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Barriers to Place-Related Actions in a Post-Communist Town. A Case Study of Targoviste, Romania

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Barriers to place-related actions in a post-communist town
A case study of Targoviste, Romania

A Thesis Presented

By

ANAMARIA GEORGESCU

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Barriers to place-related actions in a post-communist town
A case study of Targoviste, Romania

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To Rodrigo Zamith, for your immense kindness and understanding
ABSTRACT
BARRIERS TO PLACE-RELATED ACTIONS
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Our future is more uncertain than ever as a result of myriad environmental problems that require communal responses. In order to build resilient communities and to increase the effectiveness of planned changes to built environments, it is crucial to involve local communities throughout the decision-making processes. However, in Romania, the traditions of top-down governance from its communist period still hold sway among elected leaders - and, in some cases, its citizens. This is problematic because scholars have argued that top-down approaches to environment-related projects are more likely to fail than bottom-up initiatives that are more inclusive of community interests. This begs the question: How can we more meaningfully involve and empower the citizens in Romania? In order to help address that question, I examined four factors that might affect the place-related actions that individuals are willing to take in the post-communist state of Romania: the amount of social capital a place has (Predescu 2020; Lewicka 2005), the quality of participation infrastructure available to the place (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015), the levels of trust in local authorities at that place (Badescu and Uslaner 2004), and the perceived levels of political efficacy they have (Manzo and Perkins 2006).

Using Photovoice methodology, I heard from 22 individuals who feel a
connection with the town of Targoviste, Romania about their experience with place-related actions in Targoviste and how historical traditions and legacies from communist times have constrained their ability to be involved in place-related decision-making actions. The results illustrate that the lack of participation infrastructure, the low quality of social capital, the lack of trust in the local authorities, and the feelings of low political efficacy were identified by highly attached study participants as major barriers to taking place-related actions in the town of Targoviste, Romania. Participants expressed a desire to have a more meaningful role in decision-making processes related to the town’s-built environment and contended that involving the community in such processes would benefit the overall quality of life in the community.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The future is uncertain and the world in which we live is threatened by different environmental problems (pollution, extreme weather events, pandemics) that require a communal response. The consequences of climate change, for example, are already raising concerns across the globe and unfortunately, the prevalence of extreme weather events is expected to increase in the coming years. At the heart of these problems is uncontrolled development, which is made possible in part due to members of the community not being involved in place-related decision-making processes.

In order to address these immediate and looming risks, authorities must work with local communities in order to develop hazard-reduction plans and foster conditions that enable those communities to survive, adapt, and grow from their new conditions. While summits are held around the world and new deals are signed with the aim of mitigating irreversible consequences and building resilient communities, important questions arise at the local level: why aren’t citizens more invested in the place-related decision-making processes that they can participate in? And, relatedly, what can be done to help empower those citizens?

It seems logical that citizens are more likely to engage in place-related actions - which refer to actions taken by members of a community to protect or preserve the environment in which they live - if they feel a sense of place attachment - or a connection to that particular place (Manzo and Perkins 2006, Anton and Lawrence 2014). However, that relationship may not be so straightforward. Scholars suggest that a direct relationship between place attachment and place-related action is at best weak and generally inconsistent (Lewicka 2011). There are therefore other factors that affect
the relationship between those two concepts. Indeed, scholars have found that the amount of social capital (Predescu 2020) (Lewicka 2005), the quality of participation infrastructure (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015), levels of trust in local authorities (Badescu and Uslaner 2004), and amount of political efficacy (Manzo and Perkins 2006) can all impact the nature of the relationship between place attachment and place-related action. For example, even if a person cares deeply about a particular place, they may opt to not take place-related actions for the simple reason that they do not believe such actions will result in any meaningful change (Manzo and Perkins 2006). The 2020 parliamentary elections had a historic negative turnout since the fall of communism, with the lowest percentages among people aged 18 to 24 who refrained from casting their votes (Rezultate vot 2020). The reason people stayed away from the polls was partially due to the fear of coronavirus, but the main reason is that Romanians’ trust in state institutions and the belief in political efficacy has eroded significantly. Worse, they may feel that such attempts would not only be futile but negatively impact them as individuals, whether through attracting undesired attention from public officials or social shunning from other members of the community.

These factors may become further complicated within the context of post-socialist and post-communist countries (Stefaniak, Bilewicz, and Lewicka 2017). To that end, Romania offers an interesting case study given its rapid transition from being a communist state ruled by the iron fist of a megalomaniac dictator (1965-1989) to a young democracy with few rail guards (1990-present). For example, intelligence services in communist Romania regularly co-opted members of the community (Badescu and Uslaner 2004), which impaired communities’ ability to develop social capital. Similarly, the optimism that followed the fall of communism rather quickly turned to pessimism for many who saw a corrupt communist government replaced by a corrupt democratic government, thereby reinforcing skepticism about the authorities (Badescu 2003).
If we understand the relationship between place attachment and place-related action to mean that people who are strongly attached to their environment are more likely to engage in activities that are related to their environment - and, namely, be more protective in response to a perceived threat to a beloved place (Stefaniak, Bilewicz, and Lewicka 2017) - then it is important to examine how that relationship holds in the context of post-communist countries like Romania, where attachment is colored by factors like distrust in authorities and low levels of public engagement.

The main purpose of this thesis is therefore to examine the barriers that might affect the place-related actions that individuals are willing to take in the post-communist state of Romania. This is an important objective because individuals’ willingness to take place-related action - whether individually or as part of a collective response - is linked to the quality of democracy in that place (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015). Moreover, when members of a community feel empowered, they are more likely to want to take place-related action and participate in self-governance (Manzo and Perkins 2006). If Romania is to achieve its post-communist ideal of democratic governance and be able to match the major challenges it will be forced to face in the coming years (alongside the rest of the world), then it is thus essential that architects, planners, public authorities, and so on, find ways to involve citizens in place-related decision making processes - whether by better educating them about the formal public processes that are already in place or more simply by helping bring them into collective efforts (e.g., volunteer organizations) that strengthen community bonds, increase feelings of political efficacy, and provide critical mass for advocating for change. Over time, effective incorporation of the community should produce not just better urban spaces (i.e., those that are more inclusive, equitable, healthy, considered and forward-looking) but also a truly democratic form of self-governance.
In order to advance this research objective, I have used a combination of a short survey and Photovoice methodology to assess the extent to which 22 citizens of Targoviste (a post-industrial, mid-sized city in southern Romania) feel a sense of attachment to the city and specific elements within it; the kinds of place-related actions they have taken or wanted to take; and the factors that shaped their experiences and attitudes toward those place-related actions. These data have been subjected to a thematic analysis with the goal of identifying the presence and salience of literature-driven factors (i.e., social capital, participation infrastructure, trust in local authorities and political efficacy) as well as emergent factors (identified via open coding). In addition to identifying these factors, I will offer a thick description of how they manifest in the context of Targoviste, which I believe is illustrative of the experiences in at least some other post-communist cities.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This section builds the foundation for the main research questions and hypotheses that are evaluated by this study. I begin by defining the concepts of place attachment and place-related actions. Then, I describe some of the factors that scholars have found might shape the relationship between those two concepts. I continue with an overview of post-socialist and post-communist countries, and in particular their legacy in relation to place attachment, place-related actions, and the related factors. I conclude this section by listing the research questions and hypotheses.

2.1. Place Attachment

Place attachment has been defined and researched in different ways across various disciplines. For example, in literature that draws heavily on the discipline of psychology, it refers to the cognitive and emotional connection between people and places (Low and Altman 1992). By contrast, in literature that draws heavily on the discipline of sociology, it represents the strength of positive affective ties between people and their settings (Strzelecka, Boley, and Woosnam 2017; Carrus et al. 2014). Additionally, place attachment can be experienced at both the individual level (i.e., the connection a particular person feels toward a particular place) and at the group level (i.e., the shared place-related beliefs and values that foster a sense of community) (Low and Altman 1992). For example, an individual may feel a generational tie to a place, or become attached to a physical feature that brings them joy (Lewicka 2011). Similarly, a group may come to define at least part of its identity by their connection to a historical landmark or cultural trait that helps define that place (Low and Altman 1992).
These relationships between people and places naturally intersect with various other place-related concepts, such as community identity and belonging, and scholars have found it difficult to produce a universal theoretical model that includes the concept’s many potential facets (Lewicka 2011). This definitional and operational challenge has grown further in light of the increased interest in the concept of place attachment over the past two decades, and that has led some scholars to argue that it has now become difficult to advance theory about place attachment (Lewicka 2011).

Although it has been operationalized in many ways, this study will adhere to the traditional conceptualization of place attachment, which draws upon two main elements: place identity and place dependence (Lewicka 2011). Place identity refers to the values, attitudes, and beliefs that connect individuals and groups to their physical environment (Capello 2019).

More broadly, the concept of identity is complex and is connected to the historical, economic, social and political changes that have defined a certain place (Zamfir, Tâlângâ, and Stoica 2009). For example, Ilovan, Voicu, and Colcer (Ilovan, Voicu, and Colcer 2019) distinguish between the “identity of a region” and its “regional identity.” The identity of a region entails the physical, cultural and historical features that differentiate it from another region. Regional identity, on the other hand, captures the extent to which the community identifies itself with the region within which it lives (Paasi, n.d.). Some scholars have further broken the concept of identity into two elements: similarity and solidarity (Capello 2019). Similarity entails the feeling of belonging to a single community based on shared values. Solidarity refers to the feeling of attachment towards a physical place based on a shared sense of community, which is fundamental to the sense of a community’s identity. While these fine distinctions go beyond the scope of this study, they are useful to help us appreciate the importance of a place’s historical
context, and to appreciate how a mixture of individual and community factors may impact the ways in which place attachment is felt and expressed.

*Place dependence* refers to the sum of the features of a place that facilitate certain activities for its inhabitants (Clarke, Murphy, and Lorenzoni 2018). For example, an individual may feel a sense of dependence on a park if they believe it is the only place where they can safely go skateboarding. Alternatively, a community may feel a sense of dependence on a place if it offers a resource that they have specialized in harvesting, such as a coal mine. When places don’t offer the necessary resources, their identity alone cannot keep people there. Thus, the availability of employment and housing, and access to things that they value, influence their dependence on the place - and, by consequence, their attachment to it (Barreira et al. 2017).

Place attachment, therefore, cumulatively mirrors both utilitarian needs as well as a collective memory built from individual affections toward a place, its particular symbolic spaces, and the connection between the local community and its heritage (Ilovan, Voicu, and Colcer 2019). The individual affective bonds reflect and at the same time help foster broader (collective) identities (Brown, Perkins, and Brown 2003). Moreover, place attachment has a reciprocal relationship with the community characteristics: the strength of the community is often linked to the kinds of attachment individuals have with a place (Lewicka 2011). Put another way, places are linked to the characteristics of social networks embedded in them.

Place attachment is a particularly important concept to consider when one is interested in better understanding place-related actions, or actions taken by members of a community to protect or preserve the environment in which they live. Put simply, individuals are more likely to take place-related actions if they feel a sense of attachment to a place - if only for the simple reason that they *care* about that place. To that end, it is important to specify the analytic level within the context of a research endeavor.
This study focuses on place attachment at the individual level (i.e., the extent of attachment that individuals feel) because that is a prerequisite for the formation of a communal sense of place attachment - even as these two analytic levels act upon one another (i.e., a stronger sense of community identity increasing personal feelings of place attachment). In particular, this study will focus on individuals who hold a high degree of place attachment in order to better understand the factors that keep even highly motivated individuals from taking place-related actions. It is expected that the constraints introduced by those factors would only be magnified for less-attached individuals who are less likely to want to persevere in the face of obstacles.

Even though the research focuses on the individual level, there are communal implications at play. The willingness to engage in place-related actions is connected to the quality of relationships and shared interests and values among the people orbiting around a certain place (Ilovan, Voicu, and Colcer 2019). To illustrate this, consider local associations and cooperatives. These organizations are typically social initiatives borne from collective solidarity among people interested in achieving common goals, many of which are oriented around the place in which they exist. Put another way, collective actions on behalf of an environment are often seen in places characterized by strong attachment to the place (Capello 2019). Thus, some scholars have argued that communal place attachment can be viewed as a proxy for understanding the collective identity of a local community (Ilovan, Voicu, and Colcer 2019) - and, in turn, be leveraged as a key variable for understanding both participatory processes and development that is responsive to the priorities of a community and the individuals who inhabit it.

Research has also shown that higher degrees of place attachment are linked to several positive outcomes, such as higher levels of community social capital, higher satisfaction with their quality of life, and higher degrees of interpersonal trust (Lewicka
2011; Mesch and Manor 1998). However, it is important to note that all of those associations are correlational; it is hard to prove that attachment is the cause of the outcomes or if an association of other variables influences it (Lewicka 2011).

Moreover, it is important to note that the scale of the place factors into the level and kind of place attachment that individuals develop. Scholars have found that individuals tend to develop the strongest attachment to the place that is closest to them, such as their own home/residence (Brown, Perkins, and Brown 2003; Hidalgo and Hernández 2001). However, they frequently develop attachment to larger and more distant places, including their town or city (Bonaiuto, Fornara, and Bonnes 2006) and even the regions and countries they have a connection to (Lewicka 2005). Notably, there is not a linear relationship between place distance/scale and the level of attachment. For example, Hidalgo and Hernández (Hidalgo and Hernández 2001) found that people expressed a higher degree of attachment to their house and their city than they did to their neighborhood scale. This is especially important since Lewicka (Lewicka 2011) observes that most studies of place attachment focus on the neighborhood scale - meaning that place attachment at a broader scale, as with a city, is less well-studied and less is known about how different individual and social factors intervene with its relationship with the place-related actions available at that scale.

2.2. Place-Related Actions

As humans, we generally hope to make a change in the world through meaningful actions, with the goal of contributing to a better future. However, our capacity to effect change is linked to an environment that empowers us, listens to us and supports our ideas. Moreover, there are a range of potential actions one can take to contribute to a better future, from those that follow official channels to those that are more ad-hoc or grassroots in nature.
The concept of place-related actions encompasses a broad range of interventions that people can take in response to potential changes to their environment. Some examples of place-related actions are community actions projects, volunteering, engaging in neighborhood associations, attending public meetings, or engaging in a more pro-environmental behavior, just to name a few. However, it is important to note that place related activities can take multiple forms, such as supporting environmental changes or resisting those changes in order to protect the status quo (Lewicka 2011).

As the concept’s name suggests, the actions one chooses (or at least wishes) to take in relation to their environment is linked to their sense of attachment to, and understanding of, the place. Put another way, the physical, socio-economic and cultural characteristics as well as its legacy and history all shape the intentions and possibilities open to individuals and communities for taking place-related actions (Devine-Wright 2009).

A recurring finding in the literature is that the perception of the nature of environmental change (and the related consequences) shapes the kinds of place-related actions one views as being necessary or justified (Devine-Wright 2009). For example, if the change is perceived to threaten a place they are attached to, then the place-related action is likely to involve opposition to the change. Conversely, if the changes are perceived to be beneficial to that place (e.g., improving the well-being of the individuals or community in that place), then the place-related action is likely to promote the enactment of the change (Carrus et al. 2014; Devine-Wright 2009; Manzo and Perkins 2006).

For example, the notion of “NIMBYism” (Not In My Backyard) is often used to capture individuals who tend to hold negative attitudes toward changes that affect the places they are attached to (Devine-Wright 2009). In this example, an individual may strongly support increasing the use of green energy, even as they actively oppose the
installation of a photovoltaic field near their home. Such opposition is thus due to the perceived threat to a place they are attached to, with the place-related actions ranging from speaking out during the public comment portion of a planning board meeting to mobilizing the community to protest against the action to even engaging in criminal action to stop the project.

One particularly common form of place-related action is to engage in public participation (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015). Public participation is an umbrella term that describes an array of processes designed to help determine how a society will manage and protect their environment (Beierle 2010). For example, public participation may include public hearings, wherein a governance board may invite members of the community to comment on a proposal. It may also include public deliberations, wherein local authorities facilitate engagement between different stakeholders or invite experts to share their views about an issue facing a community. In short, there is a wide range of existing processes that are typically, though not always, provided through official channels (Beierle 2010). Such processes are often designed to help link experts (e.g., agency officials and consultants) with non-expert stakeholders (e.g., members of an affected community), and represents a broader democratic paradigm of self-governing a given environment (National Research Council et al. 2008).

However, place-related actions can also be informal (McFarlane and Waibel 2012). For example, active citizenship as a strategy is meant to foster greater citizen responsibility (Kearns 1992) in order to ensure the continuity of a representative democracy by enhancing social cohesion and reducing the gap between communities and the institutions representing them (Hoskins and Mascherini 2009). Similarly, environmental and pro-environmental behaviors are understood as the sum of actions consciously undertaken by individuals in order to minimize their negative impact on the natural and man-built environment (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002). Place-related actions
can also be rooted outside of legal structures (McFarlane and Waibel 2012). For example, insurgent planning has been defined as radical planning practices that “respond to neoliberal specifics of dominance through inclusion” (Miraftab 2009). In some cases, individuals opt for informal actions because they are the most readily available or seemingly natural responses, such as when members of an affected place get together and decide to protest outside of a city hall. In other cases, such responses are sought because the individuals do not believe following the formal processes will result in any meaningful change. These beliefs and attitudes are tied both to specific individuals (e.g., their political philosophy or personal experience with a process) as well as the broader history of a place (e.g., the political traditions of a place or the legacy of a prior regime).

Ultimately, the goal of taking place-related actions is to increase the likelihood that the individual’s (or community’s) desires will be heard and taken into consideration (Carrus et al. 2014). Relatedly, though perhaps secondary, there is also often the objective of pushing decision-makers to adopt processes that are more attentive and responsive to the community’s needs (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015). While individuals can sometimes succeed in achieving these objectives on their own, such goals are often more likely to be achieved when the place-related actions are taken by multiple members of the community - collective action (Carrus et al. 2014).

Put another way, place-related actions are more likely to take place when there is strong place attachment and are more likely to succeed when there is a collective backing (Manzo and Perkins 2006). It is thus important to understand what factors get in the way of people taking place-related actions at an individual level and mobilizing to take collective place-related actions at a communal level.
2.3. Factors Shaping Intention and Selection of Place-Related Actions

Just because opportunities exist for individuals to take place-related actions – whether through formal processes for public participation or informal processes like ad-hoc community advocacy events - does not mean that individuals will engage in such actions, even if they are highly motivated by their attachment to the place (Lewicka 2005). Instead, the intention and ability to take place-related actions (and the selection of which actions to take) are driven by both internal and external factors.

Scholars have identified several factors that shape the kinds of actions people are willing to take, as well as those they believe they can take. These include the amount of social capital a place has (Predescu 2020; Lewicka 2005), the quality of participation infrastructure available to the place (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015), the levels of trust in local authorities at that place (Badescu and Uslaner 2004), and the perceived levels of political efficacy they have (Manzo and Perkins 2006). These factors are detailed below as scholars have identified them as being important elements at the intersection of place attachment and place-related actions. Moreover, these factors are further complicated by the contexts of post-socialist and post-communist countries - a phenomenon further described later in this literature review.

2.3.1. Social Capital

The concept of social capital is well-studied and is used to describe the features of social networks that facilitate cooperation toward achieving a mutually beneficial outcome (Predescu 2020). Social capital is hard to measure, though, as it entails the quality of relationships among people within a certain community (Predescu 2020). This external, community-level factor may be approximated at the individual level via the expressed perceptions of opportunities for civic engagement and the extent of social trust among the members of a community.
Put another way, the existence of multiple community associations and organizations (especially if they are well-supported by members of that community) is evidence of a high level of social capital (Stefaniak, Bilewicz, and Lewicka 2017), and individuals’ awareness (or lack thereof) of such organizations is evidence of their perception of the amount of social capital held by their community. Similarly, if they believe there is general and mutual trust among the members of the community (i.e., there are extensive trust-based ties among individuals), then that individual will also believe that the community has a high amount of social capital (Manzo and Perkins 2006).

As one might expect, places that contain high amounts of social capital are more likely to have individuals who want to take (and feel capable of taking) place-related actions (Manzo and Perkins 2006). There is also reason to believe that this is a self-reinforcing factor: places with multiple avenues for civic engagement and that have strong trust-based ties will foster conditions for increasing the levels of social capital.

2.3.2. Participation Infrastructure

All places have some form of a participation infrastructure that is designed to help link members of that place with the individuals who make decisions affecting the development of that place (Maričić, Cvetinović, and Bolay 2018). Such infrastructure may include hosting public hearings, using surveys to learn about public attitudes (or using even more formal referendums), or holding events designed to explain local governance to citizens and invite their participation in volunteer-led advisory groups for elected bodies. Ideally, these common mechanisms are designed to gather input from members of a community and integrate that input meaningfully in decision-making processes that involve developments that impact the public. In 1969, Sherry Arnstein proposed a model in the field of democratic public participation, called “The Ladder of
Citizen Participation* through which she described and illustrated increasing levels of citizens involvement, from as low as no power, to participation as citizen control.

Therefore, such mechanisms can also be designed to stifle participation, even as they offer the façade of welcoming community input. For example, the meeting time and location for a public hearing may not be posted in a place that is accessible to most members of a community (or, the hearing may not adhere to the posted information); participation in an advisory group may be overly complicated or cumbersome, such as by having meetings during working hours or requiring an exceptional amount of time; or, authorities may simply treat such meetings as a box to be checked in the name of democracy, and have little intention to take community input into consideration.

There are certain conditions that promote an effective participation infrastructure (Arbab, Taghizadeh, and Fadaei Nezhad 2020). First, public participation should be approached as a continuous process, manifesting itself throughout all the stages of a proposal. Second, the information provided to the public should be easily understood and made accessible to all stakeholders. Third, the public should be engaged via multiple means (e.g., through physical notices as well as postings in online communities) and encouraged to express their opinion, with special attention paid to vulnerable groups. Lastly, a good participation process should consider all the comments and concerns raised by the public (Arbab, Taghizadeh, and Fadaei Nezhad 2020).

Notably, scholars have observed that most of the laws governing most places’ participation infrastructure are at least decades old, and many have not kept up with recent technological innovations and related social changes. For example, the increased digitization of everyday life has resulted in more mediated exchanges (e.g., seeking information about local affairs on government websites, deliberating about public affairs on Facebook groups, and even having regular interpersonal conversations via messaging apps). Thus, modern participation infrastructure must include a wider range
of opportunities for digital participation in democratic governance, such as e-participation
and even gamification (Hassan and Hamari 2020).

Access to quality participation infrastructure is presumed to increase the
likelihood that individuals will engage in place-related actions, and further increase the
likelihood that such actions will follow formal channels (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015).
Put another way, if the barriers to participation are lower (and, further, if input is actively
solicited), then individuals will want to take place-related actions via government-
sanctioned channels. Alternatively, if such channels are lacking in quality (or availability),
then individuals may opt to not take a place-related action, or believe the only way such
action will yield the desired response is through informal channels - whether through
peaceful action like a demonstration or subversive response like sabotaging an action
perceived to threaten a place they are attached to.

2.3.3. Trust in Authorities

Modern democracies are indirect, in that they delegate power to political-
administrative actors and institutions that are supposed to (or believed to) represent the
citizens of that democracy (Christensen, Yamamoto, and Aoyagi 2020). Under this
governance regime, the vote is usually the primary mechanism citizens have to ensure
their interests receive consideration. That is, citizens will typically threaten to withhold
their vote for a candidate who does not listen to (or advocate for) their interests. In some
cases, single-issue voters may go so far as to cast their vote for the candidate that most
closely aligns with their top priority - whether it is a philosophical view or a place-related
interest.

Underneath the conscious decision to vote for a candidate is often an element of
trust. That is, citizens cast votes for candidates they believe will carry through their
promises vis-à-vis the citizen’s priorities. If those candidates speak to the interest but
show no intention of following through, or have historically failed to follow through - then the citizen may choose to withdraw from the voting process because they believe such action is fruitless. Local governance in particular is a test-bed for democracy because the smaller scale allows individuals to be more familiar with local processes and issues, and have a better understanding of the concrete implications of a candidate’s promise (McDonnell 2020).

Governmental authorities are not just made up of elected individuals, though. In many cases, many local authorities are appointed by elected leaders - whether because of those individuals’ expertise, political affiliation, or simple nepotism. Additionally, many authorities are career workers who rise up the ranks of a local institution. The way those individuals get to have their job is usually immaterial to the power they have in shaping places. However, such decisions may impact the extent to which they are trusted by citizens - especially if they have a historical connection to ineffective governance. When citizens do not trust local authorities, they are less likely to follow the formal channels offered by those authorities when taking place-related actions as they are likely to believe such actions will not yield a fruitful response (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015).

There are many factors that can influence the level of trust placed in authorities. The quality of the services citizens receives and the community’s evaluation of it, as well as their views on democracy and prevailing political attitudes, can all influence the levels of trust in government (Christensen, Yamamoto, and Aoyagi 2020). The causal relationship between these elements is difficult to establish but scholars believe they are at least mutually reinforcing (Uslaner 2004). That is, poor experiences with the authorities may result in lower levels of trust, which authorities may then take to mean that public input is irrelevant (or the lack of public input is indicative that authorities are taking the right actions), creating a feedback loop that distances citizens from authorities. Moreover, authorities may become skeptical, if not outright defensive, about
allowing the public to participate in decision-making processes - which, again, creates a feedback loop that reduces trust in those authorities - because they may view the public as being uneducated about the proposal or even an obstacle that must be overcome to reach the ‘sensible decision.’ Indeed, people’s resistance to change is sometimes portrayed by local authorities as inflexible and irrational (Manzo and Perkins 2006).

Relatedly, scholars have argued that trust is the motor of cooperation and an important condition for collective action (Gibson 2001). Put another way, trust is a precondition for organizing around an issue in order to collectively advocate for (or outright enact) a place-related action (Badescu and Uslaner 2004). If citizens trust their peers to be effective and supportive advocates, they are more likely to engage with them - whether through an ad-hoc action like a letter-writing campaign or the formation of a civic group (e.g., a citizen-led government watchdog organization) or even taking group-based insurgent action. This intersects with trust in local authorities because if citizens believe such mobilization efforts will be penalized (whether through being socially marginalized by authorities as a ‘problem citizen’ or, worse, being jailed) then they are less likely to engage in it (or, at least, do so publicly).

2.3.4 Political Efficacy

Citizens are more likely to take place-related actions, especially through formal channels, if they believe their actions are likely to yield a result (Gibson 2001). Scholars have conceptualized this phenomenon as political efficacy, or the capacity of a person to influence a political process (Zimmerman 1989). Political efficacy is made up of two elements: internal political efficacy and external political efficacy (Zimmerman 1989). Internal political efficacy refers to the capacity of a citizen to take participatory action and external political efficacy refers to the belief that a political system has the capacity to change or adjust in response to their participation (Zimmerman 1989). While political
efficacy is tied to the participation infrastructure of a place, it is also deeply connected to that place's history and individuals’ experiences with that infrastructure, the level of trust they have in authorities, and the amount of social capital held by a community.

Political efficacy is also connected to citizens’ belief that they have something to offer to a decision-making process, whether through their lived experience (e.g., insight into how they use a park) or their expertise in that topic (e.g., their work as a landscape architect). In some cases, people may believe decisions should be left to recognized experts (e.g., the citizen may believe they have nothing to offer as the local planner knows best). Alternatively, people may believe decisions should be more collaborative (e.g., the citizen may believe the local planner knows best but that they can add their experience to the planner’s calculations). Further, people may believe decisions should be community-oriented (e.g., the citizen believes the local planner should work around their or their community’s needs, as the community knows best).

When political efficacy is high, individuals tend to feel more comfortable in taking place-related actions (Zimmerman 1989). Conversely, when that efficacy is low, they are less likely to see the investment in a place-related action to be worthwhile.

2.4. Research Context

While the involvement of citizens in place-related actions is one of the essential elements of a democratic society, it is often a relatively new concept for emerging or new democracies, such as Central and Eastern European countries. Post-socialist and post-communist countries in the region have been slow to embrace democratic values, and the extent to which they have been adopted has been uneven (Badescu and Uslaner 2004). For these new democracies, the road to participatory democracy has been long and colored by the authoritarian and paternalistic attitudes of former socialist regimes. In some cases, it can hardly be said that participatory ideals are even close to being
attained. Although these post-socialist and post-communist countries share many commonalities, there are still important differences that are particular to each country (Badescu and Uslaner 2004). Among the factors that have contributed to these contextual differences are the country’s recent history, the type of control it was subjected to, the identities of power-brokers during the transition to democracy - which are just a few of the many relevant socio-economic, political, cultural, and historical variables that are specific to each country (Badescu and Uslaner 2004).

Romania offers an interesting case study of how a post-communist country has tried to transition from top-down, autocratic rule - often exercised with an iron fist - to a more participatory indirect democracy. Romanian towns and cities in particular are great examples of how communist ideology drove an intense and rapid process of industrialization, which led to rapid urban growth. Communist architecture and urban planning aimed to change society through design (Diener and Hagen 2013). Across the country, the industrial development of towns and cities was tied closely to the transformation of their urban centers, which were seen as representations of the place's identity and of the ideals of communism. Detailed redesign plans incorporated vast plazas dominated compositionally by a monumental building, which served as a symbol of political power (Tulbure, 2019). One consequence of redesigning those places was the demolition of old town centers and the history embedded in them. In some places, many of those projects were never finished. This resulted in the old fabric of the place being damaged twice: first when the historic center was demolished to make room for a new vision, and then when the communist projects left those spaces empty and unfinished (Tulbure, 2019).
The fall of communism in 1989 left Romania’s urban landscape in crisis, as evidenced by the decline of manufacturing and the resulting high levels of unemployment (Popescu 2014). Indeed, while industrial restructuring has presented challenges to all countries, deindustrialization throughout the 1980s and 1990s was felt particularly strongly in Central and Eastern Europe (Cercleux, Merciu, Bogdan, Florea-Saghin, Paraschiv 2018) as post-socialist and post-communist states transitioned from a centralized economy to an open economy (Sageata 2013). With the disintegration of the economy, population loss, out-migration and suburbanization followed. Additionally, in the absence of a coherent deindustrialization policy during that period of transition, and a failed attempt to save many industries through privatization, both national and local
authorities in Romania found themselves unable to control the development within towns and cities (Jigoria-Oprea, Popa 2017). The consequence, again, was the introduction of many perceived threats to beloved places - many of which were introduced with seemingly little recourse for citizens to take place-related actions via formal channels.

In addition to the changes to the cityscape, there were transformations to the cultural and political identity of post-socialist and post-communist countries (Diener, Hagen 2013). For example, community abandonment robbed many towns and cities of important cultural resources and talented leaders, and the out-migration led to the dispersion of families and the disconnection of important community ties (Popescu 2014). Indeed, after joining the European Union in 2007 (and thus gaining open access to the European labor market), Romania lost 3.2 million citizens to out-migration over a span of eight years - a rate second only to war-torn Syria during that time (United Nations 2016). Moreover, the country experienced substantial internal migration, as the country’s youth left their families for better prospects elsewhere in the country (e.g., leaving small towns for opportunities in the capital of Bucharest). The consequence of this pseudo-voluntary migration was the loss of important cultural, economic, and political touchstones, as well as the disruption of places’ collective memories. Indeed, such migration undermines the strength and resilience capacity of the communities left behind (Popescu 2014). Such migration further introduces new pressures to receiving places, especially when there isn’t an adequate system in place to deal with the new demands (Popescu 2014; Doussard, Peck, Theodore 2009).

The sudden and poorly planned transition from communism to democracy also directly and indirectly intersected with the four aforementioned factors that can shape the intention and selection of place-related actions. Some of the key intersections that arise in the context of Romania are described below.
Social Capital. Post-communist countries generally exhibit a lower level of social trust (Stefaniak, Bilewicz, and Lewicka 2017) and there is often an elevated rejection of collectivist ideology among a significant portion of their population (Soaita 2013). These are often remnants of the challenges of living under autocratic rule. For example, Romanians (and other citizens of most countries in the former Eastern bloc) lived under the influence of a repressive regime that promoted competition for basic goods and co-opted individuals into elaborate espionage networks (Badescu & Uslaner 2004). This made it difficult for members of a community to trust one another and, in turn, foster the development of social capital - especially when the consequences for mobilizing could be so great (Badescu & Uslaner 2004). Indeed, there is ample evidence of citizens being suspicious of everyone around them. In Romania, this was not just a perception issue; even close family members would sometimes be compelled to turn on one another under threats by different authorities. Ultimately, not only did these conditions foster conditions for reduced trust (and a fear of trusting), they also led to lower levels of voluntary participation in different kinds of civic groups and organizations (Uslaner 2004). This, in turn, presented a challenge to the mobilization of groups for taking collective place-related action.

However, at the same time, ties among friends and family had to be fostered in such places in order to permit the cooperation that was necessary for families to survive in the face of rationing (Badescu & Uslaner 2004). Even after the fall of communism, such ties were essential for dealing with the uncertainty that followed the change to democratic rule, and to secure the opportunities that arose during that messy transition. Thus, despite the weak levels of trust among Central and Eastern European countries, like Romania, there are nevertheless several instances of people engaging in collective action in response to, and even to subvert, repressive regimes.
*Participation Infrastructure.* In Romania, community involvement is often described as being shallow due to a lack of cooperation between local authorities and citizens (Constantinescu, Orîndaru, Căescu, Pachiţanu 2019). This is a consequence of the fact that civic participation - in the way we typically conceptualize it in the academic literature - did not meaningfully exist under Romania’s communist regime (Uslaner 2004). Today, there are certain cultural and policy-related barriers that either make civic participation difficult. For example, practices such as exchanging favors, drawing upon special privileges by virtue of one’s position in society, relying on special connections obtained through personal and professional networks, and even bribing officials remain in use. This is a common phenomenon in post-communist societies (Soaita and Wind 2020). Politically, researchers have argued that policies are poorly drafted, announced with little consultation, and subsequently ‘corrected’ in haste after they go into effect (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020). For example, in 2003 The Association for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania – The Helsinki Committee (APADOR-CH) monitored the implementation in practice of the first law on transparent decision making in public institutions. They monitored 93 local and central state bodies in 16 counties and found that only 60% of them had a functioning website and that 80% don’t announce when they have public meetings and as a consequence, they don’t really hold public discussions (Baltador and Budac 2014). As a consequence of this, the participation infrastructure in Romania is often perceived as being closed off to many citizens, and the most important role in decision-making processes is held by the mayor and the local council. With a low degree of direct participation by the community, Romania’s citizen participation, in terms of Arnstein’s “Ladder of Citizen Participation” seems to be situated between levels of *consultation*, when citizens are invited to express their ideas but there is no guarantee they will be taken into account, and *placation*, when citizens are involved only to demonstrate that they were involved.
Additionally, Romania had very limited bottom-up civic initiatives during its time under communist rule (Badescu 2003). Today, there are more non-profit organizations and other forms of civic associations that tend to be more active than the citizens (Neamtu, Dragos, and Capraru 2014). This could be explained by the lack of participatory culture among community members, apathy and distrust in public authorities (Neamtu, Dragos, and Capraru 2014).

**Trust in Authorities.** Romanian citizens have experienced a history of broken promises made by public authorities. This has resulted in disillusionment and, in turn, to a lack of trust in those authorities - especially in the face of perceptions of corruption. This disillusionment was exacerbated by the fact that, following the fall of communism, Romanians were hopeful for a better future - one they could help shape under democratic rule. When those dreams failed to materialize, the sense of disappointment held a stronger grip. Consequently, people were left to ask: why should we trust the same authorities and processes that failed to deliver on the promises?

Statistics from researchers and non-governmental organizations bear this out. According to a 2021 survey, just 13.4% trusted the Romanian government in general - in contrast to 64.7% who trusted the Romanian Academy, 62.4% who trusted the Romanian Church, and 51.1% who trusted the European Union (de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale (ISPRI) 2021). Similarly, according to the World Bank, public trust in politicians has increased in recent years, but it remains very low and well below the world median (Klaus Schwab 2017). Indeed, according to a 2020 report, “Romania continues to be characterized by a deeply ingrained tradition of simulated reforms and state capture, which has tended to be combined with a deep skepticism among the population vis-à-vis state policies, low trust in institutions and hence a tendency to subvert the implementation of policies or find ways around them” (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, p. 30).
Political Efficacy. Following the fall of communism, Romanians not only believed that the country was on the right track, they also believed they were in control of their own fate (Uslaner 2004). However, as they witnessed uncontrolled development and the return of old tendencies, Romanian citizens began to wonder if they truly had any new powers to direct their fate. This promoted low levels of both internal and external political efficacy. That is, citizens began to question whether they had the capacity to take participatory action and began to lose belief that the political system was capable of adjusting in response to citizens’ advocacy. Indeed, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index gives Romania a civil society participation score of 5 - meaning it is in line with the world median - with a 2020 report contending that considerations of expediency often prevail over broader consultation with organizations such as trade unions, business associations or churches” (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, p. 35). Similarly, today, local authorities often do not perceive the challenging of the status quo as a positive development - which, in turn, reinforces the low perceptions of political efficacy experienced by many Romanians.

2.5. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The literature tells us that people who have a high attachment to a place are more likely to want to protect it, such as by taking place-related actions that support or oppose a proposed change to that place (Manzo and Perkins 2006). However, the kinds of actions people want or feel they are able to take are shaped by different factors, such as social capital (Predescu 2020; Lewicka 2005), participation infrastructure (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015), trust in local authorities (Badescu and Uslaner 2004) and political efficacy (Manzo and Perkins 2006). These factors, in turn, are themselves shaped by the context of a place - meaning they may not apply in all contexts or
manifest themselves differently in a given context, as in the case of a post-communist country like Romania.

In light of this, the following hypotheses and research questions are proposed:

Research Question #1: What are the factors that enable or limit residents from undertaking place-related actions?

Hypothesis #1(a). The low quality of social capital will be identified by participants as a major barrier to taking place-related actions.

Hypothesis #1(b). The lack of participation infrastructure will be identified by participants as a major barrier to taking place-related actions.

Hypothesis #1(c). The lack of trust in the local authorities will be identified by participants as a major barrier to taking place-related actions.

Hypothesis #1(d). Low political efficacy will be identified by participants as a major barrier to taking place-related actions.

Hypothesis #1(e). There are factors other than the above ones that will be identified by participants as barriers to taking place-related actions on behalf of their environment.

Research Question #2. In this post-communist setting, what are the place-related actions that are most likely to be undertaken/most desired/preferred by residents?
3.1. Case Study

In order to address those hypotheses and research questions, I will examine the context of Targoviste, a post-industrial, mid-sized town in southern Romania. Targoviste has a long history, and its inhabitants are cognizant, and proud, of their heritage. Additionally, like many historic Romanian towns, there is a palpable sense of longing for the past. Targoviste has experienced many of the social and economic costs of the transition to democracy, yet some of its inhabitants believe they have seen few resulting gains. Moreover, and especially among those who feel they have not found a place in modern times, there is still a romanticization of life under communism - and, in particular, the stability it afforded them. As such, there has not only been a measurable decline in many material attributes of Targoviste but there is still a widespread undercurrent of tension among its inhabitants, some of whom question the present and fear for the future.

Archaeological excavations in and around Targoviste offer evidence that the region has been inhabited since the Neolithic era (Radu 2009). The town of Targoviste itself reached an incipient urban stage in the middle of the 14th century, with the process of population growth underscored by the establishment of an exchange market and the creation of a specialized handicraft production. At the beginning of the 15th century, Targoviste was chosen as the capital of a historical region known as Wallachia (today’s southern Romania). That selection was not an accident, nor was the fact that it remained the capital for more than three centuries (1400-1714) with few interruptions. The city’s rulers offered its inhabitants opportunities for a flourishing life and a sense of accomplishment. Additionally, Targoviste was a pioneer city in Romanian culture: in
1508, the first Romanian book in the Slavonic language was printed at its Dealu monastery. Establishing the Lordly Court of Wallachia in Targoviste also stimulated the economic development of the town and increased its regional prestige. A Genovese diplomat even remarked that the town’s buildings were more beautiful and ‘prouder’ than the ones in Bucharest, reinforcing the sense that the city gave its residents reasons to feel proud (Radu 2009).

During the wars between the Austrians and the Turks in the 18th century, Targoviste suffered great damage. This played a major role in the formalization of Bucharest as the country’s capital city. Then, following World War II, Targoviste fell into the megalomaniacal vision of the country’s communist ruler. It also became a regional center (in 1950) and a county seat (in 1968). While under communist rule, Targoviste followed the typical pattern of uniformity in terms of architecture and urban planning - a shift away from its previously well-defined, historic style (Diener, Hagen 2013).

Like other mid-sized Romanian towns, Targoviste was pushed into the iron-and-steel industry in the 1970s (Sageata 2013). This choice wasn’t fortuitous. Its predominantly historical and cultural background weren’t well-suited to becoming a powerful industrial center (Sageata 2013). Nevertheless, the town grew quickly. In 1973, Targoviste’s population registered 18,719 inhabitants. Four years later, its population had tripled. And, by 1992, it had grown to 98,117 (Sageata 2013).

This rapid growth resulted in the creation of large apartment blocks in clusters (micro-districts) known today as Micro III, V, VI, XI, XII. Nearly 225 apartment blocks registered in 1992 were built between 1971 and 1980 (Sageata 2013). In the rush to accommodate the population boom, most of these buildings were constructed without proper comfort or safety norms. Additionally, key town services and recreational spaces were located primarily in the town’s center. Indeed, most communist plans in Romania
identified the town center as its most important element, which served both a symbolic and utilitarian function.

Thus, in the case of Targoviste, large-scale developments were abruptly inserted into the existing fabric. That reorganization of the town into “Micros” remains prominent in the collective memories of neighborhoods and the town writ large. It has been imprinted such that, now, Micros serve as reference points within the town (i.e., when giving directions to others). Additionally, those identities have helped create stigmas that only deepened social inequities and divisions within the town, all the while making it harder for its inhabitants to unite in order to take collective action.

Following the fall of communism in 1989, Targoviste experienced a notable economic decline and was gripped by the same incoherence in governance faced by the rest of the country during the transition period into democracy. After decades of rapid growth, Targoviste saw its first population decline in the decade following the fall of communism. That decline continued over the following decade, with the 2011 Romanian census reporting a population size of 79,610 (Romanian Institute of Statistics 2011). This has damaged the social fabric of the town as historic ties were broken and families and previously tight-knit social circles became more dispersed.

Authorities in Targoviste have also exhibited a tendency to enact policies that promote sprawling development, rather than compact development, over the past three decades, with residential neighborhoods expanding the town’s outer limits (and further encouraging a car-oriented environment). The town has also introduced several public improvement projects with little public input - a phenomenon experienced elsewhere in Romania in recent years (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020). Monument restorations, the creation of new parks or revitalizations of public squares have been criticized as failing to invite (much less take into account) public input.
To illustrate the prevailing attitudes toward public participation among high-ranking officials in Targoviste, consider the following anecdote. A Facebook group called “Targoviste Townhall,” which has 6,800 members (in a town of less than 80,000, as of 2011) features an average 18 new posts per day - many of which contain pictures of what members describe as ill-conceived developments or areas that require improvement. One particular ongoing project, which aims to revitalize historical ruins located in the Metropolitan Church Park of Targoviste (a central and reference landmark of the town), has generated a large number of posts and resulting comments on the part of the town’s citizens - the vast majority of which express dissatisfaction with the ongoing changes. In response, the town manager wrote a lengthy online post that included the follow:

“I was surprised to find an invasion of opinions, more or less relevant or competent, regarding the public project of Targoviste City Hall for the restoration of the ruins. ... From the very beginning, I want to mention that I am a supporter of freedom of opinion, of the right of everyone to access public information. ... To the less knowledgeable, but with a high civic spirit, I ask you to end the unnecessary talk in the virtual public space, and inform you that Mr. L ... is certified to sign and coordinate this type of project. ... Therefore, if any of you believe that you have MORE experience and expertise, or at least HALF, maybe just ONE QUARTER, even 3% of that of Mr. L, who GUARANTEES the quality by signing for everything that is done ... I ask you to express your opinion and point of view loud and clear. If not, with the same consideration, I ask you to repress your imaginary justice instincts or the useless frustration accumulated lately, and to refrain from filling the public space with totally unadvised and false opinions. Regarding the wish of some online activists to be asked for their opinion on this project, I attach the announcement for public participation, which was made in the most transparent way possible on this planet and to which any SPECIALIST (not brave person on Facebook) had the legal opportunity to participate” (Damboviteanul, 2020).

As this anecdote shows, at least some citizens of Targoviste view public participation as an item to be checked off on a To Do list at best and a mere illusion at worst. Moreover, such attitudes - especially when expressed in such public ways - have
the capacity to impact key factors previously identified in the literature as obstacles to taking place-related actions, such as reducing external political efficacy and reducing social trust in authorities.

Finally, it should be noted that the town’s history remains important to its present. Public officials (and its citizens) frequently reference the town’s status as the medieval capital of Wallachia. The entrances to the town are marked by steel symbols that honor its recent industrial past. And, the town has recently considered proposals for renaming areas of town (e.g., the Micros) after its famous rulers. There is still a strong sense of pride in the town, and despite the many changes to its urban fabric, a palpable sense of attachment to the place.

3.2. Photovoice Methodology

Qualitative research is well-suited to capturing important nuances of people-place relationships, as well as with citizens’ experiences with place-related actions. One such qualitative method is photovoice, which has an embedded participatory component at its heart (Gubrium and Harper 2016). Developed by public health scholar Carolyn Wang in 1999, Photovoice builds sustenance by engaging with local communities or groups of volunteers to generate visual documentation, build a narrative through their voices, and eventually with their help, reach a broad audience and communicate with local authorities and policymakers about the concerns raised and identified (Gubrium and Harper 2016). Moreover, Photovoice’s open-ended approach is well-suited to unearthing participants’ priorities - which can be particularly helpful in identifying new phenomena of interest (e.g., factors that affect the taking of place-related actions that have not been previously identified in scholarly work).

Photovoice begins by assembling the community of participants, also known as the inner circle (Gubrium and Harper 2016). The work is then organized among
participatory teams. Usually, the theme(s) are established *a priori* (in light of a study’s research questions and hypotheses) and then discussed with the participants, who have an opportunity to adjust the theme(s) and add to them during an initial meeting with the researcher. That first meeting also aims to familiarize participants with the study’s general objectives, how to use photography equipment and share photos with the research team, and any relevant ethical considerations. After the first meeting, the participants go on to photograph phenomena (e.g., buildings, landmarks, everyday life) based on the discussed themes and their personal experiences and beliefs. In taking the photographs, participants contribute local knowledge about the agreed-upon themes. Participants then select the pictures they would like to discuss with the group and share them with the research team (Gubrium and Harper 2016).

The second meeting is focused on the discussions, which draw upon the pictures as a starting point (Gubrium and Harper 2016). In a focus group-style environment, a picture-taker is typically invited to describe their picture, their motivation for taking the picture, and what the picture represents. Then, other members of the group are invited to discuss what the picture represents as well, and use that as a basis for a broader discussion about the topic of the picture. By introducing and discussing pictures, different participants are able to share multiple stories and anecdotes about the topic captured by the picture - even if those stories and anecdotes are not themselves directly illustrated by the image being discussed. Such exchanges often involve a mixture of agreement and disagreement, which exposes the researcher to multiple organic perspectives and provides a sense of the extent to which certain perspectives are shared (Gubrium and Harper 2016).

Photovoice can also be used to reach a broader audience with the help of participants by turning the collection of pictures into bigger events targeting a general population, such as a photo exhibition (Gubrium and Harper 2016). The purpose of such
events is to bridge gaps between local communities and those in charge of effecting change, be they officials or policymakers who are sometimes inaccessible to the community at large - and specially to marginalized groups (Gubrium and Harper 2016).

By using Photovoice methodology, researchers can include the community’s collective knowledge into a set of recommendations for best practices vis-à-vis a particular issue. Additionally, by giving participants an active role in the research process, they can be made to feel empowered - which can contribute to their own sense of value as well as to a sense of community ownership. At its core, Photovoice addresses social justice by including community input throughout the research process.

Finally, Photovoice methodology can be supplemented with surveys and other data collection methods - especially in order to obtain information in a more consistent and structured manner. For example, a survey can be used to quantify the prevalence of a particular attitude, with Photovoice used to capture the nuances of those attitudes.

3.3. Sampling

In order to address the study objectives, I originally sought to recruit between 20 and 40 citizens of Targoviste, and divide them into Photovoice sessions containing 6-8 people. This objective was higher than Guest et al.’s (2006) broader recommendation for qualitative research. They remark that among a group of relatively homogeneous individuals, twelve interviews should suffice (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006). However, to account for some potential heterogeneity among participants (whether in demographics, attitudes, or beliefs), I aimed to exceed that number.

Participants were recruited primarily on the basis of their availability and predisposition to participating in scholarly research, but also with an eye toward representing different aspects of Targoviste’s demographics. I began by posting a recruitment message that described the nature of the research, the required time
commitment, and my contact information in multiple Facebook groups identified with the town of Targoviste every week between July and August of 2021. However, Romania does not have a tradition of regular citizens participating in academic research, and I anticipated the more formal language of the recruitment message (which was approved by the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Institutional Review Board) would scare off many would-be participants. Thus, in light of these circumstances, I also drew upon my professional network in Targoviste in order to increase both participation and representation. Specifically, I contacted the architectural order of Targoviste, liaised with connections in the town’s public education system, and reached out to local leaders to increase the reach of my recruitment messaging.

In order to be eligible for participation, individuals simply needed to be citizens of Targoviste and older than 18 years of age. While I made a concerted effort to recruit members of the town’s Roma minority (in addition to the general population), that effort was not fruitful - in part because of built-up distrust among the country’s Roma population of those who aim to examine them (rather than work with them). I was, however, successful in capturing the perspectives of both new and long-time residents of the city, as well as those of individuals who were both young and old.

The final sample was made up of 22 individuals, 12 women and 10 men, with age ranging from 18 to 67, and a median age of 28.6.

3.4. Procedure

This research project was approved by the University of Massachusetts’ Institutional Review Board in July 2021. Following the IRB approval, I recruited participants using the strategy described above. All participants who agreed to participate in the research were asked to attend two research sessions, usually held a few days apart and consisting of 4-6 people. A total of five Photovoice sessions were
held between July and August of 2021, with four held in person and one over video conferencing (Zoom). In-person meetings were typically held in the evening in a classroom at a public school in the town, offering participants a neutral and semi-private space.

At the first research session, I formally obtained each participant’s informed consent - though the highlights of the research were also previously included in the recruitment message - and described the purpose of the project and of the Photovoice method. Then, participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire about their attitudes toward the town of Targoviste, their experiences with the town’s participation infrastructure, and how they self-identified across traditional demographic attributes (e.g., gender, age, the amount of time they had lived in the town). Of particular note, the survey included questions about the participant’s level of attachment toward their town, the elements of the place they identified with or believe to be worth preserving, and their desire to participate in place-related actions related to their town (see Appendix A). This questionnaire generally took less than 10 minutes to complete.

After filling out the questionnaire, participants took part in a brainstorming session where we discussed the predetermined themes of “Attachment” and “Engagement.” These themes were discussed in terms of what they meant to each participant, how they would define them and if they thought they would be able to illustrate those themes through the pictures they could take. Although the themes were predetermined, each different group of participants were given the opportunity to suggest other themes they believed might be relevant. However, this did not work. Since participating in research is not a very common thing in Romania - this was the first research project nearly all of the participants had been a part of - most participants wished to stick to the two predetermined themes. During this first meeting, participants were also given a short primer on how to take photos and easily share them with me.
These meetings also included discussions about the ethics of photography, and in particular the need to avoid taking pictures in which unaffiliated people could be easily identified.

The second Photovoice meeting served as the basis of the main focus group discussion. The discussions followed a semi-structured facilitation protocol. Specifically, I preloaded all of the pictures sent to me - or, in some cases, a mildly curated set if a participant submitted several variations of a single picture - and displayed each picture on a separate PowerPoint slide that was projected in the classroom. My role as a facilitator was to go through the selected photos, invite the picture-taker to share their perspective, invite other group-members to comment on the picture and share their perspectives, and finally wrap up a discussion so we could proceed through the pictures in a timely fashion. (Discussions about a single photo sometimes lasted as long as twenty minutes.) While these Photovoice sessions were typically intended to last about 75 minutes each, nearly all of them exceeded that parameter, with the longest session lasting just over three hours.

3.5. Analytic Strategy

All Photovoice sessions were both video and audio recorded using multiple devices. I then manually transcribed those recordings - which totaled 15 hours. The survey results and the transcripts served as the primary data analyzed in order to address the hypotheses and research questions.

In order to analyze the surveys, I performed simple descriptive data analysis. The main survey questions that were factored into my analysis pertain to individuals' sense of attachment to Targoviste, and I calculated the mean value of the Likert-scale responses as part of my analysis. This was necessary in order to substantiate the presumption that the participants express a high level of attachment to their place.
(Targoviste). I used the same analytic strategy to examine a few other questions that relate to place-related actions.

In order to analyze the Photovoice transcripts, I performed a thematic analysis. I began the analysis by performing semi-open coding. Specifically, I reviewed all of the transcripts by looking for evidence of two sets of things. The first set covered the four factors identified in Hypothesis #1 (social capital, participation infrastructure, trust in local authorities and political efficacy). The second set covered references to different kinds of place-related actions that participants expressed as either wishing they could take, their preferred course of action, and the actions they believe are available to them (Research Questions #2 and #3). In addition to this, I looked for expressions regarding other potential factors that do not fit the existing four (Research Question #1). Whenever I encountered a reference to any of these things, I assigned the entirety of the relevant segment to an existing code (e.g., “social capital”) from a provisional list (based on the hypotheses). If the segment covered something conceptually distinct, I assigned it an entirely new code. As I performed the coding, I was writing an analytic memo designed to help me reflect on the coding process.

After completing this initial review of the transcripts, I reviewed my analytic memo and my list of codes in order to see if there is overlap among some of the codes (which may warrant collapsing them into a single code). Then, for each of the codes, I reviewed all of the segments assigned to that code in order to see if it is necessary to create sub-categories of those codes (e.g., “social capital: lack of civic organizations”). While completing this step, I kept another analytic memo. At the conclusion of the step, I once again revisited my list of codes to check for overlap.

After coming up with the revised list of codes, I reviewed all of the transcripts and applied the new codes to them, following a similar process to the one described in the initial step - all the while writing a new analytic memo.
I repeated the above steps until I have reached saturation, and no further ability to refine or find new evidence that was useful to evaluating my hypotheses and research questions.
A total of 22 people participated in this research project. They all participated in the face-to-face focus groups, collectively submitted more than 400 pictures for discussion, and completed a short survey. In this section, I describe the key findings in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

4.1. Place Attachment

In conducting this research, it was presumed that participants would have a high level of attachment to Targoviste. This expectation was supported in two ways.

First, in response to the survey question, “Do you feel a sense of belonging in Targoviste?” the mean rating was 4.31 (on a five-point Likert scale). Notably, there was a lower rating for the question, “Do you think other people feel a sense of belonging in Targoviste?” The mean rating for that question was 3.63. Thus, participants reported a higher personal sense of place attachment, at least on the dimension of belongingness, than they perceived those around them to have.

Among the reasons for their sense of attachment, participants listed the following reasons in response to an open-ended survey question: they saw Targoviste as their home (12 out of 22 participants); they were proud of its history (9); they had lived there most of their life (6); and they felt the city provided them a good quality of life (7). A smaller share of participants listed the city’s potential – both in terms of development potential and its cultural potential – as a reason for their attachment. Put another way, their attachment came in part because they believe that this history and culture can be translated into tourism and appreciated by outsiders as well. In contrast, two participants said the city did not offer what they needed, which created a sense of disconnect.
Additionally, one participant mentioned that an extended period away from Targoviste had reduced their sense of attachment.

Second, participants were able to quickly identify multiple things in Targoviste that they were attached to. The survey asked participants specifically about the landmarks they might feel attached to and participants unsurprisingly listed the city’s main monuments: the Royal Court, the Royal Church, Chindia Tower, the Fortress ditch and hill, the Metropolitan church, and the historical city center. Nearly all of the participants considered these landmarks to be important (6 out of 22 said they were very important, 15 said they were important, and just one was indifferent).

However, the Photovoice process in particular elicited many other places and aspects of the city that were deemed to be meaningful. For example, multiple participants selected less prominent spaces that fostered connections at the neighborhood level (Roses Alley neighborhood) and at the street level (Chestnut Boulevard). Others pointed to buildings that might not have much meaning to outsiders, such as a particular elementary school or high school where they forged memories, or houses made by Italian craftsmen and constructors that they felt created a connection to their extended ancestry. In some cases, the attachment was tied to the state of a building or area of the city – the “parts of the city I am afraid will disappear,” as one participant put it. Unsurprisingly, many participants used the language of “forgotten” and “unpromoted” places. Several participants also used emotive language to refer to the objects of their pictures, such as, “places that are dear to me” and “important places in town.”

In multiple instances, the attachment wasn’t directly to a particular built structure but to a detail about that place. For example, one picture (Figure 2) was used to highlight the disappearance of the original materials and decorations in old monuments around the city, and how their replacements were substandard. The participant remarked:
“I notice the gables disappearing all over the town. They are plastered and whitewashed. And then the decorations are being covered. The same as the wooden doors are replaced with plastic ones, the windows disappear, also the same, replaced with plastic ones. … This is the trend.”

Figure 2. The facade of a house and its original decorations being covered by plaster (female, 65 years)

In such instances, the attachment is reflected mostly through the fear of loss. In this case, what was being lost was not just a piece of the past but a point of pride. Indeed, the theme of “beautiful houses on the verge of disappearance” was brought up in every focus group. Most of the referenced houses were built in the 19th century and
used to belong to wealthy families. However, today, they are in disrepair, with the cost of proper renovations being rather high and often beyond the means of the inheritors. As such, one solution is replacing at-risk parts of the structure with cheaper materials – which are sometimes more heat-efficient and thus reduce utility costs for those inheritors – which in turn makes others less proud of, and attached to, the city and its history.

Figure 3. A house listed as monument that escaped the mass demolitions during communism (male, 32 years)

Participants remarked that the same situation occurs with houses listed as monuments. The house pictured in Figure 3 is considered a landmark of the city because of how it was able to avoid demolition under the country’s communist regime, which aimed to replace it with an apartment building. However, as one participant remarked:

“The house is currently divided into about 4 or 5 families. Only one
of them is the heiress, but they don't have the money to restore it, because there is a lot to invest. Inside, it looks like a castle. I couldn't believe that I had passed by it so many times and hadn't noticed its true beauty, due to it being covered in ivy. On the inside there are murals on the ceilings. The house is fascinating. I understand that the owners would like to access some funds, but it's not that easy. And they are required by law to keep everything as it is, and not to make any changes. I noticed that some of the people living in the house put on double-glazed windows, but I don't know if they were allowed.”

A place that deserves particular attention is the city’s Lordly Court, with the Monastery and Chindia Tower (Figure 4). In the survey, this was selected as the most important landmark in the city. One participant elaborated on this phenomenon during one of the focus group sessions:

“It is the most important monument in the city. It is a real tourist objective for all Romanians, I would say, and even for some foreigners. We cannot be proud of a millennial history, as it has been said, because it is only a history of about 600 years. But it is an authentic place, as long as it continues to be preserved as authentic.”
Interestingly, however, that place rarely came up in the images produced through the Photovoice process. One citizen’s explanation helps shed some light on why this was the case:

“I wouldn’t have thought of the Chindia Tower because even though I know it is an emblem of the town, it seems to me that it has a little cliché effect. The emblems keep us at some distance from the real texture or significance of a place. I think about how few times I have actually climbed the tower. However, different people told me they know Targoviste associated with the tower. Of course, I’m glad when people recognize the town for an emblem, but I didn’t have many personal memories there.”

Put another way, while many participants listed the Chindia Tower as a place they were attached to, a closer inspection indicates that the attachment comes not from a particularly strong personal connection to the place but rather to what it represents as a historical artifact. The fact that it is a recognizable symbol, and a key reason for why others might visit Targoviste, makes Chindia Tower an important place.
Some images also reflected *non-attachment*, or the loss of attachment in relation to certain places in the city. As participants repeatedly noted, this was mainly due to the ways in which those places were being maintained and utilized in the present. For example, two pictures (Figure 5 and Figure 6) sparked a discussion about what was happening in the background (which featured outdoor seating for bars in a historic center of the city). Multiple participants noted that modern, uncoordinated transformations of that historic center made them feel less attached to it, for what had made that part of the city special now appeared to be in disarray. As one participant put it:

“The Old Town doesn't generate the same emotion for me anymore. On the contrary, it irritates me when I see certain things that seem totally disharmonious. Maybe the focus should be on the need to renovate all these buildings. Each construction has a different color, with a different terrace in front, it looks like an amusement park and it bothers me.”

*Figure 5. Image of the Old Town focused on floral arrangements (male, 39 years)*
4.2. Taking Place-Related Actions

In light of their attachment to the city of Targoviste, its built structures, and its public spaces, participants unsurprisingly expressed concern about the state of things and expressed some desire to take place-related actions.

First, half of the participants believed the city’s major landmarks were not maintained in a way that reflected their importance. Seven of the 22 participants considered the landmarks to be somewhat well-maintained, and just four believed they were being well-maintained. The vast majority of participants reported being aware of government-led efforts to restore or maintain the landmarks, though some argued that such efforts were “unfortunate” (executed in a detrimental manner) and “not successful.” Beyond landmarks, many of the Photovoice discussions highlighted varying states of degradation, with a common theme being the lack of action taken by multiple stakeholders, including the local authorities, the owners of those places and structures, and other citizens. This was consistent with the earlier observations, where these
participants believed they were more attached to Targoviste than most other citizens. However, another salient theme in the discussion was reflected by the title “involvement,” which was used for many pictures. Such pictures, and their accompanying discussions, highlighted different levels of engagement and taking concrete place-related actions. For example, participants pointed to examples of thoughtful building restorations completed by the structure’s owners, as well as efforts to offer clean public spaces. Thus, in these examples, participants expressed an appreciation for their peers who sought to beautify (and protect) cherished spaces, while recognizing that meaningful environmental place-related actions could be executed at the individual level.

During the focus group sessions, participants also described various place-related complaints that they had lodged through official channels, actions they took in order to promote town’s important landmarks, attempts to teach others about local history, and efforts to raise awareness about the town’s legacy and the need to support its preservation for the future. While these actions were all voluntary, many were taken in response to what participants described as a threat to their beloved environment. As one participant remarked:

“Looking at the Revolution Square, we witnessed all the demolition, the cutting of the trees. They were all meant to be cut down but then I got active. There was a moment when I went to the City Hall and it became a little scandal. Television and more people began to come, and we at least managed to save some of the trees. [It wasn’t perfect] but there are at least a few [trees] left.”

Another participant similarly felt he had to capture the decaying state of the city, both to preserve the past but also to chronicle the present transformations:

“I turned into a little house hunter because they started to demolish the houses massively or [left them to] fall on their own, and I wanted to capture either a window or the whole house as it
is here. And I'm sorry to see them disappearing.”

While some of these place-related actions were being taken individually, some of them were collective actions taken both through ad-hoc and well-organized groups. For example, the regional branch of the Architectural Order of Architects organized multiple exhibitions related to Targoviste’s built environment “so that people passing by could see and remember” the town. One participant that was affiliated with the Order remarked:

“We have a commitment – as a guild and as professionals. It was with satisfaction that I gave people the opportunity to stop in front of our exhibition panels and experience the feeling of belonging to our city.”

A recurring theme underlying those endeavors was the desire to make Targoviste feel as important to others as it was to them. As one participant remarked:

"I have an attachment that comes from the place of birth, of childhood. In my case, the desire is to change, to improve, to make things better. Why … can't [Targoviste] be like cities in Transylvania? This attachment then turned into a series of duties. A duty that I personally felt I had to perform if I lived here. I pushed myself. We have to try; we have to be able to fight for this town. I have been working on that for about 10 years."

While that quote aptly captured the desire to improve a place they are attached to, that same participant also remarked:

“And with the duty part, I would assume it wherever I live if I found that things are not as good there as we see elsewhere. We can take examples of good practices from other cities that have gone through this as well. We've been stuck for 30 years and I don't see any progress.”

Put another way, several of those participants expressed frustration not only with the state of things but with the obstacles they faced in trying to improve the places they cared about. Indeed, as one participant succinctly put it:
“These police-like things that we feel we have to do in Romania are not normal.”

A broader disillusionment with the challenges of taking place-related actions in Targoviste is reflected in the response to one of the survey questions. When asked to remark on whether citizens of Targoviste had a strong civic spirit, the mean response of 2.54 (on a five-point Likert scale) indicated that participants believed the community had only a modest level of commitment to the city. Notably, not a single participant rated the Targoviste’s citizens as having a very strong civic spirit. In response to a separate survey question about the reasons for not taking place-related actions, participants identified the lack of time (10 out of 22 participants), the lack of attractive initiatives (11), not knowing how to get more involved (5), and the lack of meaningful reward for taking action (3) as key reasons.

In the following sections, I expand on these obstacles that emerged through the Photovoice discussions. These are organized around the four key factors identified in the scholarly literature relating to the intersection of place attachment and place-related action.

4.3. Factors Shaping Intention and Selection of Place-Related Actions

4.3.1. Social Capital

During the focus group sessions, participants remarked that attempts to take place-related actions, especially in a collective form, still relied on close personal connections and mutual trust. One example of this was an initiative started seven years ago to collect clothing and goods during the Christmas season to improve the quality of life of less-fortunate local families. According to the participant, the effort spread through word-of-mouth and became quite successful. However, as the participant noted, the
success was due in no small measure to a local priest who played a pivotal role in raising awareness, especially in light of their status as a trusted community leader. Additionally, that participant expressed a desire to scale up the operation – which would require creating a local organization, something they could not pull off themselves given resource constraints. As the participant remarked:

“I collaborated with the priests from the villages because, in the beginning, I didn’t really know how things worked and he clearly knew the social cases, the children. … In recent years we have received more money and we buy food. I would love to run a community organization. At the moment, however, I don’t have [the resources, such as] time.”

As this participant’s quote illustrates, the existence of some level of social capital was crucial to helping a motivated individual get involved in an initiative that increased the quality of life for their community. However, the perceived limitations to the available social capital prevented them from becoming more involved.

Participants observed a reduction in the spaces that could be utilized by community-oriented organizations, making collective organization more difficult. For example, one participant observed that a large government building from the Communist era that had been used as a performance hall and community cultural space was now rented to a furniture store (See Figure 7). The participant noted that it was “unheated [and] unwelcoming, [and] no investments have been made [in it] for a long time.” Put another way, the participant indicated that a community organization hoping to utilize an existing public space had access to limited or substandard resources.
Participants also observed that there was a general lack of community-building institutions involving the city’s youth, which made it harder for them to later draw upon social capital that is often readily available in places outside of Romania. For example, one of the Photovoice sessions elicited a discussion around the simple fact that high schools in Targoviste do not have an alumni community:

“One thing we lack is an alumni community, in the sense that the [high school] graduates could organize get-togethers from time to time. Not just a simple, formal goodbye and [an event] 20 years [later]. But, to have a database with former students and to see where each one ended up, [and] to bring them to programs like School Differently. … [It would] make a kind of transfer of knowledge, of experiences, a local intervention that [brings] the community [closer together]. It makes you feel connected again, in addition to family and friends, you feel that you still have an active
contribution.”

The lack of such institutions was part of a broader pattern of discussion observing a perceived shortage of community organizations dedicated to improving the city of Targoviste. Notably, participants observed that individual actions were incapable of having the same impact as those initiated by a community association or organization, especially if that organization specialized in the subject of the action, such as community preservation.

Participants also pointed to the utilization and development of public spaces as avenues for increasing social capital. For example, a discussion about the quality of public spaces emphasized the role such spaces play in consolidating relations among members of the community, which in turn increases the quality of social capital available at the neighborhood level. One participant captured this sentiment, in reference to a popular public space, thusly:

“The Alley of Roses neighborhood remains for me an enclave in time. I know it has a pretty strong sense of community and that’s what I like to see in different neighborhoods. They have a meeting space that is accessible to all, and maybe this is one of the secrets of the long-lived community in this neighborhood.”

However, multiple participants recognized that the Alley of Roses neighborhood was an outlier in the city. Multiple participants remarked on a broader cultural shift following the fall of Communism that made it difficult to develop spaces like the Alley of Roses elsewhere in town. This, they noted, presented a challenge to developing a greater sense of community across the city’s neighborhoods. As one participant observed:

“It seems to me that, in our country, immediately after ‘89, the idea of public space has been diluted a lot and it seems that each of us has retired to his small apartment and organizes his own universe
there and no longer gives a damn about anything else and once they pass their home door, nothing longer interests them.”

In a similar vein, some participants expressed a lack of trust in both the goodwill of many local citizens as well as in the city’s processes and procedures in relation to development. A recurring concern was that some citizens and organizations were given special privileges that came at the detriment of the common good. The phrase, “it depends on who you are” and the sentiment that the kind of relations one has with the authorities influences the likelihood of approval for their desired changes to the built environment was frequently repeated. As participants observed, one person might have their request denied or burdened with extra bureaucracy while another is granted a clear pathway for the same request. As one participant reflected:

“My next-door neighbor wanted to demolish the old house because it was no longer habitable and build another one in the same style. And he didn’t get approval. But others received approval.”

Multiple participants observed that the thinking around the idea of “property” had changed in a way that deemphasized the social good. In the Photovoice sessions, a number of pictures were shared that, in the participants’ views, reflected the idea that some citizens saw property as something that simply belonged to them, rather than being a piece of a community. Some participants explicitly argued that while the inside of a built structure might belong to the owner, the outside belonged at least in part to the community.

This sentiment was not universal, however. Some participants, while expressing a desire for more community-oriented development, also contended that at least some restrictions intended to preserve or improve the common good should be limited to only certain kinds of structures and spaces. As one succinctly put it, “it's up to the owner to do
what he wants with his house if it is not a historical monument.” A similar sentiment colored common-good restrictions on development as exacerbating disparities, imposing undue burdens on people who can’t afford it, and limiting the development they observed others deemed to be necessary. As one argued:

“I think that a person’s standard of living is an important factor. People who earn little are worried about tomorrow, and not about whether we have green space in the city or whether we have more beautiful pavement or not. … We don’t all have the luxury of thinking about how to make [everything a] public space.”

That sentiment was echoed by another participant, who characterized their peers’ lamentations about the seemingly uncoordinated development in recent years as reflecting disparities in the availability of individual capital:

“This is the thing: If I have money, I’ll insulate my apartment and it [will be] an extremely unsightly general patch. [The building’s] facade was designed without closed balconies. [Now.] each one is closed according to its [owner’s] vision and … budget. [That becomes] an extremely unsightly symbol that says: "I don’t care about the community. I do it my own way because it is my private property." … You have to spend [money to fix] these things.”
“I was struck by this whole combination of elements that at the same time tell so many stories about how people try to find a lifestyle that suits them in a built environment that often opposes what they want to do... I find it uncomfortable to have such a yard, be it narrow as it is, but in the back, you have some blocks that do not offer you any privacy. It seems to me that people have to work very hard against the space they have and not with it.”

This lack of agreement was seemingly understood to not be surprising. However,
the focus group discussions suggested that there was general recognition that a broader cultural change toward individualism and concerns about some citizens’ intentions and the fairness of institutional processes did have implications for the development of social capital. That, in turn, limited the kinds and scope of place-related actions participants believed they (and others) could take.

In light of the many limitations participants identified with regard to the quality of social capital, and the connection of those limitations to the challenges of taking place-related actions, Hypothesis #1(a), which stated that “the low quality of social capital will be identified by participants as a major barrier to taking place-related actions,” was supported.

4.3.2. Participation Infrastructure

When participants were asked in the survey about their level of satisfaction with the local authorities’ efforts to involve the community, not a single person reported being very satisfied, and just one person reported being satisfied. The mean response rating of 2.09 for that question (on a five-point Likert scale) indicates a general level of dissatisfaction. Furthermore, 16 of the 22 participants reported that they had not tried to participate in public consultations initiated by local authorities – at least those involving changes to the town’s-built environment.

In response to an open-ended survey question about local authorities’ efforts to involve the community, one participant wrote: “The dialogue is just a façade. There is no real interest from the authorities.” Another wrote: “Public consultations don’t actually exist. They appear in announcements that are posted too late.” A third participant observed that they were “only an observer, without any real chance to interact [with authorities].” A fourth participant wrote, “the emails I sent weren’t taken into consideration” and that “the communication with the authorities is too weak; [they are]
expeditious public consultations, done only as a formality, with superficial expressions.”

Finally, the conclusion of another participant was simply that “they didn't care about my opinions.”

These sentiments were repeatedly echoed in the focus group sessions. Participants frequently remarked that formal participation infrastructure, such as public hearings or complaint processes, were unwelcoming and confusing. In every focus group, several participants would report having never heard through formal channels or directly from the authorities of some place-related intervention mentioned by another participant. Even the participant raising the place-related intervention would often use phrases like: “I’ve heard that…,” “I understood from several people that …,” and “I saw a post [on Facebook] related to….”

One participant took particular exception with the town’s website, which could ostensibly serve as a cheap but effective way to at least inform citizens about upcoming actions. They remarked:

“The town hall’s website is often down, besides the fact that it is difficult to navigate around. It seems like it is from the 1990s.”

Some participants expressed cynicism about the local participatory processes, arguing that they were designed to either frustrate or lead to a dead end. For example, one participant argued:

“There are local council meetings. You can attend one. You sign up on lists, because … we are theoretically allowed to go and attend. Practically, that’s only going to happen if they [decide to] let you in.”

In a separate focus group, a participant also expressed both frustration and cynicism about the design of the city’s participation infrastructure. In reference to an area of houses proposed for the construction of apartment buildings, that participant
remarked:

“I understand it will be an apartment building area. Again, it does not seem appropriate to me, but it was debated in the same style in which public debates are organized in our town: without actually holding a public debate. [The notices] are in fact displayed on the website, but sometimes we see that the announcement was posted just one day before the deadline for submitting comments expires. I think that this is how they post them, very late and sometimes even after [the deadline]. I set out to gather evidence in this regard. I did not [capture all the] print screens but it is clear that there are late announcements, and the debates are not organized in any [public] way.”

Another focus group participant observed that even in cases where the city does broadly advertise a consultation process, the notice itself can be difficult to decipher and therefore serves as a barrier to participation. The participant photographed one such notice to illustrate how challenging it was to simply read it (Figure 9). They explained that picture thusly:

“I found this public consultation notice on this bulletin board next to the former Cavalry School and I remembered how much we struggled when we saw the announcement, which was posted in other places in the town, about the comprehensive plan update …. I did not photograph this badly. This document has such small writing that it is completely illegible, so no one can understand anything. No matter how hard you try to enlarge the image, it is not understandable. And not only here, but also on the City Hall website where the announcement was posted. So, they didn’t really want to -- or, perhaps, let’s say they have ignored the fact that this announcement was supposed to inform and show that the authorities are excited about public input or eager to work with the citizens on this important and expected document. We have been waiting for this important document for almost two decades. It is unacceptable that this is happening. But, again, other than just signaling, I don't know what we can do.”
In a separate focus group, a participant explained their personal experience with a public consultation process connected to the development of a comprehensive urban plan for the city. Despite working for the local authorities at that time, and ostensibly having some power to influence the proceedings, they said they found the process to be maddening. The participant said:

"Initially, when there were discussions for the Targoviste comprehensive plan, there were working groups [about] 4.5 years ago and I was working for the authorities. I participated in the
urban mobility plan discussions once, when they wanted to make a transport hub. The idea collapsed because everyone had other interests and nothing suited them.”

Multiple participants also expressed disappointment with the public participation processes associated with proposed changes to the Chindia Tower -- the landmark perceived to be most important in the survey results. Some changes in relation to the Lordly Court Museum complex involved the use of double-glazed windows on the Lordly Church (listed as monument, therefore illegal), and at the moment the Chindia Tower is in the process of restoration, without having details about what is being restored and what it will look like in the end. One participant reported that they tried to follow all of the steps required to get involved, but that even being proactive was insufficient:

“It was not a publicly debated project. You couldn't find [any information about] it. I requested [the information] and I didn't receive it. The request was submitted, the deadline passed, and I did not receive any answer. From the discussions that were had, [it seems] they are going to make a change in the appearance of the Chindia Tower.”

A second participant echoed that frustration by observing that if public consultations regarding changes to major landmarks like Chindia Tower are poorly communicated, then there is little hope for the many other (smaller) interventions that affect communities around the city. That participant described what they considered to be a minimum standard for the city’s participation infrastructure:

“Ideally, all these proposals should be publicly debated. Authorities should come and say: "We want to add some things to the tower. Do you agree?" I mean, it's super important here. If you want to [change] something, do a consultation [and announce it] online, in public, on TV. Inform the people first and prepare them for the coming [change]. … I don't know who is involved, what expertise those people have, [and] in the end, we don't know much from the public authorities. I'm hearing [about this] for the first time in this discussion. I hope it won't be a disaster, because
at least at that level, I hope they won't risk [anything major]. But [that will] depend on who they collaborated with. If some architects or historians were involved, I have no idea. It remains to be seen.”

In the absence of formal infrastructure, several participants pointed to social media as both a tool and space for taking place-related actions and for coordinating collective action. For example, nine participants reported on the survey that they had used social media to report incidents or irregularities regarding Targoviste’s landmarks. In response to an open-ended follow-up survey question, participants argued that social media, compared to traditional means, offered “the possibility for other citizens to see the conflict/issue” and “greater freedom of expression,” it provided a “faster” way to report issues, and it increased the “visibility” of complaints by increasing “the number of people who are receiving the information.”

Throughout the focus group sessions, participants pointed to Facebook as a key social media platform for raising awareness. One key use of Facebook was to raise awareness about problems they observed around the city, with the hope that increasing public attention would force the city to take action. For example, one participant recalled one experience where the visibility of social media led to the authorities taking action:

“Here is Valul Cetatii. For a short time, it was a garbage dump. However, thankfully, after a few posts it got [cleaned up].”

Facebook was not a panacea, though. First, while the platform could be used by authorities to increase public outreach and engagement, participants repeatedly stated that most interactions with local authorities were one-way, with authorities simply announcing their future plans (and not inviting community input) or celebrating completed projects. One participant captured this sentiment like so:

“It seems to us that the mayor broadcasts a lot on social networks and does not stimulate participation. He just somehow presents his accomplishments, and people just applaud him.”
Second, while some of the citizen-led discussions were initiated through a post made by a citizen to their own profile (and thus discussed largely among friends and friend-of-friends), many occurred in public Facebook groups. This is notable because some of those groups were under the administrative control of local authorities, which granted them the ability to moderate posts. In some instances, the authorities could impose roadblocks that forced citizens to find other ways to communicate their issues. In some cases, that meant returning to the existing formal participation infrastructure. One participant captured this phenomenon by relating their experience after taking multiple place-related actions:

“After reporting several problems, I got blocked on the mayor’s account. However, I continued reporting by using the Targoviste City App.”

Notably, participants also used Facebook to raise awareness of the places they considered to be important. Put another way, they saw the platform as a vehicle for showing other citizens the many places in town they felt were remarkable. For example, one participant said:

“That’s what I tried to do. To combine the seasonal flowers with the most representative tourist objectives. I had more appreciation and compensation from outside Targoviste. Our tourism in Targoviste is supported by others, not by us. We may be used to what we have or we may not realize what we have. Maybe it doesn't burn us, go to work, your mind is in trouble, what will you do the next day and so on.”

Given the multiple frustrations participants repeatedly expressed with the quality of Targoviste’s participation infrastructure, and how such limitations not only inhibited taking place-related actions but also forced citizens to seek out new channels for coordinating action, Hypothesis #1(b), which said, “the lack of participation infrastructure
will be identified by participants as a major barrier to taking place-related actions,” was supported.

4.3.3. Trust in the authorities

The level of trust in authorities can be measured through the quality of the services citizens receive and the community’s evaluation of it. Additionally, poor experiences with the authorities may result in lower levels of trust citizens have in the authorities. In all focus groups, participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the authorities’ past and ongoing place-related projects (or the lack thereof) and acknowledged that their confidence in the authorities was very low.

First, throughout the focus groups, participants pointed to the illegalities committed around the city. For example, some of the discussions and pictures illustrated how parts of the public domain have become private property or how some of the recent constructions defy every urban regulation. This again, highlights the importance of the kind of relations one has with the authorities and the privileges of such relationships.

One participant said:

“The mill pond is now a private property, which is illegal. And that it is illegal is one thing, but another problem is how some [citizens] are superior to others, and something that should belong to the community, only some enjoy it.”

Some participants expressed disappointment with the poor quality of the place-related projects, arguing that they were made in a hurry to attract European funds, and collaborating with companies with relations with the authorities and a reputation for poor quality and often delayed works.

One example that kept coming up in the focus groups is the bike infrastructure of Targoviste. Several participants have highlighted that “the so-called bicycle and running
tracks are practically non-existent. I don't know, they are stripes on the already existing sidewalks”. Even in a newly built area, with recently developed infrastructure, the authorities resorted to the same solution of painting the sidewalks (Figure 10).

Figure 10. New bike paths (female, 33 years)

“[the poor quality of the bike infrastructure] includes the new tracks next to the shopping mall, which were executed the same, and there you were not conditioned and [instead were] limited by absolutely nothing… They still painted a stripe on the sidewalk to ensure that something was done for the cyclists as well.”

Other participants have reiterated the authorities’ style of focusing on the quantity of public works rather than the quality through a popular Romanian expression “In front
[you have] the nice painted fence and behind it there is a leopard”. Further examples include the rehabilitation of apartment buildings only on the side that faces the streets, or the short duration of life of public works, often made in hurry to be finished before the election date.

One of the many examples that illustrate this approach is the recent rehabilitation of one of the main plazas of Targoviste. The rehabilitation involved changing the pavement, the creation of sitting areas surrounded by newly planted trees and the construction of several fountains. The result, from the discussions with the participants, does not satisfy anyone, on the contrary, there is a regret of wasting money on works that did not bring any improvement to this public space (Figure 11).

![Figure 11. Tricolorului Square, mainly known as The Plateau (female, 30 years)](image)

As one participant notices, [the rehabilitation] “is actually a worsening of the
situation and by no means an improvement. We notice that some trees that were near the prefecture are missing. The old wells have been replaced with these constructions, which some people from Târgoviște call tombs.” Beyond the poor appearance of the plaza, there is also a poor quality of the works. Another participant noticed the day of the inauguration that “water was running outside the new fountains, then they repaired them and today [when] I passed by, the technical room’s door was open because those pumps are heating up and they do not have enough ventilation. The quality of the works is questionable.”

Some of these works have also raised numerous discussions among the citizens and in the press in relation to how public money was spent, or how transparent was the process to obtain these contracts by the construction firms. One participant with experience with the local authorities’ public processes underlines:

“I’m pretty disappointed with what’s happening in the town right now. And I’m still limited [to make any kind of change]. Because I know how projects are done in our town, what comes first and what doesn't, and who is [being] listened to and who is not: political preference, [social] status in the city, [or] who you are seen with [is what matters to them].”

A recurrent discussion in all the focus groups is related to the poor trust the participants have in the specialists’ expertise and overall quality of work. This topic is relevant because firms who have failed in delivering good quality projects are now hired again for other important public projects in town. One participant said:

“I had reservations when I answered in the survey “who should decide, whether the specialists or the citizens, or both” and it is a complicated answer. Especially [if I had to choose] the specialists, because if we think about the specialists we have now, God help us.”

Participants also pointed to how skeptical they’ve become about anything that
involves the local authorities “I often find myself suspicious”. For example, a discussion about the quality of public works emphasized how stressed the participants are regarding the outcome of the ongoing rehabilitation projects at the Royal Court. One participant captured this sentiment:

“I’m very scared about what they’re going to do with Chindia’s tower. Who knows what we’ll see when the scaffolding comes down?”

Given the multiple frustrations participants repeatedly expressed in regard to how the local authorities are doing their job in relation to the built environment and how such actions are a source of stress for the citizens, Hypothesis #1(c), which said, “the lack of trust in the local authorities will be identified by participants as a major barrier to taking place-related actions,” was supported.

4.3.4. Political Efficacy

The survey asked participants to reflect on the decision-making processes that affect the built environment in Targoviste and the community and experts' roles in it. 13 participants consider that public authorities should listen equally to members of the community and experts (e.g., technical professionals and consultants).

Internally, political efficacy is linked to the quality of participation infrastructure, especially the formal channels. As we have previously discussed, in Targoviste, participation infrastructure is poorly constructed, at times nonexistent. Externally, political efficacy can be measured through the belief citizens have that the political system has the capacity to change or adjust as a response to community’s involvement.

Some participants expressed cynicism about the decision-making processes, considering that they will never change and the power they have is limited: “we can influence things to a certain extent”. This sentiment is shared among participants. One
The participant said:

“It is unacceptable that this is happening, but again, aside from signaling, I don't know what we can do.”

The fact that citizens find out about changes occurring around them only after the consultation phases have passed, limits their contribution to “comments only”, reinforcing a paternalistic attitude, rather than a more adult-adult relationship. This conventional participation is causing frustrations first of all because it is administrated by the local officials, and secondly, because the citizen participation process is limited to a pseudo-consultation level that portrays an opportunity of information exchange when in fact it is at best a one-way flow of information.

“In the end, [this suggestion that the participant made] would have been an option, but it is too late to discuss now, the plans for this area have already been decided.”

In light of the limitations participants identified with regard to the political efficacy, and the connection of those limitations to the challenges of taking place-related actions, Hypothesis #1(d), which posited, “Low political efficacy will be identified by participants as a major barrier to taking place-related actions,” was supported.

This research aimed to also look for other factors identified by participants as barriers to taking place-related actions on behalf of their environment, as well as what are the place-related actions that are most likely to be undertaken/most desired/preferred by residents. The information collected from the participants didn’t identify an additional factor that might impact the quality of place-related actions. They also haven’t expressed a preference in relation to what other type of action they would like to take on behalf of their environment. The use of social media has not been identified as preferred, but rather as necessary when other forms of engagement have failed. In this sense, the participants have underlined their desire to repair the formal
participation infrastructure, considered to be the most important and effective channel for them to communicate between the local authorities and the rest of the community. Essentially, they just want to be well informed in relation to changes in their environment, invited to express their preference, and listened to.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

As predicted, the lack of participation infrastructure, the low quality of social capital, the lack of trust in the local authorities, and the feelings of low political efficacy were identified by highly-attached study participants as major barriers to taking place-related actions in the town of Targoviste, Romania. These findings are based on the feedback of 22 residents of Targoviste, who completed a survey and participated in focus groups designed with Photovoice methodology. Participants expressed a desire to have a more meaningful role in decision-making processes related to the town’s-built environment, and contended that involving the community in such processes would benefit the overall quality of life in Targoviste.

The research started with the assumption that participants will be highly attached to the town of Targoviste. The sense of place attachment, at least on the dimension of belongingness, was measured using a five-point Likert scale on a survey questionnaire. However, the “membership feeling” related to an environment is a construct that has been previously used in explaining social attachments to places (Raymond et al, 2010) and is relevant in sensing the existence and quality of social capital.

According to Ilovan, Voicu, and Colcer (2019), a decrease in the willingness to engage in place-related actions is a consequence of a declining quality of relationships between people, interests, and values. We saw some evidence of this in the present findings. People who attempted to take place-related actions often acted individually – even as they recognized the limitations of individual action – or relied on personal connections and mutual trust. This illustrates that even though more than 30 years have passed since the fall of communism in Romania, its society is still facing the challenges of an extended period of autocratic rule. That is, the discussions were in line with the
predictions that lower levels of trust among the citizens present a challenge to any collective place-related action. This is an interesting, though not entirely unexpected, observation given that Romania’s transition to democracy has succeeded only through the collective power of the public. Put another way, a form of public participation earned Romanians their freedom, but it seems that they have been unable to fully claim their democratic rights. Key social and procedural barriers continue to stymie attempts at democratic self-governance, at least as far as the built environment is concerned.

This study lends further support to Lewicka’s (2011) argument that there are important cultural differences when it comes to attachment and public participation (one type of place-related action), and that such differences are rooted in social systems and historical legacies of places. For example, the lack of trust in the authorities and in the capacity of the public to effect change through participation are arguably due in part to the history of Romania. As evidenced in multiple accounts from the participants, the lack of trust between members of the community is interrelated with the lack of trust citizens have in the local authorities. For example, rather than trusting local governmental institutions, one participant highlighted the pivotal role of priests in the community. This is supported by other research: according to a 2021 survey, 62.4% of Romanians trust the Romanian Church – second only to the Romanian Academy (64.7%) – while just 13.4% trusted the Romanian government in general. It appears a lack of trust is not endemic to the Romanian people. Instead, the animosity is concentrated toward certain groups of people that are charged with designing official mechanisms for place-related actions (i.e., government officials), arguably due to historical reasons. This results in individuals feeling a need to circumvent those processes with the help of trusted members of the community (e.g., members of the clergy). However, as the participants observed, such strategies can only get them so far.
The particular lack of trust in the authorities, and the complementary findings that formal public participation in Targoviste is shallow and that there is limited cooperation between local authorities and citizens, supports Constantinescu et al.’s (2019) findings according to which community involvement in Romania is superficial and this lack of trust and limited cooperation is likely to continue, too. As the participants observed, and as Uslaner (2004) described, practices such as drawing upon special privileges and connections, or exchanging favors in the ways that characterized Romania under the communist regime, have not disappeared. The participants’ comments repeatedly showed that such practices remain prevalent, and the social position or job one occupies is often a better predictor of success in the daily life activities than most any other variable.

Apart from this phenomenon, the lack of trust in the local authorities also derives from consultations announced shortly before they are due to conclude, dysfunctional websites and unhelpful publicity materials. This aligns with the earlier findings by Baltador and Budac (2014), which found that only 60% of local and central state bodies in Romania had a functioning website, and that 80% did not announce when public meetings would be held. As a consequence, the participation infrastructure in Targoviste is rightly perceived as being closed off to many citizens. It is not just a perception issue; it is a rational response to a systemic failure. Why should they trust the same authorities and processes that failed to deliver on promises, that doesn’t empower, listen or support their ideas?

While the practices of community engagement and citizen participation cannot simply be standardized, the purpose of public participation should be driven by several principles: they should take into account different community and individual needs and to promote equal access to opportunities for public involvement. The citizens of Targoviste seem to recognize participation as a right they have fought for, but they also believe that
it is not really recognized by local authorities beyond meeting minimal legal
requirements. Rather than encouraging the diverse voices of Targoviste’s citizens, the
country’s authorities appear to restrict public deliberations and consultations in important
ways. Marginalized social groups are excluded, some active community members are
ignored, and barriers to participation are introduced in settings where public input should
be of great import, such as those involving place-related decision-making. While the
authorities frequently employ a rhetoric of sharing power with the public, its participatory
processes are more akin to empty rituals.

In continuing with the same practices, the city of Targoviste risks alienating its
citizens not just through its decisions but by its decision-making processes. If citizens
haven’t given up yet, they are not far from feelings of resignation. As the focus group
illustrated, the following sentiment came up repeatedly: “But now it’s too late. Whether
we like it or not, life moves on.” While this resignation can be interpreted by public
officials (and other citizens) as satisfaction with the status quo – which is then seen as a
positive sign – it risks not only alienating citizens from self-governance but also produces
feelings of detachment from the place. This has social, cultural, and economic
consequences for the city and raises the prospect of even more people leaving
Targoviste for ‘greener pastures’ since they will feel fewer connections that help connect
them to Targoviste. Furthermore, it arguably has negative consequences for
Targoviste’s development. As scholars have repeatedly found, place-related decisions
that are not formed with public input often prove to be ineffective and unhelpful to
inhabitants. In the present case, some of them did not know about the existence of a
new park in Targoviste and worried about city projects when all they could see were
scaffolds going up ahead of an apparent renovation.

The observations in this study are also consistent with Soaita and Wind’s (2020)
findings. They found that non-participation to be rooted in two main reasons. On one

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side, there is the social passivity – which is a continuation of Romania’s communist legacy. On the other side, Romanians’ lack of engagement has been characterized in terms of their cultural trait of insular individualism (Soaita and Wind 2020). Recent national protests in Romania have taken place only because the implications were severe and the information reached the ears of the citizens through the media. On a smaller scale, the participants who said they are using social media (mostly Facebook) to raise awareness about Targoviste’s irregularities were hoping for a collective reaction from the public. However, the political transition from communism to democracy, and from a centralized economy to a market one, has definitely touched and reflected the broader struggle the Romanian society is facing from a cultural shift from collectivism to individualism. The active distancing from communist ideology and the embrace of a more modern, Westernized lifestyle has pushed people into insular individualism, or what Soaita and Wind (2020) called “ethnocentric individualism.” As such, the preferred method of place-related form of action taken by the participants lies in the online environment, particularly reporting on Facebook community groups. Although this research has gathered information from just 22 participants, a closer look at these groups is helpful in illustrating that the sentiment of these few participants is shared among the larger community of Targoviste. One group in particular, titled “Targoviste Town Hall” (which is not administered by or connected to the local authorities), has over 8,500 members and averages seven posts per day. While half of those posts are shared news items or advertisements, there is a considerable number of posts related to irregularities, concerns, and other place-related information that citizens wished they could share or address through formal mechanisms.

This research reiterates that the label of “post-communism” continues to represent a condition for Romania. Although the economic transition to a market economy and a more capitalistic ideology took just a decade, the vestiges of
communism and the consequences of a sudden transition to democracy continues to be felt today. It may be a matter of generations before some of the issues identified in this research can be fully addressed, both on the part of the authorities (many of whom consider the public to be uneducated and saved from themselves) and on the part of the citizens (many of whom feel unable to contribute valuable input or effect meaningful change in relation to place-related affairs).

Using Photovoice as methodology provided participants the opportunity to partake in participatory action research. It allowed them to document their beloved places in the town of Targoviste and talk comfortably about the extent to which those places are maintained, what kind of actions they have taken in relation to the built environment, and what were the main obstacles they faced in taking (or wanting to take) such actions. Although the pre-identified themes for the pictures were related to the concepts of “attachment” and “engagement”, the discussions followed a semi-structured facilitation protocol and the focus group members shared a broad array of perspectives that allowed them to go far beyond close-ended or short responses to a survey questionnaire. Focusing on individuals who hold a high degree of place attachment also proved beneficial to better understand the factors that keep them from taking (more) place-related actions. It is expected that the constraints introduced by those factors are only magnified in the case of less-attached individuals, who are less likely to want to persevere in the face of obstacles. While the focus group discussions were not designed to directly touch upon the factors identified as possible barriers in taking place-related actions, the topics of social capital, participation infrastructure, trust in authorities, and political efficacy were invariably brought up. This only serves to increase confidence in the broader finding that these factors are important, as the participants were not prompted or primed to engage with such factors. Instead, they were naturally elicited.
One of the limitations of this research is that the results are based on the discussions and survey responses of only 22 citizens who volunteer to participate in the study. In this sense, while the results are in agreement with the vast literature on place attachment, place-related actions, and factors that might affect the quality of those actions, it is important for future studies to engage a broader public. Additionally, this research has focused on the likelihood of place-related actions and not the likelihood of their impact, which might represent an interesting topic for future research. The direction of this study has shown the particularity of place attachment in the social political context of Romania. Moreover, as highlighted by Lewicka (2011), it has demonstrated the importance of factors such as social capital, participation infrastructure, trust, and feelings of political efficacy, in shaping people’s relationships and bonding with their places and the willingness to take actions on behalf of their environment.

I believe the answer to addressing the challenges identified in this work lies in educating members of different communities about the impact of their voice. The best way to achieve this goal is through action at the local level, since that is where people can most clearly see and feel the impacts of public participation. Additionally, I believe it is important to not only improve the existing avenues for participation within the existing participatory systems but to seek out ways to unite publics and decision-makers via informal channels that can be created outside the pathways established by public institutions. Photovoice, as methodology, has proved beneficial for this research for various reasons: its open-ended approach allowed participants to freely express their ideas and concerns related to their town, but it also created a sense of community, trust and participation among the volunteers. The second step in Photovoice methodology aims to reach a broader audience, for example, by turning the collection of pictures taken by the participants into an exhibition. In this sense, the aim is to organize a street pop-up gallery between September 9 and September 11, 2022 when the town of
Targoviste organizes its annual festival “Days of the Fortress”. The goal of this step is to communicate the findings to the rest of the community, to continue gathering input, and hopefully bridge the existing gaps between citizens and local authorities. Additionally, these small workshops or exhibitions have the power to build trust in the efficacy of engagement, both on the officials and on the public’s side.

It is thus essential for us – as future regional planners – to find ways to involve people in multiple public processes, whether through educating them about the formal public processes that are already in place or more simply by helping bring them into collective efforts (e.g., volunteer organizations) that strengthen community bonds and increase feelings of political efficacy. Over time, I trust that such participation would produce better urban spaces – that is, urban spaces that are more inclusive, equitable, healthy, considered, and forward-looking.
APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONS

SCREENING
1. Are you a citizen of Targoviste? Yes / No
2. Are you over the age of 18? Yes / No

PART ONE
The following questions will ask about how you feel about the town of Targoviste, and what landmarks are most meaningful to you.

1. Do you feel a sense of belonging in Targoviste? (1 - Not at all, 5 - Very much so)
   
   1                     2                       3                       4                       5

2. Do you think other people in Targoviste feel a sense of belonging in Targoviste? (1 - Not at all, to 5 - Very much so)
   
   1                     2                       3                       4                       5

3. Why do you feel, or not feel, a sense of belonging in Targoviste? (open ended question)

4. If you had to move to another place, would you miss Targoviste? (1 - Not at all, 5 - Very much so)
   
   1                     2                       3                       4                       5

5. What about the town of Targoviste gives you the greatest sense of belonging? (open ended question)

6. Which landmarks in Targoviste, if any, are most meaningful to you? (open ended question)
7. How important is/are the landmark(s) you identified to you? (1 - Not at all, 5 - Very much so)
   1   2   3   4   5

8. Do you believe these landmarks are being maintained in a way that reflects their importance? (1 - Not at all, 5 - Very much so)
   1   2   3   4   5

PART TWO

The following questions will ask about your and others’ amount of participation in consultation processes involving the town's public spaces and landmarks.

9. What efforts, if any, are you aware of to maintain landmarks that are of interest to the community in Targoviste? (open ended question)

10. How satisfied are you with the authorities’ efforts to involve the community in public consultations about changes to the town’s built environment?

11. Have you ever tried to participate in public consultations initiated by the authorities about changes to Targoviste’s built environment? Yes / No

   IF YES: What was that experience like? (open ended question)

12. Do you ever use social media to communicate about public projects involving your landmarks of interest? Yes / No

   a. IF YES: What does social media offer you that you cannot find through official participation channels? (open ended question)

13. Do you think the citizens of Targoviste have a strong civic spirit? (1 - Not at all, 5 - Very much so)

   1   2   3   4   5
14. How much time do you invest in matters related to the community’s future in Targoviste? (1 - None at all, 5 - A lot) 

1  2  3  4  5

15. How much time would you like to invest in matters related to the community’s future in Targoviste? (1 - None at all, 5 - A lot) 

16. What stops you from doing more? (choices)

17. Do you think the community plays an important role in decision-making processes affecting public spaces and landmarks in Targoviste? (1 - Not at all, 5 - Very much so) 

1  2  3  4  5

18. Which of the following should public authorities listen to the most when making decisions affecting public spaces and landmarks in Targoviste? (1 - Personal opinions of the community, 3 - Both, equally, 5 - Technical specialists and consultants) 

1  2  3  4  5

19. How would you describe the quality of community involvement in decision-making processes affecting public spaces and landmarks in Targoviste? (1 - Very poor, 5 - Excellent) 

1  2  3  4  5

20. Over the past six months, how many issues have you reported to officials in Targoviste that pertain to the town’s built environment? (Options from None to Ten or more) 

IF MORE THAN “NONE”: Of those issues that you reported, how many do you believe feel the officials meaningfully followed up on? (1 - None, 5 - All of them) 

1  2  3  4  5
21. What, if anything, do you think should be done to improve community involvement in decision-making processes involving Targoviste’s public spaces and landmarks? 
(open ended question)

PART THREE
We’re almost done! Now, I’d just like to ask you a few questions to help me aggregate the responses based on different characteristics.

22. What is your sex? Male / Female / Other
23. In what year were you born? (Options from Before 1940 to 2003, in one-year intervals)
24. Would you consider yourself to be part of the Roma or Bulgarian communities? Yes / No
25. Which of the following represents the highest level of education you have completed? Did not complete high school / high school or equivalent / Associate’s degree or equivalent / Bachelor’s degree or equivalent / Master’s degree or higher
26. How long have you lived in Targoviste? (Options from < 1 year to > 50 years, in one-year intervals)
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