Developing an Improved Conceptual Framework of Residents’ Supports for Sustainable Tourism Development at World Heritage Sites

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Abstract: Most of studies that examined tourism impacts and residents’ support for tourism development have been generic without specifying types of tourism resources. This study in particular focuses on sustainable tourism development in world heritage site areas. Therefore, the existing conceptual frameworks that explain residents’ support for tourism development may not be appropriate in this context. In addition, a number of factors were also neglected in the literature despite its importance from theoretical points of view to explain residents’ supports, namely community involvement, perceived local economic conditions and trust in governments. Adding these factors could increase the predictive power in explaining residents’ perceptions and supports for sustainable tourism development. This study incorporates all these factors together with the underpinning theory in the newly improved conceptual framework.

Key words: Residents · Supports · Sustainable Tourism Development · World Heritage Sites

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism development approach is crucial for the protection of cultural and natural resources within world heritage sites in the long run [1, 2]. In fact, it is now a standard policy and practice in tourism development at international level and adopted by both World Tourism Organization (WTO) and United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Sustainable tourism development is a development that aimed “at protecting and enhancing the environment, meeting basic human needs, promoting current and intergenerational equity and improving the quality of life of all people” (p. 495) [3]. UNESCO World Heritage Centre has also made it clear that all state parties must develop and manage world heritage sites according to the principles laid out by sustainable tourism development approach. However, sustainable tourism development requires strong commitment and support from stakeholders, especially the local residents in order to be effective. Without the support from local residents, developing a sustainable tourism destination will be very difficult and costly [2, 4, 5]. In many instances, residents’ active oppositions towards tourism have been found to delay development progress [7].

Given the above situation, many studies have been conducted to examine factors influencing residents’ supports for sustainable tourism development [2, 6-15]. Among the factors widely examined were community attachment, perceptions towards tourism and socio-demographic variables. Besides that, there were other factors despite its importance from theoretical point of view, but were largely neglected, for example community involvement, local economic conditions and trust in government [7, 16, 17]. Social exchange theory postulates that the above factors are crucial in determining residents’ supports [16, 18]. In addition to that, there were also very little studies focusing on residents’ support model in the context of world heritage sites. Thus, the inclusion of residents’ perceptions towards the designation of an area as world heritage site will contribute significantly to the heritage management literature, which is currently very limited. In line with the above arguments, the objective of this study was to develop an improved conceptual framework that may
Factors Influencing Residents’ Supports for Sustainable Tourism Development: In tourism literature, community attachment has been found to influence both attitudes and support for tourism development [7, 9, 11, 19-23]. Community attachment is also able to explain how a person is sentimentally rooted with a particular community and heritage [24]. Strongly attached residents tend to support any development plan that will benefit the community from economic, cultural and environmental aspects [2, 9, 11]. In contrary, some scholars suggested strongly attached residents were reluctant to change, thus rejecting tourism development in their place [19, 22, 25]. This conflicting findings trigger for more rigorous studies in solving the ambiguities that exist in the relationships between community attachment and support for sustainable tourism development.

Community involvement is another factor that received considerable attention among tourism scholars. Recent studies indicated that residents who involved in tourism activities both at decision-making stages and economic activities tend to support tourism development [11, 26]. Wager [27] also proposed that such involvement is able to foster greater respect and understanding to safeguard protected areas the likes of world heritage sites. However, the majority of existing studies on community involvement were explorative and descriptive in nature [28, 29]. Thus, more empirical evidence is needed to validate the causal relationship between community involvement and residents’ support for tourism development.

Besides the above, some scholars also suggested that perceived local economic conditions can be considered as a factor to explain the degree of residents’ support for tourism development [8]. This is because tourism is often seen as a catalyst for economic growth [14]. For example, residents in Turkey acknowledge their willingness “to put up with some inconvenience in exchange for tourist money” (p. 654) [30]. On the contrary, residents in highly developed countries such as Japan were found to be somewhat sceptical about tourism [31]. In such scenario, tourism activities were perceived as a threat to local’s cultural integrity and exert pressure to residents due to overcrowding. In summary, scholars argued that residents who live in the poor regions were more favourable of tourism than those who live in wealthy regions [15, 32]. The inclusion of this factor may increase the understanding about what actually determining residents’ support for tourism.

Many studies in the past have omitted trust in government as a factor that determine residents’ supports [14]. Laeequddin, Sahay, Sahay, & Waheed [33] defined that trust is “a set of expectations shared by everyone involved in economic exchange based on person, process and institution” (p. 55). Scholars claimed that the exchange process will likely to occur when there is trust between the exchange actors [17, 18, 34]. In this study, the exchange actors in tourism development represents the residents and the governments. Thus, residents may not be willing to support tourism development until they establish a certain degree of trust in government’s plan.

Last but not least, perceptions towards tourism development have long been recognised as a factor that influences residents’ supports [6, 11, 13, 14, 35]. Despite extensive studies, some inconsistencies still persist and requiring further investigations [8]. In addition to that, studies on residents’ perceptions have been focusing on tourism development in general without specifying the types of tourism resources. In the context of world heritage sites, the impacts are not only restricted to tourism’s benefits and costs, but also the impacts from the mandatory conversation of heritage resources on local people’s lives [2, 36]. The mandatory conservation of world heritage sites often known to put pressure on traditional economic activities that seen as a threat to heritage conservations [37]. In some areas, local residents were no longer allowed to continue certain agricultural and other resource-based economic activities in the quest to safeguard the heritage resources. Even worse, some residents were also displaced because of the very same reason. At certain point, heritage conservation may become a barrier for physical development within the locality. Thus, including residents’ perceptions towards the designation of world heritage sites in the local area would contribute to a new body of knowledge in heritage management. On top of that, perceptions have long been recognised as a third factor that ‘connect’ the relationships between independent variables and support for tourism development [2, 11]. In line with that, this paper proposes the mediating role of perceptions on the relationships between community attachment, community
involvement, perceived local economic conditions, trust in government and support for sustainable tourism development as depicted in the Figure 1.

**Underpinning Theory:** The majority of studies utilised social exchange theory in explaining residents’ support for tourism development. Early works on social exchange theory were carried out by renowned sociologists such as Homans [38], Blau [39] and Emerson [40]. This theory has been used to study and understand social behaviour. Homans [38] defined social exchange as “activity, tangible or intangible and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two person” (p.3). This transaction can be extended into exchanging social capitals like power, trust, participation, support and many more. In tourism literature, among the pioneers using this theory were [6, 25]. They further developed this theory into a model that explain residents’ attitudes and support for tourism development. In general, the theory assumes that residents who believe they will benefit from the proposed development, project or policy are likely to view it positively, while those who perceive costs will view it negatively. These perceptions will in consequence lead to support or oppositions towards tourism development. Until today, this theory have been used successfully in many researches concerning residents’ attitudes and support for tourism development [7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 26].

**Proposed Conceptual Model:** The following figure depicts the proposed conceptual framework on residents’ supports for sustainable tourism development.

The above figure illustrates that there are four independent variables namely community attachment, community involvement, local economic condition and trust in government interacting with perceptions towards world heritage site designation as a mediating variables and support for sustainable tourism development. The model used social exchange theory as the underpinning theory to explain the above relationships.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The proposed conceptual framework has successfully integrated new factors especially community involvement, local economic condition, trust in government and perceptions towards the designation of world heritage sites which have been neglected in the existing literature. These factors could increase the predictive power in explaining support for sustainable tourism development. In addition to that, this is also the first time all of the above variables were simultaneously integrated in a single framework.

One particular contribution in this model, is the extension of social exchange theory by including trust in government. Previous studies have failed to integrate trust as one of the elements that trigger the exchange process between the actors in tourism development. Experts suggested that trust play important role that lead to the social exchange process in economic development [18,41]. Trust is also believed to promote cooperation, reduce risk during transaction, instil support, shape attitudes and strengthen relationship between partners [34].

**REFERENCES**


