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ABSTRACT

Local residents remain peripheral players in tourism development planning, and exhibit little appreciation of potential impacts. Yet the long-term viability of sustainable initiatives depends on community members' initial understanding, support and engagement in the planning process. Trust is a key construct that most scholars believe to be critical in gauging and understanding resident support for tourism development. However, limited tourism research has been conducted exploring the dimension of trust. The purpose of this study was to explore the construct of trust, and its antecedents, ability, benevolence, and integrity, in the context of a tourism development project.

Keywords: *resident attitudes, trust, tourism planning*

INTRODUCTION

Extensive research has examined residents' attitude toward local tourism development, with many conceptual models and frameworks established to better engage and empower local residents in the tourism planning process (Látková & Vogt, 2012; Nunkoo, Gursoy & Juwaheer, 2010). However, local residents still remain peripheral players in tourism development planning, and exhibit little appreciation of potential impacts (Byrd, Cardenas, & Greenwood, 2008). Yet the long-term viability of sustainable initiatives depends on community members' initial endorsement and ongoing support (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011). Although researchers have used different theories to examine resident attitudes, with Social Exchange Theory (SET) being the most prominent (Andereck, Valentine, & Knopf, 2005), many scholars suggest that trust is the most important variable in this exchange process (Blau, 1962; Nunkoo & Ramikisson, 2012). But to date, very little scholarly work has examined the meaning and structure of trust in the context of support for or against tourism development.

Trust, utilized in varied disciplines since the late 1970s as a construct to explore inter-organizational exchange in the context of relationship development and commitment, has been framed both as a belief and a behavioral intention, and is considered fundamental to social

relationships (Gurviez & Korchia, 2003; Lachapelle & McCool, 2012). A number of studies further suggest that trust is a multi-dimensional construct (Mayer & Gavin, 2005; McCool 2009). Colquitt, Scott, and LePine (2007), for example, sought to identify the antecedents of trust and examine whether trust has a mediating effect on associated constructs, namely: (1) trustworthiness, which is described in terms of the antecedents ability, benevolence and integrity on the part of the trustee; and (2) trust propensity, which describes dispositional predilections on the part of the trustor.

Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2012) tested a model that included level of trust (in government agencies) as the central variable in examining community support for tourism development. Trust as a key component of SET was essential to determine residents' support. The results also suggest that beyond economic and/or social rewards, trust represents a promising construct that demands further attention among researchers (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011b). However, trust's antecedent, trustworthiness and its multiple dimensions was not examined. This study expands on previous studies by examining the structure or dimension(s) of trust in the tourism context, as well as its impact on residents' attitude and support on tourism development.

METHODS

Residents in a rural southeastern community in the U.S. were surveyed to determine their level of trust in the local agency (a chamber of commerce) which coordinated the feasibility study of a proposed new tourism development project. A survey was developed based on the literature addressing social exchange theory, resident attitudes, tourism planning, and trust. In addition, qualitative research results of focus groups and interviews with local stakeholders assisted the development of the questionnaire and the trustworthiness scale. The questionnaire included 30 questions and was divided into three major sections. Residents' level of trustworthiness (13 items) was adopted from Mayer & Davis (1999) study and modified based on current literature in tourism and with the input from the local agency. Data collection took place over two weeks during the summer of 2012 in various times and locations in the community. Self-administered survey and systematic random sampling (every 5th person who crossed pre-determined spots) was used, and a total of 308 usable questionnaires were completed.

RESULTS

Factor analysis was conducted on trust (13 items) and revealed a uni-dimensional construct. The single factor explained 74.3% of the total variance and the reliability value (Cronbach's alpha) was .97. Factor analyses were also employed to test the dimensions of the potential economic (8 items), social (10 items), and environmental impacts (7 items) of the project as perceived by residents. Two dimensions (benefits vs. costs) were identified in each of the three constructs and explained 74.8%, 62.8%, and 73.1% of the total variance respectively. The six reliability values of these dimensions ranged between .74 and .94.

The results of multiple regression analysis revealed that residents' attitude toward the tourism development was determined by three constructs, i.e., trust, perceived benefits of tourism, and perceived costs of tourism. These three factors explained 55.3% of the total variance ($F=95.524$, $p<.001$), with the perceived benefits of tourism being the most important predicting factor of residents' attitude. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed and indicated appropriate model fit (the results will be presented in detail in the full paper).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results do not support the multiple dimension of trust as previous research suggested (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine 2007), possibly because the study examined trust for an organization instead of interpersonal trust, and the majority of respondents actually had similar supporting attitudes. Along with the perceived benefits and cost of tourism, trust serves as an essential predicting factor in determining residents' attitude toward future tourism development in the community. Future research should examine the structure of trust when respondents have more

variability in their viewpoints, and further measure trust in more extensive organizations considering their roles in tourism planning.

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