

# Students' perception on preventive archaeological research in Timisoara

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## Abstract

The research that has been carried out in recent years in the historical area of Timisoara constituted the context for conducting a sociological study regarding the perception of permanent residents and visitors of Timisoara, on these studies, both in terms of the legislative framework in which preventive archaeological investigations are carried out, their way of organization, but especially regarding their impact on the cultural heritage of the city. A separate category of subjects, individualized within the target group of the research, are the students. Our analysis follows the perception of 360 students, highlighting both their level of information and knowledge regarding the archaeological research carried out in Timisoara, but also their opinions regarding the impact and usefulness of this type of investigation for the cultural heritage and for the city of Timisoara. After analyzing the results, we could find that most students expressed themselves in favor of this type of archaeological investigation, perceived as necessary and useful, with an impact especially on local history, which should be restored and valued. The conclusions of the study are important in our opinion, as they reflect the perception of a significant category of the population, namely students (mostly young people, aged between 18-28).

**Keywords:** cultural heritage; preventive archaeology; students; Timisoara; perception.

## Introduction

Cultural heritage, meaning both tangible cultural heritage (buildings, constructions, monuments, artefacts) and intangible heritage (symbols, values, traditions, customs, rituals), has come to the attention of specialists and institutions since the 90s, when they started to be equally concerned with protecting, promoting, and capitalizing cultural heritage, with a view to the sustainable development of human communities. ONU stated from 2002 the need to raise awareness of local cultural heritage. The educational and cultural policies of the EU are positioned in the same direction even today.

The interest of the public of any age and any level of training towards cultural heritage should increase continuously. Thus, the year 2018 was named "European Heritage Year", from the desire to draw attention to the importance of cultural heritage and the

potential that heritage has: from being the one that helps us understand our common or individualized past, to the fact that it is an important component of social and identity construction, an important component in sustainable development, but also a useful and precious component in the education of the young generation.

In some European states, even before 2018, specific programs that support education in the field of cultural heritage have been implemented. For example, in Spain, as early as 2015, the Education and Heritage Plan was implemented, through which even the development of educational applications for knowledge and intermediation of access to cultural heritage elements, and scientific research that has cultural heritage as its subject, are financially supported (López-Fernández et al., 2021).

The respect for the past, for what is valuable in our collective memory, and the need to preserve these legacies for future generations, have led to the integration of cultural heritage into educational programs and its exploitation for tourism purposes, in order to increase interest and accountability of the general public (Achille, Fiorillo 2022, 2656; Karaca et al., 2016, 73; Hoang, 2021).

## Analysis and Results

Heritage can be used as a tool for teaching civic education (López-Fernández et al., 2021). Moreover, heritage can be interpreted as an “integrative social construction” for a community (González-Monfort, 2019). There is a particular need to develop among young people the interest in protecting culture, cultural heritage and to value and pass it on. In this direction there are the approaches of the last years, researching the level of awareness of young people regarding cultural heritage; these researches are important to understand the perception of young people, the factors that influence these perceptions, their level of information, but also the most appropriate solutions to build tangible links between young people and cultural heritage. Such a study was conducted in 2014 among Cumhuriyet University students, with the aim of identifying the level of knowledge regarding the cultural heritage of the city of Sivas (Turkey) (Karaca et al., 2016). The analysis carried out on a sample of 1128 students revealed a low level of interest of students in the cultural, historical, and ethnographic heritage of the city. The quantitative study was completed by a qualitative approach; in this sense, 4 focus groups were carried out. Participating students claimed that cultural heritage is not part of the concerns of young people around the age of 20, and that their lack of interest would also be justified by insufficient information in this regard (Karaca et al., 2016, 78).

Another research carried out in the year 2019 on a sample of 201 students of Pondicherry University (India) tracked the level of knowledge of students regarding intangible cultural heritage with reference to festivals, traditions, way of life, religion

and food habits. Overall, the level of knowledge of students was reported as above average, but the fact that 40.8% of students did not know about local festivals, 28.9% were not informed about religion, 29.4% had no knowledge about traditions and 31.9% regarding habits were sources of concern and required, in the opinion of the authors, remedial measures (Shimray, Chennupati, 2019, 4).

A moderate level of awareness towards cultural heritage was also identified in the study conducted among students of the Department of Geography at Giresun University, Turkey (Karadeniz, 2020).

However, we consider it important to mention the fact that learning through active involvement would favor not only a direct interaction with the cultural heritage, and consequently a better knowledge of it, but would contribute to the involvement of young people in a social and participatory activity that complements the learning that they frequently encounter in classrooms (Engeström et al. 1999; Gizzi et al., 2019).

Our research approach corresponds to this framework of investigating the perception of young people towards cultural heritage, but targeting a separate category, in the context of cultural heritage, namely archaeological heritage, with reference to archaeological sites that emerged as a result of preventive archaeological research.

Timisoara, a well-known historical, cultural, economic and university center in the west of Romania, experienced in the period 2006-2020 an effervescence of preventive archaeological research, occasioned by the numerous investments in the city's infrastructure, located in the area of the old historical center. The vision of the local authorities related to the transformation of some areas with car traffic into pedestrian areas, but also the replacement of some road infrastructure elements, led to the need to carry out preventive archaeological research for several years in the central area of the city of Timisoara. Among the most extensive archaeological investigations, we mention those carried out under the current tram line in the area of the Bega store, in the Liberty Square (that led to the discovery of the Turkish Baths between 2013-2014), the Saint George Square (which identified a Turkish mosque and its cemetery, between 2013-2014), Union Square (2014, where elements of the defensive system from the Ottoman period were identified, as well as constructions from the period of Austrian rule), on Popa Șapcă Street (which revealed parts of the Austrian citadel in 2017).

Other preventive archaeological investigations took place in 2018 in the roundabout from Mărăști Square, where parts of the Vienna Gate were uncovered. The Vienna Gate is a very important archaeological objective for the history of the city on the Bega river. Its exact location was not known, and the information provided by the architectural plans is rather scarce. This gate is the most important gate of the Austrian citadel, one of the four that the Timisoara citadel had, and it was located between the Carol

and Elisabeta bastions. It is presumed that the Vienna Gate is situated in the present Mărăști Square, in front of the Vienna garrison, known today as the U garrison. It was the only gate of the fortress that was decorated with elements specific to the Baroque style. In 2019 the research focused in the area of the roundabout at the Cardinal Points and Martin Luther Street. A very dynamic preventive archaeological research can be observed on a large geographical area in the central area of the city of Timisoara.

As we have mentioned above, most of the preventive archaeological research undertaken in Timișoara during the period 2005-2020 brought to light aspects related to the development of the city during the Turkish period, but also during the Austrian and modern periods, the discoveries from the medieval era being very rare. This can also be explained by the fact that Timișoara is located on a marshy area, and we are in the presence of a multi-layered urban archaeological site, which means that the elements from the medieval period are at quite great depths. This aspect makes reaching medieval living standards difficult to achieve. Also, since it is about preventive archaeological research, the option was agreed to carry out the archaeological research only up to the depth affected by the beneficiary for the change of certain components related to the infrastructure, be it road or other. In this situation, the archaeological researches were carried out up to the depths agreed with the beneficiary and as such the medieval levels were not reached, usually found at depths greater than 2.00 meters.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the information held by students regarding preventive archeology in general and research carried out in Timisoara in particular, but also to analyze the level of satisfaction perceived by this important category of population regarding the preventive archeology research.

In accordance with the aim pursued, the objectives of the research are:

Ob1. To analyze the students' knowledge and perceptions regarding the preventive archaeological research carried out in Timisoara.

Ob2. To assess the level of satisfaction of students towards preventive archaeological research

The hypotheses we pursued in our research were the following:

H1. Students know the specific conditions for conducting preventive archaeological research.

H2. The students are informed about preventive archaeological research that has been carried out in Timisoara.

H3. Students' satisfaction with how preventive archaeological research in Timisoara was conducted is high.

H4. Students' satisfaction with the attitude of the authorities regarding archaeological research is low

H5. Student satisfaction with information about preventive archaeological research is low.

H6. Students' satisfaction with how archaeological heritage was highlighted is low

Our research design was quantitative, carried out in the period 2018-2020, online and face-to-face, with the help of a questionnaire specially created for this purpose. The questionnaire was distributed both by e-mail and on social media (Facebook), and face-to-face application was carried out with the help of students of the Sociology Department of the West University of Timisoara. The questionnaire contained 15 questions, of which 14 were closed, with a scale or predefined answer options, and one question was open. 7 factual questions were added to these.

The population targeted by this analysis is represented by students, the group of respondents being one of convenience, participation in the study being voluntary. Of the 356 respondents, 252 (70.7%) stated that they live in Timisoara, while 104 (29.3%) are not from Timisoara. 230 female persons (64.6%) answered the questionnaire, 124 men (34.8%), and two subjects declared belonging to another gender (0.6%). Regarding the age of the respondents, 56% belong to the 20-21 years old category, 23% to the 22-23 years old category, 14% are 18-19 years old, 6% are 24-28 years old, and 1% are over 28 years old.

To begin with, we set out to analyze the students' knowledge of preventive archeology in general, the information they hold on preventive archaeological research from Timisoara in particular, as well as the students' perception of the consequences that these researches have on the city and its inhabitants.

As we are talking about students, a population category that in our opinion was expected to show greater openness towards archaeological research, if not through direct contact with them, at least through the interaction mediated by a rich literature and cinematographic productions on this subject (Arias-Ferrer, Egea-Vivancos 2017, 94) we preferred to analyze their level of information regarding the specific conditions of preventive archaeology, not its definition, considering that the answers provided will also highlight the level of understanding of the field of study of preventive archaeology. In order to see if the students know the specific conditions for conducting preventive archaeological research, we asked two questions in the questionnaire: Q2. *According to Ordinance no. 43/2000, any infrastructure work carried out in an area with archaeological objectives requires the discharge of archaeological burden. Are you aware of that?* Q3. *Do you know that the obligation to carry out preventive archaeological research rests with the person who contracted the infrastructure work?*

To question Q2, 190 of the respondents, i.e., 53.37% gave a negative answer, 122 (34.26%) answered affirmatively, while 44 people (12.37%) ticked the option "do not know / do not answer". To question Q3, the percentage of those who answered negatively was 45.5% (162 students), 35.67% answered affirmatively (127 students), while 18.83% (67 students) ticked the option "do not know / do not answer". Following these answers, taking into account the percentage of students who answered affirmatively, we estimate that the level of information of the students is moderate to low. Our research hypothesis (H1. Students know the specific conditions for conducting preventive archaeological research) is not confirmed, as most of the answers given by students were negative.

Regarding the preventive archaeological research that took place in Timisoara, only 47% of the respondents answered the question Q1. *Do you know that researches were undertaken in recent years upon archaeological objectives in the area of historical Timisoara?* affirmatively, while 37% were negative responses, and 16% undecided. An extremely interesting situation emerges from the answers given to the open question Q2. *Where have archaeological researches taken place in Timisoara in recent years?*, where we surprisingly find that people who gave an affirmative answer to Q1 could not mention even a single specific location, while people who answered negatively or undecided to the question Q1 mentioned at least one area in the city where such research was conducted, this in the condition that 325 (91.25%) of the respondents stated that they had visited the city more than once. In our opinion, these answers reflect the low interest of students in this field and prove that our research hypothesis - H2. The students are informed about preventive archaeological research that has been carried out in Timisoara - cannot be fully confirmed.

The answer is more surprising since most of the preventive archaeological researches were carried out in the central part or close to the central area of the city, an area that has become pedestrian, therefore more accessible to young people, implicitly to students on their way to the various university locations. This aspect leads us to the idea that although they interacted with them, they did not internalize them as areas with archaeological potential and the fact that there are still parts of the local history of the community.

This attitude of moderate to low interest towards preventive archaeological investigations is similar to the one observed for other inhabitants and non-inhabitants from Timisoara, according to our study undertaken in 2020 (Onițiu & Balaci, 2020, 51).

In order to identify the students' perception of the implications and consequences of preventive archaeological research, we integrated five questions into the questionnaire: Q6. *In your opinion, the archaeological research had implications...*, Q7. *Do you think that archaeological research can have positive consequences on...*,

*Q8. Do you consider archaeological research to be..., Q9. What do you think should happen to the important archaeological sites for the culture and history of Timisoara? and Q12. Do you think that the restoration and/or exploitation of archaeological sites could contribute to increasing the number of tourists?* According to students, archaeological research primarily affects public transport (15.16%), followed by cleanliness (14.04%), pedestrian traffic (13.48%), public safety (10.67%) and public tranquility (7.02%). 39.6% of those surveyed did not give a specific answer to this question. For most students (55.61%), archaeological research is useful, other opinions being: necessary (for 25.84%) and mandatory (for 8.70% of students).

80.61% of students believe that the archaeological remains must be restored and valued. 42.69% of students appreciate that archaeological research has positive consequences on local history. The second place is occupied by tourism (27.24%), while options such as: urban development (12.35%) or educating the public (10.39%) were not considered relevant by students to the same extent. It is surprising that only 27.24% of students believe that archaeological research has positive consequences for tourism, while 88.2% of respondents believe that the restoration and exploitation of archaeological remains could contribute to increasing the number of tourists. A possible explanation would be that students distinguish between the actual archaeological research as a work and process and its finality, i.e., the remains that are discovered. Unfortunately, the decision of local authorities to highlight and give the public the opportunity to interact directly with the results of archaeological research does not correspond to the expectations and needs of our respondents. The local authorities in most of the archaeological discoveries (with the exception of the Dam from the time of the Austrians in 700 Square, the church, later on converted into mosque in Saint George Square) decided that these archaeological discoveries should in most cases be traced and indicated only at the road level, disagreeing with their highlighting and public exposure, even though they are of national and international importance, not just local. We are referring here to the Turkish baths in the Liberty Square, Turkish baths (hammams) that are unique in Romania, but also to Vienna Gate, located in the roundabout from Mărăști Square.

Returning to the first objective of our research, namely, to analyze the students' knowledge and perceptions regarding the preventive archaeological research carried out in the city of Timisoara, we find a certain superficiality in the students' answers, which most likely reflects their low level of interest and concern towards this problematic, a situation that confirms the findings of similar studies (Karaca et al., 2016; Shimray, Chennupati, 2019).

The results of the Cultural Consumption Barometer for 2019, which provide a context and a more comprehensive picture of the situation at the national level, are also relevant for the period in which we carried out this research. Thus, the analysis of

leisure cultural practices shows us that, although young people with higher education from big cities are the main visitors to historical monuments, compared to the other types of practices, this is one with the lowest scores (**Figure 1**, after Dumitru, Oană 2019, table 2).

Leisure practices grouped by similarities of the socio-demographic and spatial profiles of practitioners	Education			Age				Gender		Residence locality type					Total
	middle school	high school	university	18-29 years old	30-44 years old	45-59 years old	60+ years old	woman	man	small commune	big/medium commune	town under 100 thous. inhab.	big city	Bucharest	
going on trips	9	29	44	43	34	22	11	20	31	18	18	26	35	37	25
going to entertainment shows	2	9	17	15	13	6	2	6	11	4	4	9	14	15	8
walking in parks	44	75	80	82	79	60	53	66	67	44	61	66	82	82	67
going to the mall	16	58	69	66	63	42	28	46	48	41	36	42	72	63	47
going to music shows	2	11	14	16	11	8	4	7	11	7	6	7	13	20	9
going to the cinema	2	11	16	21	14	5	1	6	12	6	5	7	13	23	9
practising sportive activities	9	34	45	57	38	23	9	20	37	13	22	32	40	39	28
going to the restaurant	11	41	59	68	51	32	11	28	46	29	30	40	44	49	37
going to sports shows	4	14	17	20	18	10	5	5	20	7	10	12	17	16	12
meetings with relatives/friends	85	90	94	92	93	89	85	89	89	88	90	87	91	91	89
visiting historical monuments	2	7	14	13	6	7	4	5	9	4	5	8	13	6	7
visiting museums	1	4	10	8	5	3	3	3	6	3	2	5	8	5	5
going to theatre	0	3	11	8	5	3	4	3	6	1	2	5	9	6	5

Figure 1. Romanians' leisure practices in 2019  
Source: Dumitru, Oană 2019

55% of the Barometer participants have never visited a monument or an archaeological site (Dumitru, Oană 2019, 47, Graph A1), therefore we can speak on a national scale of a lack of interest in this field, which however, as the participants in our study also argued, it has a potential to contribute to the promotion of local history and the development of tourism.

These results are also in agreement with the conclusions of the NEARCH study (Marx, Nurra, Rossenbach 2017; Kajda et al., 2018), undertaken in 2017 in nine European countries (Germany, Greece, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and UK). In France, for example, only 19% of respondents expressed an interest in archaeology, although 85% consider it useful. 77% accused insufficient information (Kajda et al., 2018, 100).

In addition to our study, we aimed to evaluate the level of satisfaction of students with the preventive archaeological research carried out in the city of Timisoara, and to achieve this objective we asked several questions, on a five-step scale, from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied", thus: Q5. *How satisfied are you with the archaeological research in Timisoara?*, Q10. *How satisfied are you with the importance local authorities*



give to archaeological discoveries?, Q13. How satisfied are you with the information provided in the media during the period of the preventive archaeological research?, Q14. How satisfied are you with the information on archaeological objectives on site?, and Q15. Are you satisfied with the way in which the archaeological sites in Timisoara were restored and exploited?.

Analyzing the recorded responses to question Q5. *How satisfied are you with the archaeological research in Timisoara?* we find that the majority of respondents expressed an average level of satisfaction, the general tendency being one of slight satisfaction (according to the statistical average of 3.31). In the condition that 190 (53.37%) of the respondents positioned themselves at a moderate level of satisfaction, we consider that our research hypothesis – H3. Students' satisfaction with how preventive archaeological research in Timisoara was conducted is high - is rejected.

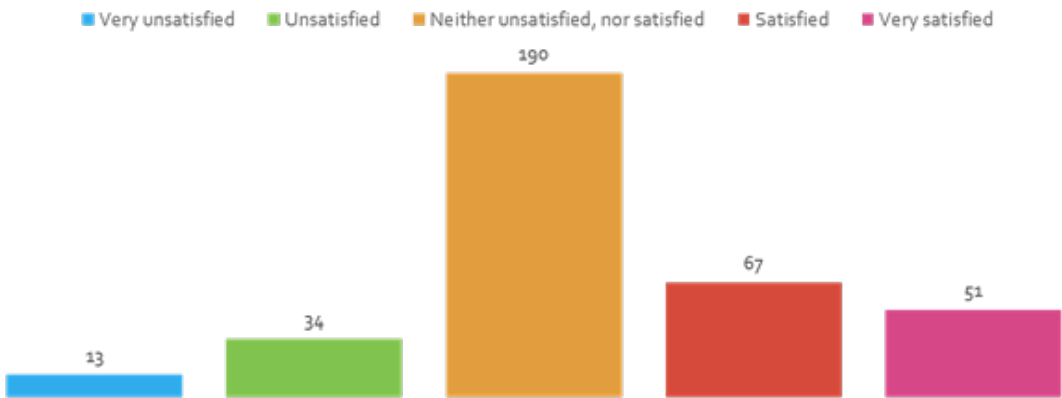


Figure 2. Students' satisfaction with archaeological research in Timisoara  
Source: Authors

Regarding the level of satisfaction with the attitude of local authorities, students expressed a moderate attitude, with a tendency towards dissatisfaction (the statistical mean being 2.94), which makes our hypothesis (H4. Students' satisfaction with the attitude of the authorities regarding archaeological research is low) to be partially confirmed.

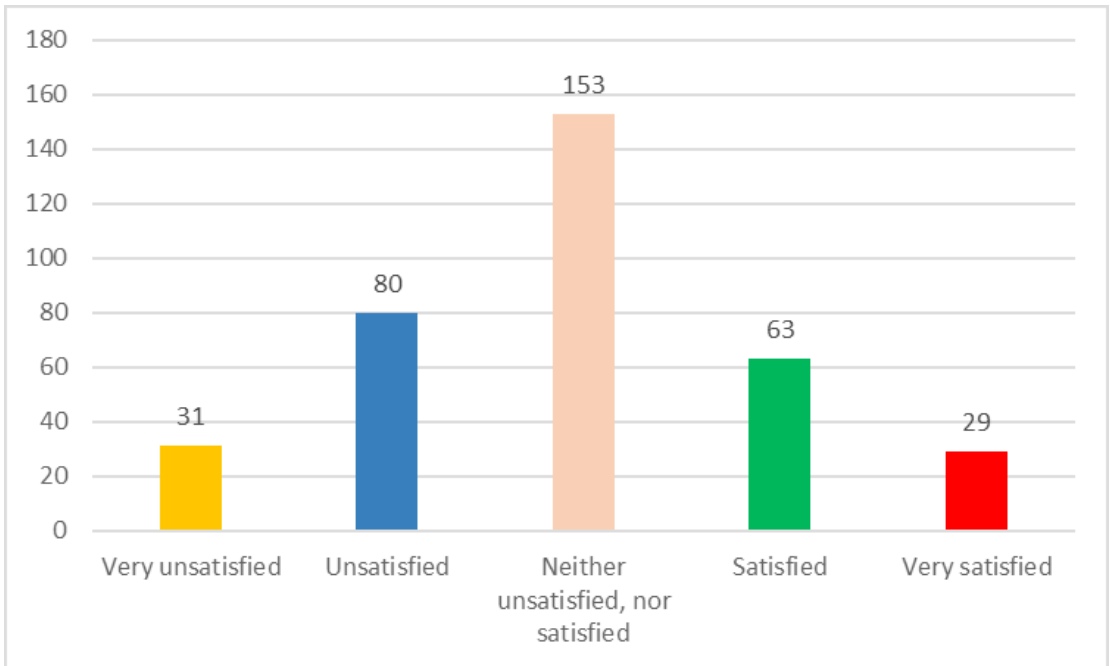


Figure 3. Students' satisfaction with local authorities' attitude towards preventive archaeology  
Source: Authors

The same moderate level of satisfaction is expressed by the students with the existing information on the site in relation to the archaeological objectives revealed as a result of the preventive archaeological research (Q14. *How satisfied are you with the information on archaeological objectives on site?*),

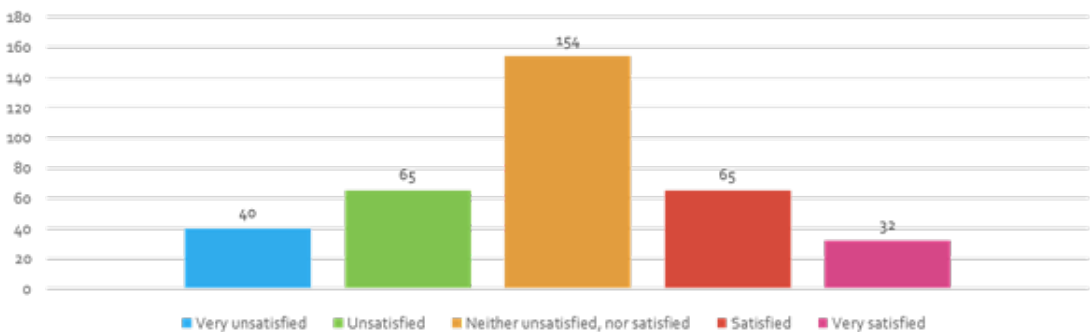


Figure 4. Students' satisfaction with the information on site  
Source: Authors

but also, to the way in which the archaeological monuments were restored and preserved (Q15. *Are you satisfied with the way in which the archaeological sites in Timisoara were restored and exploited?*)

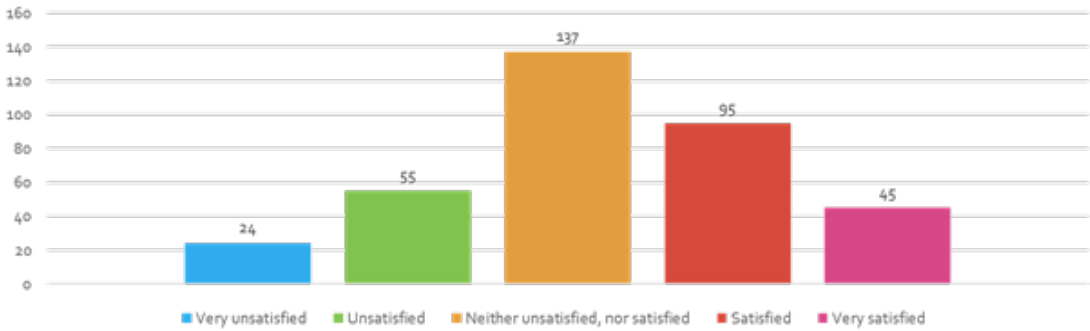


Figure 5. Students' satisfaction with archaeological monuments restoration and preservation  
Source: Authors

If in the case of information, the tendency is rather towards dissatisfaction (statistical average being 2.78), a fact also highlighted by the answers given to question Q13. *How satisfied are you with the information provided in the mass media during the period of preventive archaeological research* (with a statistical average of 2.96)

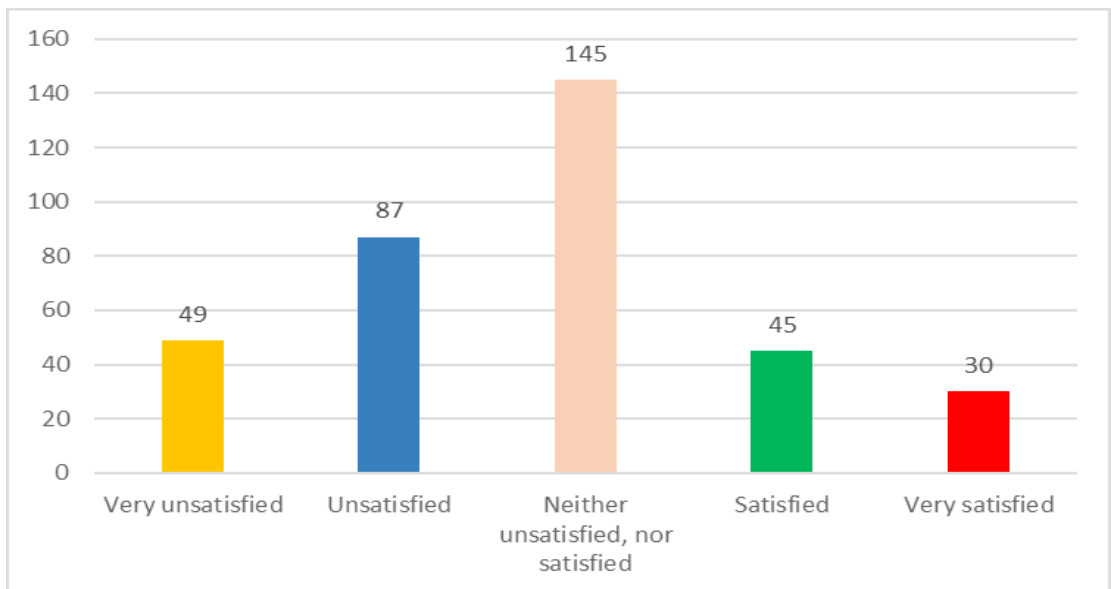


Figure 6. Students' satisfaction with mass media information  
Source: Authors

which partially confirms our hypothesis (H5. Student satisfaction with information about preventive archaeological research is low), regarding the way of restoration and valorization of archaeological sites, the tendency of the answers is an upward one, towards satisfaction (according to the statistical average of 3.23), which rejects our hypothesis H6. Students' satisfaction with how archaeological heritage was highlighted is low).

Comparing the answers obtained, we find that the lowest averages are recorded for questions regarding information, both those provided by the mass media and those existing on the spot, as well as for the question regarding the involvement of local authorities (which includes their concern in disseminating information).

These results are similar to those recorded for other categories of population, residents and non-residents of Timisoara (Onițiu & Balaci, 2020, 53), which supports the fact that the age of the respondents or their level of education by accessing a form of higher education are not factors that can influence the population's interest in the archaeological cultural heritage. As for the level of satisfaction, in the previous study (Onițiu & Balaci, 2020, 54), following statistical analyzes carried out on a population of 863 individuals, we were able to establish that education is a predictor of satisfaction and that people with higher education show a lower level of satisfaction than people with secondary education.

## Conclusions

We can thus conclude that the students of Timisoara, whether we are talking about permanent or temporary residents, show a low interest in the preventive archaeological research that took place in the city and complain of insufficient information. We cannot say with certainty that insufficient information is a cause of modest concern for this area, but we do not rule out this possibility either.

The positioning of the students' answers to many of the questions in the middle zone, that is, in the zone of no real involvement in the given answers, leads us to the conclusion that we are also in an area of research where they are not sufficiently sure of their answers, but neither would like to say that they did not pay attention to such interventions in their city. This can be seen by looking at the responses in the middle area of Figures 2-5. It is about an affective non-involvement in what is part of the current life of their city, although such archaeological research will take place in Timișoara, right in the most central point of the city (Opera Square) in the next two years (2024-2026). We believe that archaeologists need to be much more open and present with information to the inhabitants of the city, implicitly to provide more information to students and to young people in general, regarding the archaeological

discoveries made. This aspect is felt by our respondents, as can be seen from figure 6. Such an attitude would perhaps make the knowledge and then involvement of students in supporting the restoration of some archaeological monuments to be much more conscious and assumed.

Discarding the answers in the middle area which mean that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, but paying attention to the other answers provided, we deduce that the students from Timișoara are dissatisfied and very dissatisfied with the attitude of the local authorities towards archaeological research, but also of how one finds information in the mass media regarding these preventive archaeological researches. What we can deduce from this is what we suggested above, namely that archaeologists need to be more open to the community and constantly share information about their research, and that local authorities get more involved and maybe even change their attitude towards this type of intervention in the city space, i.e. in that of the community. Perhaps this is the only way we could change the interest, attitude and perception of students towards this type of archaeological research which is necessary, imminent and can also contribute to the urban development of the city on the banks of the Bega river.

The research undertaken at the national level during the pandemic and post-pandemic period, after our research approach, showed that the Covid pandemic generated a change in the free time cultural practices of the Romanians, in close connection with the need to carry out in particular activities in free space. Thus, in the barometer regarding cultural consumption trends from the year 2020 (Oană, 2020, 24), it can be found that visiting a monument or archaeological site is the activity with the most responses recorded as an intention to participate by Romanians.

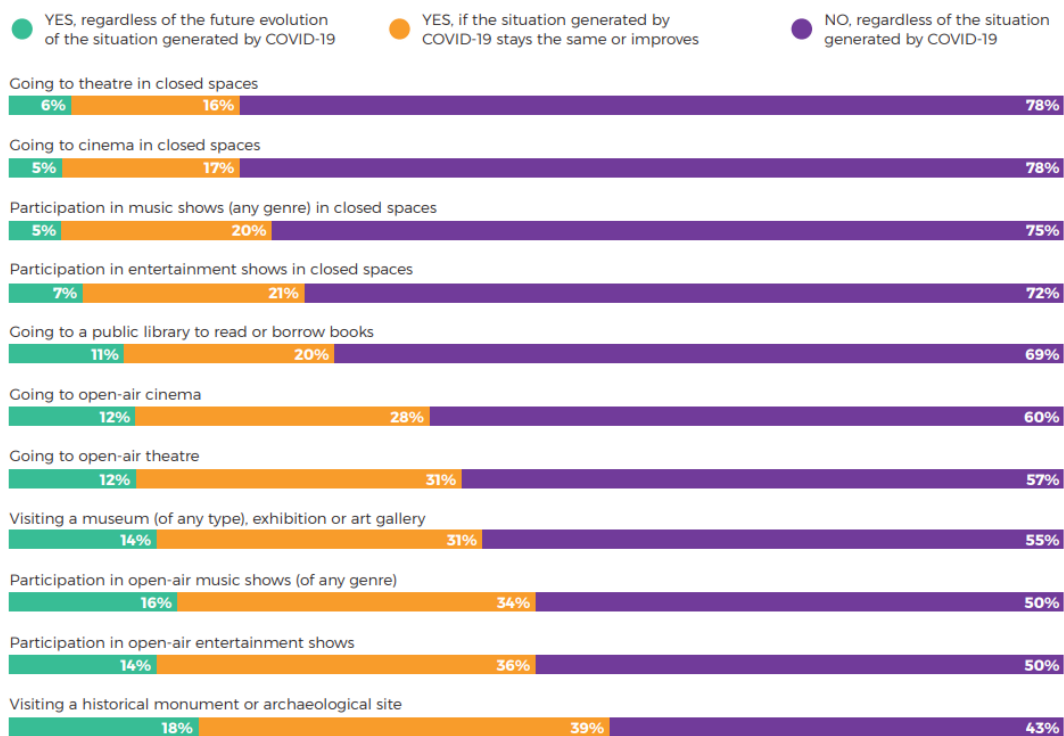


Figure 7. Intention to participate cu cultural activities

Source: Oană, 2020

Compared to 2019, a significant change can be observed in terms of visiting monuments and archaeological sites, but the explanation is most likely linked to their location in the open air, not to a change in the cultural preference of the public.

	2020	2019	Difference
	NO, regardless of the situation generated by COVID-19	Not at all, in the last 12 months	2019-2020
Going to indoor theatre	78%	73%	-5%
Going to outdoor theatre	57%	73%	+16%
Going to indoor cinema	78%	66%	-12%
Going to outdoor cinema	60%	66%	+6%
Going to a public library to read or borrow books	69%	82%	+13%
Visiting a historical monument or archaeological site	43%	55%	+12%
Visiting a museum (of any type), exhibition or art gallery	55%	62%	+7%
Attending indoor entertainment shows	72%	62%	-10%
Attending outdoor entertainment shows	50%	62%	+12%

Figure 8. Comparison between 2019 and 2020 for participating to cultural activities  
Source: Oană, 2020

The tendency to visit historical monuments or archaeological sites was upward, as shown in the cultural barometer for the year 2022, reaching a percentage of 59% (Hampu, 2022, 52). The main reason why Romanians visit these historical and heritage sites is primarily relaxation (for 48% of respondents), followed by education (for 23% of respondents) (Hampu, 2022, 59). Since it is a national study, with a representative sample on the scale of the Romanian population, these findings can be generalized to the population of Timisoara, including young people and students.

If in 2020 the increase in interest in monuments and archaeological sites can be linked to their location in the open air, which makes these objectives accessible attractions given the social distancing conditions, in 2022 we observe that the number of Romanians visiting such objectives grows, but not for cultural reasons.

As shown in a European Union report (EU, 2012, 22), public participation in cultural acts can be influenced by physical, economic, geographical, or cultural factors, including interests, attitudes, and perceptions. Regarding preventive archaeological research and the archaeological remains discovered, we are of the opinion that the only barriers that could be discussed are cultural ones, and that future research could pursue this topic, especially if the respondents have signaled the potential of preventive archeology to help promote local history and tourism, which in the long term could mean urban development.

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