

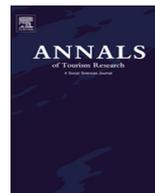


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# Empowerment and resident attitudes toward tourism: Strengthening the theoretical foundation through a Weberian lens



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### ABSTRACT

This study expands Perdue, Long, and Allen's (1990) original model of resident attitudes toward tourism in two significant ways. It first proposes Weber's theory of formal and substantive rationality (WFSR) as a way to strengthen social exchange theory. Secondly, WFSR is operationalized by using the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) as substantive antecedents and the Personal Economic Benefit from Tourism Scale as a formal antecedent influencing resident attitudes. Ten of 14 hypotheses were confirmed, with Psychological Empowerment and Personal Economic Benefit having direct and positive effects on Support for Tourism. Implications include recognition of the importance of tailoring destination marketing and management efforts to empower residents psychologically, socially, and politically.

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## Introduction

While there have been hundreds of studies on resident attitudes toward tourism over the last 30 years (Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon, 2013), gaps in the literature remain. One of the most significant gaps pertains to the measurement and application of power, a central theme within

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tourism research (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011; Cheong & Miller, 2000; Hall, 1994; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Reed, 1997). Much of this research has been centered on the Foucauldian perspective that power is omnipresent and manifests itself within the social relationships between the tripartite of tourism actors (tourists, residents, and tourism brokers) (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Foucault, 1982; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). The role of power within tourism development is also evidenced in the sustainable tourism literature, which has largely aimed to balance the power relationships between tourists and residents through increased resident empowerment (Cole, 2006; Scheyvens, 1999). Power is also an integral part of social exchange theory (SET) and the theoretical understanding of how residents perceive the costs and benefits of tourism development and ultimately make the decisions to support or oppose tourism (Ap, 1992; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). Despite power playing a central role within resident attitude research, there has been little empirical development of the construct into multi-item scales. Additionally, uncertainty remains over whether power is an unidimensional construct as operationalized by Madrigal (1993), Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2012) and Látková and Vogt (2012) or if it has multiple dimensions in the form of psychological, social, and political empowerment as suggested by Scheyvens (1999) and Boley and McGehee (2014).

Related to this gap is the movement of social exchange theory (SET) away from its original conceptualization toward an orientation more aligned with economic exchange theory thus treating resident perceptions of tourism to be predominantly based upon the financial benefits received through tourism (Woosnam, Norman, & Ying, 2009). This is problematic because under the Foucauldian conceptualization, power is believed to be behind all aspects of the host-guest relationship and not partitioned off to only the economic aspects of the relationship (Cheong & Miller, 2000). Although previous research has consistently acknowledged the strong relationship between resident perceptions of economic benefit and their support for tourism, there remains a need for the establishment of theoretical foundations that take both economic and non-economic factors into consideration (Látková & Vogt, 2012). Weber's theory of formal and substantive rationality (WFSR) is one such theory that aligns well with SET. WFSR conceptualizes human rationality as being influenced by a balance in the tension between one's formal (economic) and substantive (non-economic) motivations (Jagd, 2002; Kalberg, 1980). WFSR has been used within tourism research to explain the motivations for developing craft co-operatives (McGehee & Meares, 1998) and agri-tourism enterprises (McGehee, 2007; McGehee & Kim, 2004), but has yet to be operationalized within the resident attitude literature.

In recognition of these two gaps, this study seeks to take the newly developed *Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale* (RETS) and its sub-scales of *Psychological, Social and Political Empowerment* (Boley & McGehee, 2014) and include them as antecedents with the Resident Attitudes Toward Tourism model originally developed by Perdue, Long, and Allen's (1990). This application of the RETS within the model not only addresses the lack of inclusion of empowerment and the ambiguity over empowerment's dimensionality within previous resident attitude research, but it also provides a direct operationalization of Weber's theory of formal and substantive rationality through the inclusion of three new substantive constructs (*Psychological, Social and Political Empowerment*). These are used in conjunction with the formal measure of resident perceptions of economically benefiting from tourism to explain resident perceptions of tourism's impacts and their overall *Support for Tourism* (Fig. 1). The application of the RETS within the combined Weber/SET theoretical perspective answers Nunkoo and Ramkissoon's (2009, p. 339) charge to "develop new theoretical concepts... that are able to capture the complex attitudes and behaviors of residents toward tourism." The testing of the RETS within the Perdue et al. (1990) model also promises to provide tourism officials with a better understanding of the formal and substantive factors that influence resident support or opposition for tourism development. If the hypothesized relationships between the empowerment constructs and resident attitudes towards tourism are validated, managers will have reason to look for more ways to empower residents psychologically, socially, and politically in addition to cultivating economic benefits from tourism.

To approach this line of research, the relationships proposed by Perdue et al.'s (1990) model and the predominant use of Social Exchange Theory were first tested (H-1-5). The empowerment constructs were then added as antecedents to see if they were significant predictors of resident attitudes towards tourism. This was justified through using the substantive portion of Weber's theory of formal and substantive rationality (H6-14). The literature supporting the hypotheses and the need for a

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