communities. The resulting factor structure of public perceptions regarding the contribution of local festivals to addressing local challenges is

consistent with contemporary understandings of community resilience, according to which resilience extends beyond emergency response and encompasses the community's ability to mobilise its social, cultural, and institutional resources in the face of diverse crises.

The third dimension represents the socio-cultural resilience of local communities. The combination of preserving local traditions and reducing loneliness and social isolation indicates that local festivals simultaneously fulfil cultural and social functions. They not only preserve and reproduce local cultural heritage but also create opportunities for interpersonal interaction, mutual support, and the strengthening of residents' sense of belonging. In this way, local festivals reinforce social capital and local identity, both of which are widely recognised in the literature as fundamental prerequisites for sustainable community development.

The fourth dimension consists solely of the indicator job creation. Although it does not represent a multi-item factor, its emergence as a separate dimension indicates that respondents perceive employment as a distinct outcome of organising local festivals. This finding suggests that labour market benefits are viewed as conceptually separate from other forms of local economic vitality and occupy an independent place in public perceptions of local community development.

Overall, the results of the factor analysis confirm that territorial resilience is a multidimensional construct, shaped by the interaction of economic, social, cultural, and adaptive processes. From this perspective, local festivals function as comprehensive mechanisms for mobilising local resources and strengthening community resilience, rather than merely as recurring cultural events.

Spatial Differences in Perceptions of the Role of Local Festivals

Having identified the principal dimensions of the perceived impact of local festivals, the next question concerns the extent to which these perceptions vary across different spatial contexts. Local communities in Bulgaria differ considerably in terms of demographic structure, economic development, institutional capacity, and cultural resources. It can therefore be expected that the role attributed to local festivals by residents is not uniform across different settlement types. To examine this assumption, public perceptions were analysed according to respondents' place of residence.

To determine whether the latent dimensions of the perceived impact of local festivals differ by settlement type, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed. Settlement type (Sofia, regional centre, town, and village) served as the independent variable, while the factor scores derived from the exploratory factor analysis were used as dependent variables.

The results indicate statistically significant differences for two of the three extracted factors (Table 2). For the first factor, representing social interaction, inter-institutional cooperation, and community connectedness, statistically

significant differences were observed across settlement types ($F = 8.315$; $p < 0.001$)[3]. Even more pronounced differences were found for the second factor, reflecting local vitality and place attractiveness ($F = 26.728$; $p < 0.001$). In contrast, no statistically significant differences were identified for the third factor, which captures the economic effects of local festivals ($F = 2.254$; $p = 0.081$).

- **Spatial Differences in Factor 1: Social Interaction, Inter-Institutional Cooperation, and Community Connectedness**

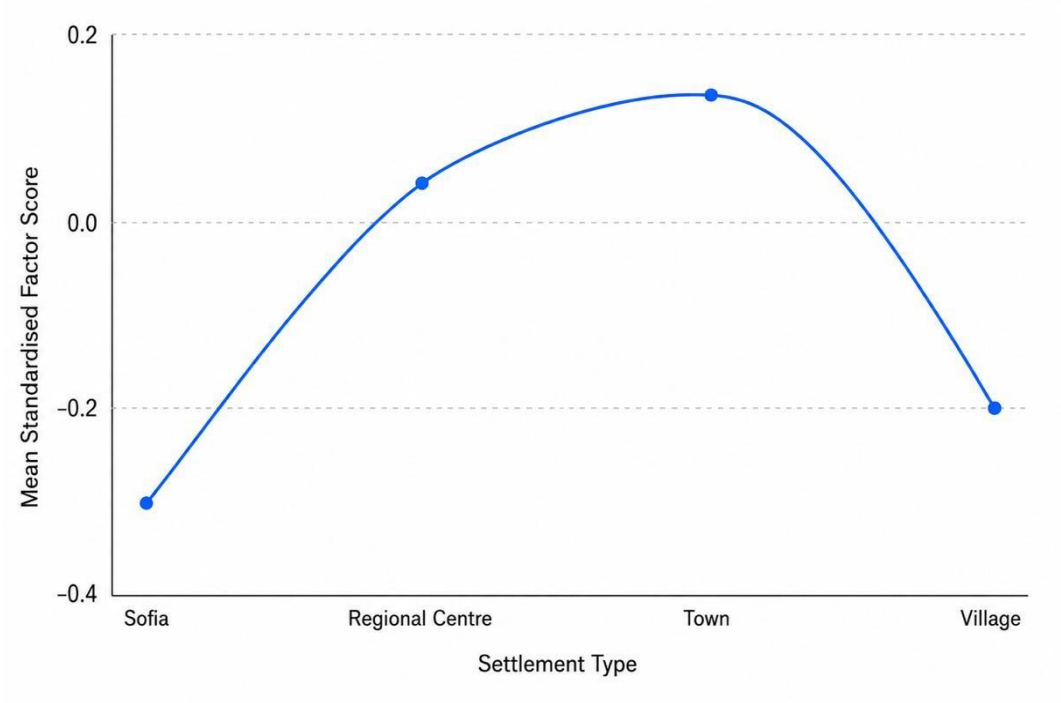
The results of the one-way ANOVA indicate statistically significant differences across settlement types for the first factor ($F = 8.315$; $p < 0.001$). This suggests that perceptions of the socially integrative role of local festivals vary significantly among residents of different settlement types. To identify the specific groups between which these differences occur, the Games–Howell post hoc test was applied.

The analysis revealed statistically significant differences only between Sofia and each of the other settlement categories. Residents of the capital evaluated the social impact of local festivals significantly differently from residents of regional centres ($p < 0.001$), towns ($p = 0.003$), and villages ($p = 0.001$). By contrast, no statistically significant differences were observed among regional centres, towns, and villages ($p > 0.05$).

These findings indicate that the capital represents a distinctive social context in which local festivals are perceived differently. While in other settlement types local festivals are regarded as important mechanisms for building trust, strengthening social cohesion, and fostering interaction between local authorities, institutions, and citizens, this function is perceived as significantly less important in Sofia.

These differences may be explained by the spatial, social, and functional characteristics of the capital city. Sofia offers a far more diverse cultural environment, and opportunities for social interaction are provided through a wide range of alternative events, institutions, and informal networks. Under these conditions, local festivals represent only one of many channels for civic participation and social interaction. In contrast, opportunities for community interaction are more limited in smaller settlements, which increases the social significance of local festivals. They become key community events that bring together residents, local authorities, community cultural centres (chitalishta), cultural organisations, and local businesses, thereby strengthening social cohesion, local identity, and residents' sense of belonging.

[3] F = Fisher's F-statistic from the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA); p= probability value indicating the statistical significance of the observed differences. Values of $p< 0.05$ indicate statistically significant differences between the compared groups.



Note: The vertical axis presents the mean standardised factor scores. Positive values indicate scores above the sample mean, whereas negative values indicate scores below the sample mean.

Fig. 1. Spatial Differences in Factor 1: Social Cohesion and Community Interaction

As shown in Figure 1, the highest scores for the first factor are observed in towns and regional centres, whereas Sofia and villages remain below the sample mean. This pattern suggests that local festivals perform their strongest role as mechanisms of social mediation in medium-sized urban communities, where they facilitate interaction among local authorities, cultural institutions, and civil society organisations. In these settlements, festivals provide spaces for building social capital and fostering community engagement.

- **Spatial Differences in Factor 2: Economic and Demographic Development**

The second factor exhibits even more pronounced differences across settlement types ($F = 26.728$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that the spatial context has a substantial influence on how the economic potential of local festivals is perceived.

The results of the Games–Howell post hoc test reveal statistically significant differences between almost all pairs of settlement types. The only exception is the comparison between Sofia and regional centres, where no statistically significant difference was observed ($p = 0.766$). In contrast, residents of towns rated the economic effects of local festivals significantly higher than residents of Sofia ($p = 0.033$). The highest evaluations were reported by residents of villages, whose scores differed significantly from those of residents of Sofia ($p < 0.001$), regional centres ($p < 0.001$), and towns ($p = 0.006$).

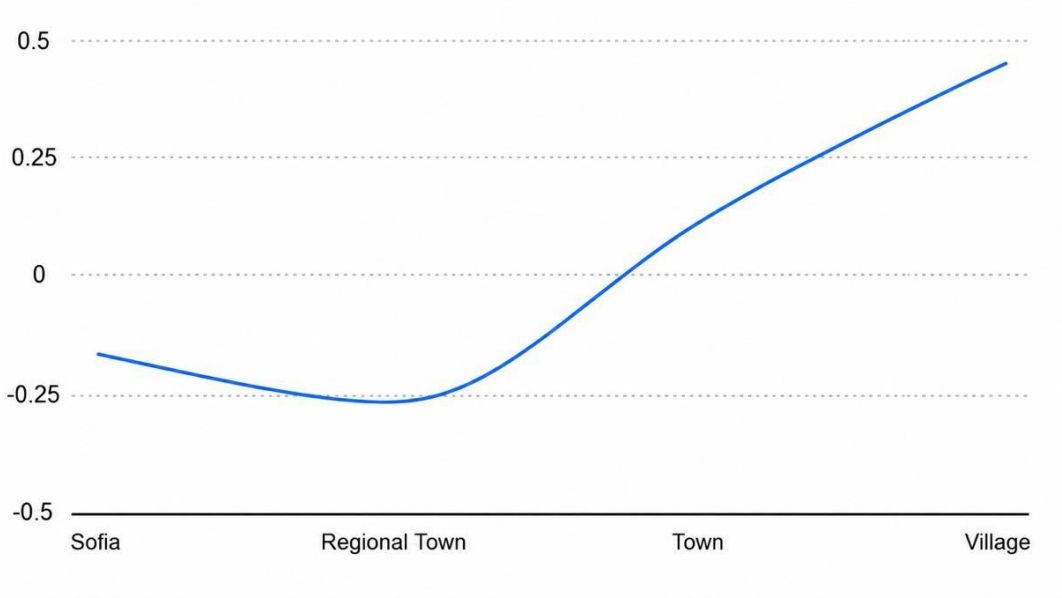


Fig. 2. Spatial Differences in Factor 1: Economic Vitality

As illustrated in Figure 2, the perceived importance of local festivals varies systematically across settlement types. The smaller the settlement, the higher respondents evaluate the contribution of local festivals to economic development, the promotion of local commerce and tourism, job creation, and the mitigation of demographic decline. These findings suggest that local festivals are perceived as particularly important resources for local development and territorial resilience in peripheral and rural areas.

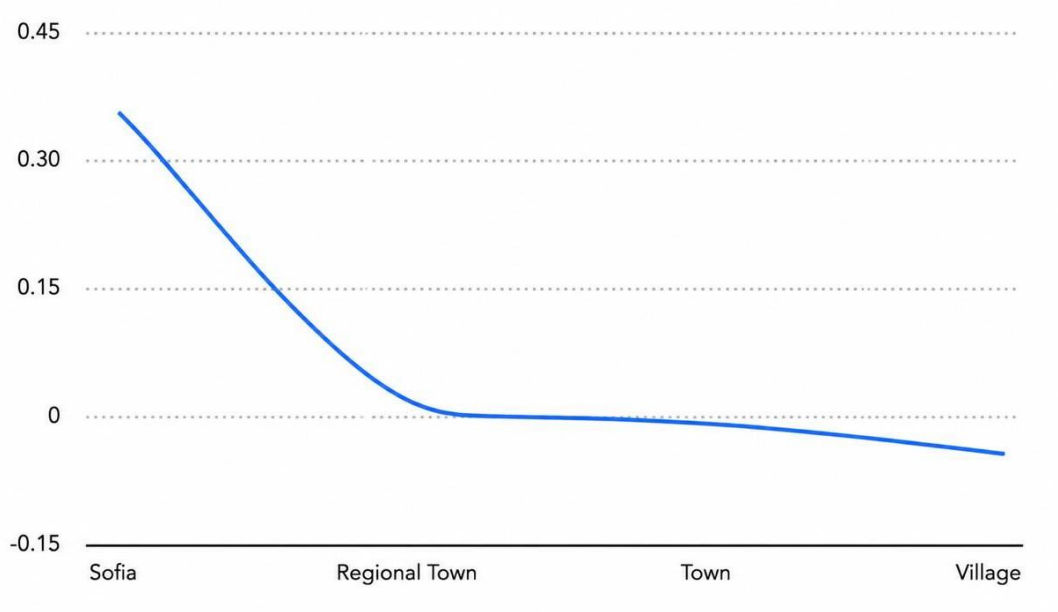
This pattern can be explained by the differing demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the various settlement types. In small towns and villages, where opportunities for economic activity, investment, and cultural initiatives are more limited, local festivals concentrate considerable social and economic potential. They stimulate local entrepreneurship, attract visitors, encourage the consumption of local products and services, and create temporary employment opportunities. Consequently, their contribution to local development is perceived as substantially greater than in large urban centres, where similar functions are performed by a more diversified economic and cultural infrastructure.

- **Spatial Differences in Factor 3: Territorial Resilience and Future Development**

The one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences across settlement types for the third factor ($F = 2.254$; $p = 0.081$). Accordingly, the results of the Games–Howell post hoc test also failed to identify statistically reliable differences between the compared groups. This indicates that respondents' evaluations of this dimension of the impact of local festivals remain relatively

consistent regardless of whether they reside in Sofia, regional centres, towns, or villages.

Unlike the social and economic dimensions, perceptions of this factor do not appear to be substantially influenced by the spatial context. This finding suggests the existence of a broadly shared understanding of the importance of this dimension across different parts of the country.



Note: Differences between settlement types did not reach statistical significance (F = 2.254; p = 0.081).

Fig. 3. Mean Factor Scores for Factor 3 by Settlement Type

As shown in Figure 3, no statistically significant differences were observed across settlement types for the third factor.

The factor analysis identified several complementary dimensions encompassing the social, economic, and adaptive functions of local festivals. The analysis of spatial differences further demonstrates that the importance of these dimensions varies according to settlement type. While the social integration dimension is perceived differently primarily between Sofia and the other settlement types, the economic dimension exhibits a clear spatial gradient, with the perceived contribution of local festivals increasing as settlement size decreases. In contrast, perceptions of the third factor remain relatively stable across settlement types, suggesting that this dimension is interpreted in a broadly similar way throughout the country.

Taken together, these findings confirm that local festivals function as a multidimensional resource for territorial resilience, although the relative importance of individual dimensions varies across different spatial contexts. Their contribution is particularly pronounced in small towns and villages, where local

festivals are perceived as playing a more substantial role in strengthening local communities and supporting territorial development.

The relationships identified through the factor analysis are summarised in Figure 4, which presents a conceptual model of the role of local festivals in fostering territorial resilience.

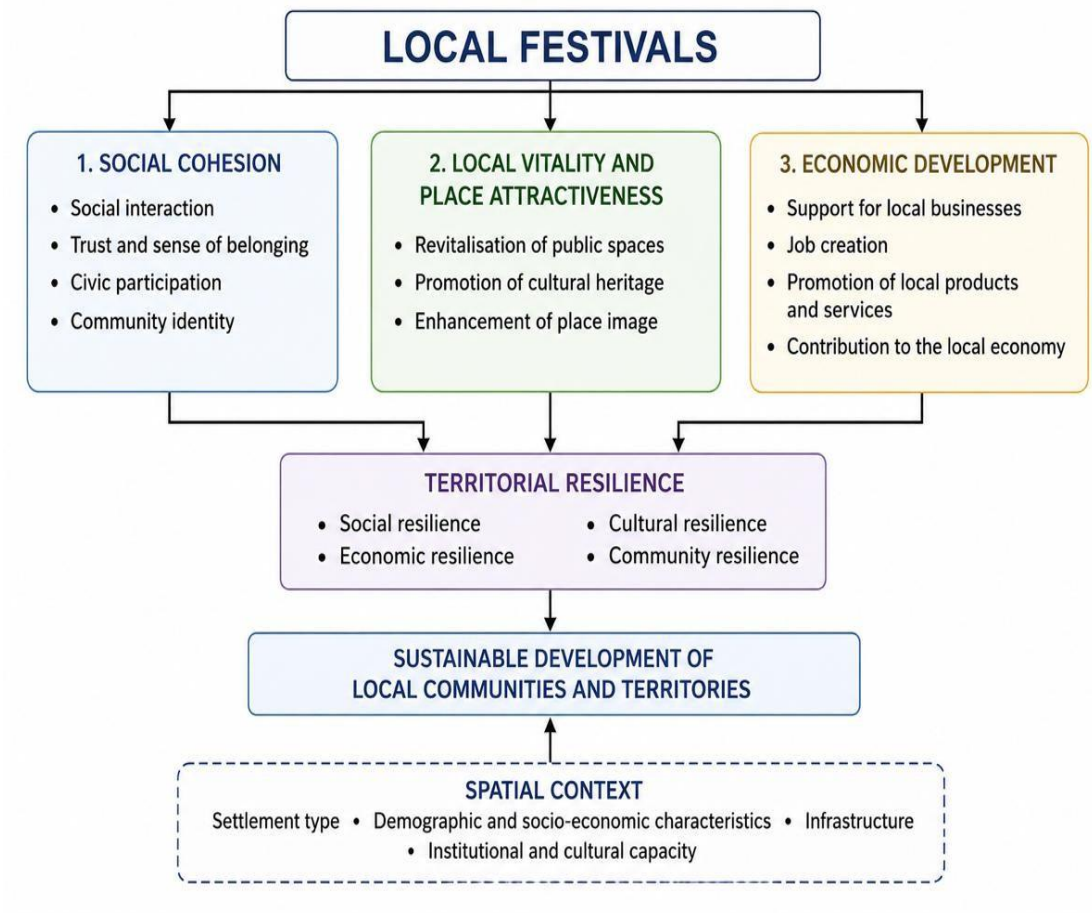


Fig. 4. Conceptual Model of the Contribution of Local Festivals to Territorial Resilience

DISCUSSION

Local festivals function not only as cultural events but also as multidimensional resources that contribute to the development and resilience of local communities. The social, economic, and adaptive dimensions identified through the factor analysis demonstrate that the impacts of local festivals extend simultaneously to social capital, local economic development, and communities' capacity to adapt to demographic and social challenges. These findings are consistent with the concept of community resilience, which views resilience as emerging from the interaction between social networks, institutional capacity, and local resources rather than from isolated factors (Magis, 2010; Wilson, 2012).

The findings relating to the social dimension of local festivals are particularly noteworthy. Respondents assigned high importance to their role in strengthening social cohesion, fostering cooperation between local authorities and citizens, and reducing social isolation. Similar conclusions have been reported in numerous international studies, which argue that local festivals create opportunities for building social capital, strengthening trust, and reinforcing a sense of place and belonging (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Derrett, 2003; Putnam, 2000). However, the present findings extend these interpretations by demonstrating that these social effects are not equally pronounced across different settlement types. The Games–Howell post hoc analysis shows that Sofia differs significantly from all other settlement types with respect to the socially integrative functions of local festivals. This pattern is likely attributable to the specific characteristics of the capital city, including higher levels of social anonymity, weaker local identity, and a broader diversity of cultural participation opportunities. By contrast, in small towns and villages, local festivals play a substantially more important role in strengthening social ties and reinforcing community solidarity. These findings are consistent with the work of Ray (1998) and Woods (2011), who identify local culture as a key resource for the development of peripheral territories.

A second important finding concerns the economic and adaptive functions of local festivals. The analysis reveals a clear spatial gradient, with the perceived importance of local festivals increasing as settlement size decreases. Residents of villages report the highest evaluations of the contribution of local festivals to tourism development, the stimulation of local economic activity, the mitigation of depopulation, and the strengthening of community viability. These findings complement the existing literature by showing that, in peripheral territories, local festivals are perceived not merely as instruments for promoting cultural heritage but also as resources for economic revitalisation, social mobilisation, and the enhancement of community adaptive capacity (OECD, 2020; Richards, 2018).

The present study also contributes to the literature by examining local festivals through the lens of territorial resilience, rather than treating them solely as cultural practices or tourism products. The findings demonstrate that their perceived contribution is strongly conditioned by the spatial context. In large urban centres, local festivals are valued primarily for their symbolic and cultural significance, whereas in small towns and villages they fulfil a much broader range of social, economic, and adaptive functions. In this way, the study advances the conceptual understanding of local festivals by interpreting them as a form of territorial capital that supports the sustainable development of local communities (Camagni, 2008; Camagni & Capello, 2013; Moore & Quinn, 2023).

Beyond their theoretical implications, these findings also have practical relevance. They suggest that regional and local development policies should recognise local festivals as instruments for strengthening social cohesion, stimulating local economies, and enhancing the resilience of peripheral territories.

This is particularly important for small settlements, where such initiatives may help offset some of the adverse consequences of demographic decline and limited economic opportunities. Overall, the study provides empirical support for the view that local festivals should be understood not as isolated cultural events but as integral components of territorial resilience strategies, particularly in regions facing demographic decline and persistent regional inequalities

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that local festivals should be understood not merely as cultural events but also as important resources for strengthening the territorial resilience of local communities. While they contribute to preserving traditions and local identity, they also create opportunities for social interaction, inter-institutional cooperation, economic revitalisation, and the mobilisation of local resources.

The empirical findings confirm that the contribution of local festivals is multidimensional. The factor analysis identified several key dimensions related to social cohesion, local vitality, economic development, and community adaptive capacity. These findings support the interpretation of local festivals as a form of territorial capital that contributes to the sustainable development of settlements. A particularly important conclusion is that their perceived contribution varies across different spatial contexts. In small towns and villages, local festivals are regarded as more important for strengthening community cohesion, stimulating local economic activity, and addressing demographic and social challenges. Their role therefore becomes especially significant in territories that are most in need of mechanisms for social mobilisation, local visibility, and sustainable development.

The findings contribute both to the academic understanding of local festivals and to the practice of regional and local development. They suggest that support for local festivals should be viewed not solely as an element of cultural policy but also as part of broader strategies aimed at strengthening social capital, enhancing local economies, and increasing the resilience of peripheral territories.

This study also has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the analysis is based on respondents' subjective evaluations of the role of local festivals, reflecting individual perceptions at the time the survey was conducted. Second, owing to the cross-sectional design of the study, it is not possible to examine changes in these perceptions over time or to assess the influence of specific social, economic, or institutional developments on the perceived functions of local festivals. Although the nationally representative survey allows the findings to be generalised at the national level, future research could broaden the analysis by incorporating qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, to provide a more nuanced understanding of the local mechanisms through which territorial resilience is developed.

Several promising directions for future research emerge from this study. Comparative analyses across different regions of Bulgaria could provide further

insight into regional variations in the contribution of local festivals to territorial resilience. Future studies could also examine different types of local festivals—such as traditional, religious, historical, and folklore festivals—to identify their specific contributions to local development. In addition, comparative cross-national research would help to determine whether the patterns observed in Bulgaria are also evident in other European countries. Finally, longitudinal studies would make it possible to examine how public perceptions of local festivals and their contribution to territorial resilience evolve over time.

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