

## Residents' Support for Rural Tourism: Community Empowerment, Life Domain Satisfaction and QoL

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# **Residents' Support for Rural Tourism: Community Empowerment, Life Domain Satisfaction and QoL**

## **1 Introduction**

Rural tourism development is an effective and important driver of realizing rural revitalization (Wang 2021). In the rural tourism, it is essential important to figure out a reasonable interest distribution mechanism and focus on the locals' participation and recognition degree. Only in this way can rural tourism have the power to achieve sustainable development (Zhao 2018).

For the past decades, the number of researches about sustainable tourism development has risen, mainly focus on the residents' support intention and behavior (Almeida, Balbuena and Cortes 2015; Suess, Baloglu and Busser 2018). To further develop the model of residents' attitudes in various tourism backgrounds, researchers used to regard residents' perceived impacts, satisfaction, the involvement of tourism as antecedents (Chi, Cai, and Li 2017). Nevertheless, within previous tourism literature, a few works posited community empowerment as the precedents. Community empowerment could influence individuals' supportive behaviors (Boley, McGehee, Perdue, and Long 2014), but there is still a lack of relevant empirical researches to explore the concrete effecting mechanism.

Additionally, among those studies of residents' SFT, social exchange theory (SET) has dominated in the field. Some researchers have advocated avoiding the over-use of the SET and suggested that further study should combine other theories to explain residents' attitudes (Latkova and Vogt 2012). Few studies have combined cognitive appraisal theory (CAT) to predict the residents' SFT from the perspective of emotional factors.

Based on the above arguments, this study proposed a theoretical framework consisting of community empowerment, life domain satisfaction, QoL, and residents' support for tourism, building on empowerment theory, bottom-up spillover theory, and cognitive appraisal theory, to examine their interplay.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Support for Tourism**

During the 1980s, Perdue et al. (1987) first used SET to explain why residents support or oppose tourism industry. SET has been widely used in the following studies of residents' attitudes toward tourism. Recently, some studies have questioned the exaggeration of rational assumption in SET, they argued that residents support tourism development not only because of the economic benefits but also some non-material things such as emotion, mentality, and policy (McGehee and Andereck 2004).

According to cognitive appraisal theory, emotion is individuals' mental state which is produced by evaluating related information (Lazarus 1991). It can explain why the same or similar event can elicit peoples' various emotions, it helps to understand how a specific emotion is induced and influence individuals' behaviors. The feeling of control oneself, saying empowerment, is a kind

appraisal of oneself, which is the determinant of individuals' positive emotions. In this way, CAT can provide psychological and social reasons (i.e., community empowerment) for residents' SFT. A current study by Zhang et al. (2019) tested the affection of psychological constructs to residents' support intention for tourism.

## 2.2 Community Empowerment

"Empowerment theory" was first narrated systematically in the social working pioneer masterpiece of *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities* (Solomon 1976). Scheyvens (1999) introduced empowerment into tourism in the study of exploring how to maximize ecotourism community residents' benefits. He proposed a four-dimension framework for ecotourism community empowerment including psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment, which was later adopted by the following studies. On the one hand, citizens could improve their QoL by participating in community activities (Zimmerman 1990). But the relation between empowerment and QoL still lacks empirical tests. On the other hand, community residents' empowerment is vital for sustainable tourism development (Schmidt and Uriely 2018). It's very useful to identify how the empowered perception of residents affect residents' attitude and behavior and help to achieve the goal of long-term destination development. Therefore, this study talks about the effect of residents' empowerment on their QoL and SFT.

Psychological empowerment, according to Scheyvens (1999), means that tourists look high upon the value of a community's natural and cultural resources, thereby enhancing the self-esteem and pride of residents. Positive emotions like positive expectations and feelings about oneself are extremely important to maintain ones' well-being (Keyes 2014), therefore psychological empowerment might influence ones' QoL. Meanwhile, the pride of tradition and culture leads to residents' positive attitude toward the surrounding tourism industry (Milman and Pizam 1988). A study conducted in Poland pointed out that psychological empowerment and SFT are correlated. Similarly, in the study of Uriely et al. (2002), the residents who have the cultural or regional heritage employed in touristic activity are more willing to be generous toward tourism, in contrast with residents who don't have a relevant culture to be utilized.

Social empowerment can be described as a situation in which the cohesion and integrity of the community are confirmed or enhanced through tourism and other activities. On the one hand, Brunie (2009) pointed that community cohesion is a kind of vital resource for community development, which can significantly improve group well-being (Jepson, Stadler, and Spencer 2019). On the other hand, the intimacy between individuals and organizations is a benefit to keeping a group's QoL (Zimmerman 1995). Thus, realizing social empowerment can help to enhance community residents' life satisfaction. Additionally, the manifestations of cohesion such as the trust between community members, interpersonal relationships, community attachment, and identity, can influence residents' tourism impact perception and their support degrees for tourism (Zheng, Ritchie, Benckendorff and Bao 2019). Thus, social empowerment could improve residents' tourism support.

Political empowerment can be achieved when community members' voices and their concerns could guide the tourism projects from the feasibility stage to implementation. Political power represents how much benefit one can get from the exchange behaviors (Emerson 1962). In the study by Wang (2018), residents who perceived tourism political empowerment highly usually have a higher perception of tourism economic empowerment, and vice versa. In other words, the

local community can truly obtain an amount of economic benefit only if they have certain tourism involvement rights and decision-making rights. Zhang (2012) has found that all four dimensions of empowerment impact community residents' well-being and attitudes regarding tourism. Besides, a study conducted by Ap and Crompton (1992) found that people who are weak in power usually hold a negative attitude toward tourism and suspect the prospect of the tourism industry. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that:

**H1.** Residents' community empowerment ([a] psychological empowerment; [b] social empowerment; and [c] political empowerment) positively influences residents' SFT.

**H2.** Residents' community empowerment ([a] psychological empowerment; [b] social empowerment; and [c] political empowerment) positively influences residents' life domain satisfaction.

**H3.** Residents' community empowerment ([a] psychological empowerment; [b] social empowerment; and [c] political empowerment) positively influences residents' overall QoL.

### **2.3. Life Domain Satisfaction and Overall Quality of Life**

Overall QoL was defined as the feeling about one's life." LDS means residents' satisfaction with specific life domains such as material, leisure, community, spiritual, health and sense of safety. According to spillover theory, the effects of a specific life domain would accumulate and vertically spill over to super-ordinate domains (overall QoL) (Kim, Uysal and Sirgy 2013). That is, residents' LDS influence their overall QoL. For example, Kim et al. (2012) identified that life's sub-dimension satisfaction would predict overall life satisfaction. However, Lai et al. (2020) reported to the contrary that life domains only partially contribute to their overall satisfaction with life. Thus:

**H4.** Residents' life domain satisfaction positively influences residents' overall QoL.

In terms of the relation between LDS and residents' SFT, Wang et al. (2020) focused on leisure life and spiritual life satisfaction, both of which connected with emotional well-being. Suess et al. (2020) tested the positive effect of residents' community satisfaction on SFT in a Chinese sample. Suess et al. (2018) also figured out that the healthcare, economic satisfaction would positively affect perceived impacts to community well-being; thereby, they contribute to supporting tourism industry. Nevertheless, in the research of Chi et al. (2017), they explore the positive effects between life domains and SFT, but their results found that most life dimensions are not related to residents' subjective well-being, while life domain conditions were related to SFT. Therefore, it still has controversy about whether life domain satisfaction can directly influence residents' SFT. Thus:

**H5.** Residents' life domain satisfaction positively influences residents' SFT.

In terms of the relationship between overall QoL and residents' SFT, Woo et al. (2015) have found that overall QoL is an important predictor of SFT. Studies have marked that individuals with greater levels of well-being will have more positive intentions or behaviors (Chiu, Cheng, Huang and Chen 2013). Although some studies have talked about the relationship between QoL and SFT, most of them examined the effect from life domain satisfaction and overall QoL to SFT respectively, rather than simultaneously. Thus:

**H6.** Residents' overall QoL positively influences residents' SFT.

According to the logical path of CAT and as positive emotions are part of well-being, here we can hypothesize that the empowerment will lead to positive emotional reactions like happiness, and thus their supportive behaviors toward tourism. Wang et al. (2020) reported that the influence of solidarity between locals and visitors on residents' attitude was mediated by emotional well-being. Chi et al. (2017) reported that residents' good social relations would through residents' subjective well-being to bolster their SFT. Lee et al. (2018) reported that residents' QoL mediates the effect from corporate social responsibility to support casino tourism development. As such, we propose that both residents' life domain satisfaction and overall QoL will mediate the impact of empowerment with residents' SFT.

**H7.** Residents' life domain satisfaction will mediate the effect of community empowerment ([a] psychological empowerment; [b] social empowerment; and [c] political empowerment) on residents' SFT.

**H8.** Residents' overall QoL will mediate the effect of community empowerment ([a] psychological empowerment; [b] social empowerment; and [c] political empowerment) on residents' SFT.

As previously hypothesized, residents improving life satisfaction and overall QoL by realizing empowerment. From the review above, community empowerment is a benefit to boost satisfaction with life domains like community, safety, and spiritual, while LDS can lead to overall QoL, both LDS and overall QoL would influence SFT. Thus, the study proposed that residents' empowerment indirectly impact SFT via life domain satisfaction and overall QoL.

**H9.** Residents' community empowerment ([a] psychological empowerment; [b] social empowerment; and [c] political empowerment) will affect residents' SFT through the chain mediating roles of life domain satisfaction and overall QoL.

In summary, this study developed an integrated model, where life domain satisfaction and overall QoL mediate the effect of community empowerment on residents' SFT. The chain mediating roles of life domain satisfaction and overall QoL were also tested (see Fig.1).

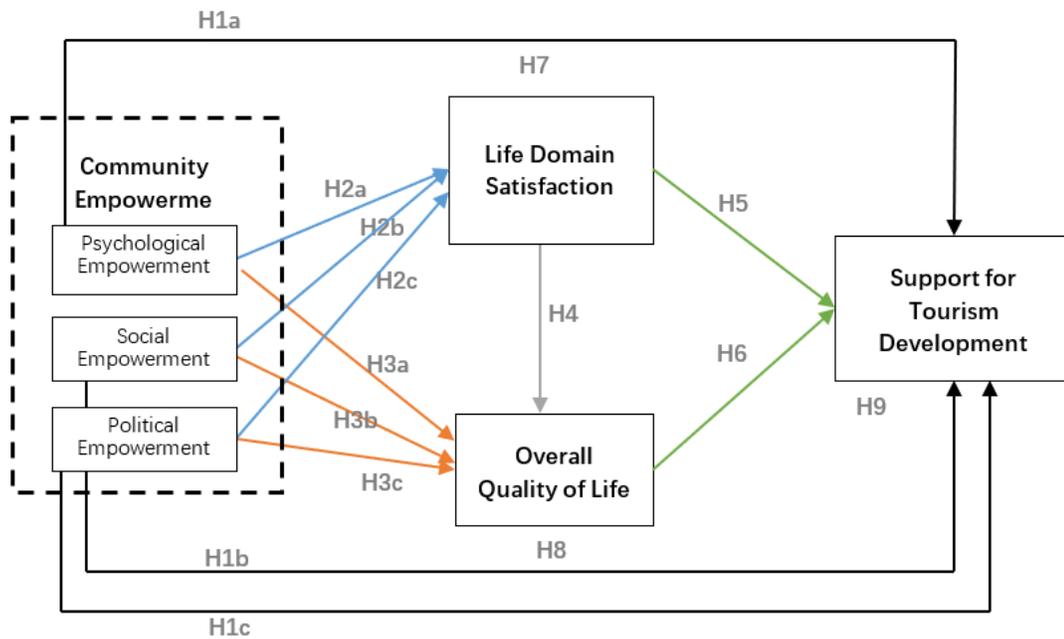


Fig. 1 Theoretical framework

### 3 Research Methods

#### 3.1 Data Collection

We surveyed residents living in two rural tourism destinations of China mainland, Zhaxigang and Taokezi. The whole survey lasted five weeks from August to September, 2018. The trained investigators asked the villagers to fill out the questionnaire door to door with a quota sampling method. Only the respondents who are older than 18 years old were asked to finish the survey. 450 questionnaires were collected totally. Thus, according to the population size of those two villages, we finally collected 412 valid questionnaires (274 from Taokezi, 138 from Zhaxigang). 65% of the responses are associated with the tourism industry.

#### 3.2 Measurement and Analysis Method

Measure instruments were generated from previous studies. Specifically, measurement of community empowerment was adapted from Boley and McGehee (2014). LDS was measured with 5 items and overall QoL was measured with 3 items, both were adapted from the research (Woo, Kim, and Uysal 2015), which was concluded from previous studies (Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin 1985; Sirgy 2002). Example items included “The conditions of my life are excellent,” “In most ways my life is close to ideal.” Residents’ SFT was measured with 4 items (Boley and McGehee 2014). All these constructs were measured by a 5-point Likert scale. As of last, respondents needed to indicate their demographics, including gender, age, education, average family income, occupation, and so on.

### 4 Results

The measurement model was tested by a CFA with Mplus7.0 software, the results show that measurement model was fit with the sample data, and both the reliability and validity of the model have been demonstrated.

**Table 2.** Comparison of structural models.

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta \chi^2 / \Delta df$	TLI	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
1	563.939	237		0.925	0.935	0.045	0.058
2	635.853	240	23.971	0.910	0.922	0.075	0.063
3	594.895	238	30.956	0.918	0.929	0.054	0.060

The relations between those constructs were tested by estimating three models using a SEM approach. Model 1 was the proposed hypothetical model in this study, Model 2 excluded the direct effects from community empowerment to SFT, Model 3 excluded the effect from LDS to overall QoL. Compared with Model 1, the competing models (Model2 & Model 3) did not improve the fits indices significantly (Table1). Therefore, the proposed model (Model1) provided the best fit.

**Table 3.** Structural model results.

Direct effects	Support for hypothesis
H1a: Psychological Empowerment →SFT	Y
H1b: Social Empowerment →SFT	N
H1c: Political Empowerment →SFT	N
H2a: Psychological Empowerment →LDS	Y
H2b: Social Empowerment →LDS	Y
H2c: Political Empowerment →LDS	Y
H3a: Psychological Empowerment →Overall QoL	N
H3b: Social Empowerment →Overall QoL	N
H3c: Political Empowerment →Overall QoL	Y
H4: LDS →Overall QoL	Y
H5: LDS →SFT	Y
H6: Overall QoL →SFT	Y
Indirect effects	Support for hypothesis
H7a: Psychological Empowerment →LDS→SFT	Y
H7b: Social Empowerment →LDS →SFT	Y
H7c: Political Empowerment →LDS →SFT	Y
H8a: Psychological Empowerment →Overall QoL →SFT	N
H8b: Social Empowerment →Overall QoL →SFT	N
H8c: Political Empowerment →Overall QoL →SFT	Y

Table 3 shows the results of hypothesized model. To clarify the influence of community empowerment on SFT, the multiple mediation effect was calculated. The impact of residents' perceived empowerment on their SFT is first mediated by life domain satisfaction and then mediated by the overall QoL. Therefore, H9a, H9b, and H9c are all supported.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

The findings showed that psychological empowerment can act to improve residents' SFT, but social empowerment and political empowerment can't. These results are not the same as the previous study (Boley, Strzelecka and Watson 2018; Khalid and Hwang 2019), but have a response to the calling of "testing relation between political empowerment and support for tourism in more communities". The results of this research also showed that empowerment could enhance local people's satisfaction with certain life domains and thus influence their overall QoL. According to the literature review, this study might be the first empirical study to explore the effect of the residents' empowerment on life domain satisfaction and QoL, especially in the rural tourism context. Besides, the 3 subdimensions of empowerment differentiate in the effect on life domain satisfaction. Specifically, political empowerment has the greatest direct effect on life domain satisfaction, which further expands the research results of Yang et al. (2020). This may because that political power represents the fundamental right, and it is the basis of other dimensions (Wang

2018). The investigated villages have developed economies to a certain degree, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, the local villagers prefer to purchase self-actualization needs. The involvement of political decision-making is a kind of potential achievement, which can help them to get a higher level of happiness, acquiring higher life satisfaction.

The study mainly contributes to the literature about the antecedents of residents' SFT. This study also better the standing of QoL (Yu, Sirgy, Bosnjak and Lee 2020; Wang 2017), which highlighted the differentiation and relation between LDS and overall QoL. Besides, the current study was the first to examine the relationships among community empowerment, LDS, and overall QoL. The chain mediating role of LDS and overall QoL have been tested, which is quite rare in previous studies and implemented the existing study (Eslami, Khalifah, Mardani, Streimikiene, and Han 2019).

This study offered insights for tourism planners and government officials, too. First, being sure that residents have been aware of their power changes brought by touristic activities. Community members should have approaches to express their tourism-related comments, thoughts, and ideas easily. Secondly, the locals should consider taking internal empowerment paths like education to help residents having the basic skills and knowledge about tourism. Only in this way they can know how to get more benefits from the tourism industry. Finally, the results suggested that residents' QoL can directly inspire SFT. Beyond empowerment, many other approaches can be taken to improve QoL. For example, when investors build the infrastructures and service equipment, the needs of both tourists and residents should be considered.

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