



Article

Environmental and Economic Concerns in Residents' Attitudes in Punta del Este (Uruguay)

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Abstract: The objective of this article is to determine the importance of environmental concern on residents' perceptions and attitudes in the case of the Maldonado-Punta del Este conurbation. To relativize the importance of this concern, economic concern was introduced into the model. Punta del Este is located next to the city of Maldonado, capital of the homonymous department, and is the most important sun and beach destination in Uruguay. For this analysis, a sample of 420 residents from the Maldonado-Punta del Este conurbation was used. The questionnaire contained several items using a 5-point Likert scale and a section including socio-demographic questions. Analysis of the data was carried out through Partial Least Squares (PLS) SEM regression. The results suggest that residents form their attitudes towards tourism based on tourism's economic benefits and socio-cultural costs. Residents of Punta del Este show concern for the environment but not for the economy. This concern is mainly related to the perception of environmental costs, but the causal relationship could be the opposite.

Keywords: attitude; benefit; cost; resident; PLS

1. Introduction

The resident population must agree with and support tourism development of their region, as this agreement is essential for tourism success [1–11]. Both public managers and entrepreneurs must take into account the opinions of residents if they want tourism to have a future in the region [5,7,12–17]. In tourism planning, knowledge of the residents' attitudes and their possible reactions to future developments is fundamental [18].

Papers that analyze residents' attitudes towards tourism have been common for almost half a century [5,7,19]. In the earliest works, the measurement of attitudes and their possible relationships with the impacts generated by tourism was prioritized [1,3,12,20–30]. These first investigations grouped the impacts potentially linked to tourism into two types, benefits and costs, and in four categories, economic, social, cultural, and environmental [3,5,23,28,31–34].

In some cases, this division into impact categories was used extensively, but in other cases, the impacts were simply divided into benefits and costs, without subsequent subdivisions [35,36]. In these works, fewer categories are used because the objective is to analyze large and complex causal models that do not focus on the perception of impacts by categories. In this article, these impacts are divided into the costs and benefits of three categories: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental.

Perceptions, understood as one's initial knowledge of something based on the impressions of one's senses and attitudes (which offers a global and long-term assessment that leads to certain actions),

are usually analyzed. In practical analysis, the differences between perceptions and attitudes tend to be minimal. The theory most frequently used to analyze causal relationships in this field is Social Exchange Theory [3,18,20,21,25,29–31], which suggests that support for the tourism sector is caused by a balance between the benefits and costs that are positively valued by residents. This theoretical basis and previous studies are the starting point for the most common causal models. The contributions of recent years have focused mainly on finding possible variables with the capacity to explain the differences in perceptions and attitudes. This paper proposes the incorporation of concerns, understood as a state of fear for a specific issue or aspect, as a possible cause of the differences in perception among residents of a local community. This is the main contribution of this work.

The purpose of this paper is to determine the importance of environmental concerns on residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and general attitudes towards tourism. To relativize the importance of this concern, economic concern was introduced into the model. Economic concern is the main driver of tourism support. In order to achieve this objective, a sample of inhabitants from Maldonado and Punta del Este has been analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling [37]. This analysis was made using Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression, a variant of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), using the statistical software, Smart PLS 2.0 [38]. The results indicate that residents' attitudes are formed from their perception of economic benefits and socio-cultural costs. In relation to their concerns, the people most concerned with the environment have a stronger perception of environmental costs.

2. Literature Review

In the last forty years, multiple studies have been carried out on residents' attitudes, due to their relevance for the sector [7,31,33,39–100]. In the beginning, these studies were more descriptive or qualitative, but at the end of the nineties, studies began to analyze the cause-effect relationships underlying residents' attitudes [49,61,63,65,66,70,71,73,77,86,88,98]. These models take perceptions of the impacts generated by tourism as direct antecedents of residents' attitudes. These residents, based on their perception of these impacts, broken down into several categories and types, generate an evaluation of the tourism sector, which is usually called the residents' attitude or residents' perception towards tourism. This causal model is a transposition of Social Exchange Theory to the field of residents' attitudes [3,18,20,21,25,29–31,39,53,54]. Other variables are usually added to the basic model with indirect, moderating, or mediating effects, in order to determine if they have significant effects on attitudes and perceptions. In addition, these research papers use different scales and variables in different regions and with different degrees of tourism development. Consequently, many causal models are proposed. All of these models are similar but not identical. Therefore, although there are multiple works on the subject, there is still no definitive or universal model.

Researchers often group tourism impacts into three or four categories: economic, social, cultural, and environmental [3,5,23,28,31–34]. When talking about positive economic impacts, we refer to improvements in the income of people, companies, and administrations [1,3,5,25,30,101–104]. This implies an increase in various economic aspects. The tourism sector increases economic activity, which entails more employment opportunities for residents and newcomers [1,3,5,14,30,39,42,58,101,105,106]; this same growth in economic activity generates an increase in business initiatives led by residents or external investors [5]. More indirectly, public administrations improve their income via taxes and fees thanks to increases in demand, the number of companies, and people with employment [3,25,105,106].

When talking about socio-cultural benefits, reference is made to improvements in the social environment of the tourist region, excluding income upturn, which includes economic benefits, such as enhancements in infrastructure and public spaces, as well as more numerous and superior public services [5,14,102,104]. The commercial and leisure activities in the region also receive advantages [3,12,14,25,29,102,105,107–109], and the conservation of historical heritage, traditions, and local culture is another important benefit [1,110]. Greater contact between different cultures is also maintained more strongly [14,102], and there is also a possible revitalization of traditions that

were already in decline (and, consequently, an increase in residents' pride) [102,111]. In most cases, these benefits are an indirect consequence of the attractions made to serve tourists. The preservation of culture and heritage and the improvement of infrastructure, public spaces, and public services are carried out with the primary objective of serving tourists, but residents indirectly benefit. There is a similar situation for environmental impacts; under tourism, there is improvement in the conservation of natural spaces and an awareness of their importance due to their conversion into tourist resources [12,14,90,102,112,113].

Of these three types of benefits, economic impacts are the most important and the reason why tourism develops. The other benefits are a secondary effect of tourism development [1,3,25,30,53,101–104]. The most relevant economic impact for the local population is the increase in job opportunities [1,3,5,30,101,114], something fundamental in many regions that were very poor before tourism development. Even so, it is necessary to consider all types of benefits. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1. *Perceived benefits have a positive causal effect on the overall attitude towards tourism.*

Hypothesis 1a. *Perceived economic benefits have a positive causal effect on the overall attitude towards tourism.*

Hypothesis 1b. *Perceived socio-cultural benefits have a positive causal effect on the overall attitude towards tourism.*

Hypothesis 1c. *Perceived environmental benefits have a positive causal effect on the overall attitude towards tourism.*

In addition to the benefits, the costs must be taken into account; these costs have a negative and significant effect on residents' attitudes [25,49,61,71,73,77,104,107,109,115]. As with benefits, costs can be divided into several categories. The main negative impact of tourism is the rapid increase in prices [14,68]. Tourist destinations carry an implicit differentiation that allows the prices of tourist products to be higher, and these price increases are transmitted to all prices in the region, fully affecting the residents. In addition to these price increases, the main economic inconvenience of tourism is the type of employment. Tourist services need many workers, but these jobs are mostly low-skilled and, in many cases, temporary jobs. This implies that tourism is a sector with significant employment but under negative conditions (poor stability, schedules, remuneration, etc.).

For socio-cultural impacts, problems like insecurity [14,104,108,109,116], overcrowding [3,25,104,107,109,113,115], inconvenience to residents (e.g., noise and traffic congestion), and changes in the local culture [1,117,118] stand out. For environmental impacts [90], the main problems generated by tourism are the natural resources consumed and the deterioration of the natural environment, especially the natural spaces that are more sensitive to human presence [108,110]. It should be remembered that environmental impacts are unavoidable in all human activities, so the only thing that can be done in this regard is to minimize the impact of an activity on the natural environment.

As proposed by Social Exchange Theory [3,18,20,21,25,29–31,39,53,54] and the existing literature, residents carry out a global evaluation of tourist activities, comparing the benefits and costs generated. This global evaluation is usually called residents' attitudes or residents' perceptions towards tourism. Therefore, based on the academic literature [25,49,61,71,73,77,104,107–109,115,119,120], it is possible to propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2. *Perceived costs have a negative causal effect on the overall attitude towards tourism.*

Hypothesis 2a. *Perceived economic costs have a negative causal effect on the overall attitude towards tourism.*

Hypothesis 2b. *Perceived socio-cultural costs have a negative causal effect on the overall attitude towards tourism.*

Hypothesis 2c. *Perceived environmental costs have a negative causal effect on the overall attitude towards tourism.*

In many cases, the tourist destinations are very poor regions that have achieved significant economic improvements for their inhabitants thanks to this sector [3,14,25,30,102,107,115,121–124], which is why economic benefits are usually the most important in evaluations carried out by residents [1,3,25,30,53,101–104]. Regions with an acceptably good quality of life tend to be more reluctant to tourism development and see it only as a source of complementary income that is conditioned not to cause significant negative impacts. The main example of this phenomenon can be found in cities that act as national and international economic or political poles (e.g., Paris, Rome, or Barcelona). In these cases, tourism is seen as complementary to other sectors and not essential, resulting in less friendly treatment by residents towards tourists. On the contrary, for poor regions, tourism is an opportunity to rapidly improve their living conditions, so negative impacts are more relativized. The main example of this is found in island tourist destinations (e.g., the islands of the Mediterranean in their early stages of development or many of the small Antilles in the Caribbean), characterized by an underdeveloped or subsistence economy before tourism development.

Until now, the part of the model that has been widely studied and constitutes the core of causal models on resident attitudes [49,61,71,73,77] has been discussed. This part of the model is a logical consequence of Social Exchange Theory, a very common theoretical foundation in studies on residents' attitudes [3,18,20,21,25,29–31,39,53,54]. We add innovative elements to these basic causal relationships: environmental concern and economic concern. Concerns, as causes of the variations in the perceptions of residents, have been rarely studied.

Concerns can be defined as a state of fear towards a specific issue. This fear of possible negative results produces greater sensitivity towards the impacts related to the subject of concern. This could translate into significantly different perceptions without concrete concerns. In the literature, mentions of residents' concerns are infrequent, but there are some works that analyze such concerns in greater or lesser detail. One of the most common cases is community concern [53,71,73], which is understood as a fear for the well-being of the local population and its future and suggests an increase in various residents' perceptions. Less studied are social concern [39], economic concern, and environmental concern [39,44], which are all understood as the fear toward impacts of a particular type. Because the economy is the counterpoint to concerns about negative impacts on other aspects of society, economic concern must be taken into account as a counterpoint to environmental concern (which is increasingly important in Western society).

The local economy is the main concern that drives a region to become a tourist destination. Many regions with scarce resources adopt tourism as a solution to their economic development problems [125,126]. In these destinations, the expected economic benefits make the reaction of the local population very favorable to tourism [3,24]. Over the years, economic dependence has been a very important element for determining inhabitants' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism [1,18,22,24,107,127,128]; in many cases, there is a positive relationship between economic dependence and the acceptance of tourism [21,24,25,117,120]. The importance of this reaction is such that economic concerns eclipse the other elements to be considered in the decision to boost tourism development.

Several authors have concluded that residents underestimate costs and overvalue benefits [1,102,128] when they are concerned about the economic situation. Therefore, the more negative the local economic situation is perceived, the more enthusiastic the reaction of the population towards tourism development will be [3]. This economic concern engenders positive attitudes towards

tourism for fear of regressing in the degree of economic well-being, especially in regions that are economically dependent on tourism [129–131]. This leads to Hypotheses 3 and 4:

Hypothesis 3. *Economic concern has a positive causal effect on the perceived benefits generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 3a. *Economic concern has a positive causal effect on the perceived economic benefits generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 3b. *Economic concern has a positive causal effect on the perceived socio-cultural benefits generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 3c. *Economic concern has a positive causal effect on the perceived environmental benefits generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 4. *Economic concern has a negative causal effect on the perceived costs generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 4a. *Economic concern has a negative causal effect on the perceived economic costs generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 4b. *Economic concern has a negative causal effect on the perceived socio-cultural costs generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 4c. *Economic concern has a negative causal effect on the perceived environmental costs generated by tourism.*

Impact precision due to tourism is not easy, as tourism's effects on the environment are often due to a set of interrelated causes that may not be exclusively determined by tourism [132]. Studies on the perception of tourism's effects on the environment indicate a positive [12,14,102,112,113] or negative [108] relationship on residents' attitudes. A possible explanation for the disparity of results is the existence of different attitudes about the relationship between human beings and the environment [3].

Gagnon-Thompson and Barton [133] proposed distinguishing between two motivations for supporting environmental actions. *Ecocentrism* considers that the environment has intrinsic value, while *anthropocentrism* considers that the environment has value in its positive effects on human lives. Different researchers have suggested that individuals with *ecocentric* inclinations (i.e., those with greater environmental concern) prefer to prioritize environmental protection over economic improvement, while *anthropocentric* individuals (i.e., those with less environmental concern) prefer to prioritize human needs and desires, even if this entails alterations in the environment [134,135].

Environmental concern has a direct impact on the degree of support for touristic development [3,25]. In the study by Gursoy, Jurowski, and Uysal [3] the residents most concerned with the environment perceived the costs more intensely and thought that the benefits were less important than the rest of the sample [130,131,136,137]. In recent times, concern about environmental impacts has increased. Social concern exists for this issue, making it necessary to account for ecological impacts on tourism development plans [138]. Because of these phenomena, we produced Hypotheses 5 and 6:

Hypothesis 5. *Environmental concern has a negative causal effect on the perceived benefits generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 5a. *Environmental concern has a negative causal effect on the perceived economic benefits generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 5b. *Environmental concern has a negative causal effect on the perceived socio-cultural benefits generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 5c. *Environmental concern has a negative causal effect on the perceived environmental benefits generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 6. *Environmental concern has a positive causal effect on the perceived costs generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 6a. *Environmental concern has a positive causal effect on the perceived economic costs generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 6b. *Environmental concern has a positive causal effect on the perceived socio-cultural costs generated by tourism.*

Hypothesis 6c. *Environmental concern has a positive causal effect on the perceived environmental costs generated by tourism.*

The six hypotheses are illustrated graphically in Figure 1 (the sub-hypotheses have not been indicated, and the types of costs and benefits have not been broken down to avoid excessive visual complexity), which configures the proposed causal model analyzed in this article.

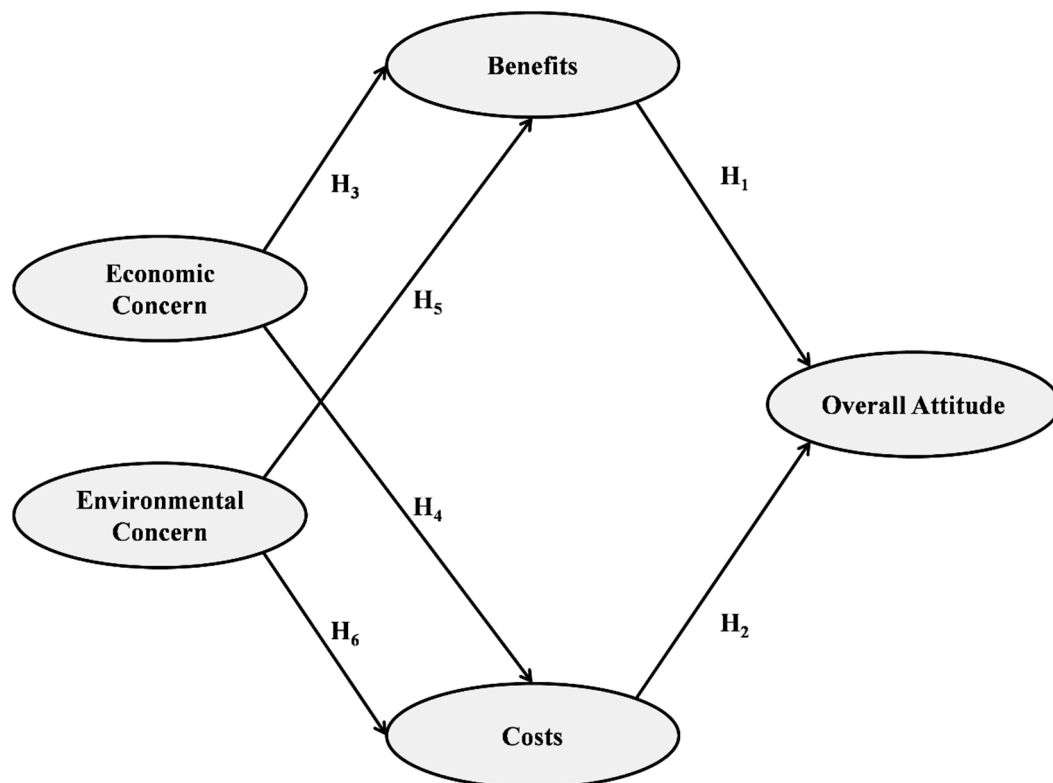


Figure 1. Proposed structural model.

3. Methodology

In order to achieve the objective of this paper, a sample of inhabitants from Maldonado and Punta del Este was analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling [37]. Punta del Este (Figure 2) is a town adjacent to the city of Maldonado, the capital of the Department of Maldonado (Oriental Republic of Uruguay), which is internationally known as a tourist destination [5]. The population of Punta del Este is 9200 people, but in the conurbation of Maldonado-Punta del Este, there are more than 100,000 inhabitants. Punta del Este is a sun and beach destination that receives more than 689,000 tourists a year, mostly from Argentina [139].



Figure 2. Geographical location of Maldonado-Punta del Este. Source: own elaboration.

The sample was obtained by personal interview, while sampling for convenience but controlling various socio-demographic parameters to avoid significant biases in the resulting profile. The information was collected between February and September 2016. We carried out the field work over several months to avoid biases due to the seasonality of tourist activity. The questionnaires obtained were reviewed to verify that they were not incomplete or poorly answered. If any of these problems were detected, the questionnaire was discarded. The final sample consisted of a total of 420 valid questionnaires, in which the demographic parameters were tested to avoid bias. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile. The margin of error is of 4.88%, with a 95% confidence level. This investigation uses a causal model, in which responses are collected using a 5-point Likert scale (1 “totally disagree” to 5 “totally agree”). These scales come from previous studies and previous work of the authors [5,75,81,83,129–131,136,137].

The sampling technique and the dates of the field work could be a problem in a descriptive analysis that seeks to determine current attitudes. However, this case employs a cause-effect analysis that seeks to model the formation of residents’ attitudes, and the field work is such that there are different positions within the sample (that is to say, heterogeneity), so the statistical software can “compare” and obtain results. In fact, this is an after-only type of analysis carried out through a field study, thus providing greater reliability than an experimental “laboratory” study with students or through the use of a Mechanical Turk. On the other hand, people’s attitudes change continuously and slowly, except in the case of a shocking event, and it takes many years to detect significant differences in descriptive analyses (up to a decade).

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of the samples.

Socio-Demographic Variable.	Frequency	%
Sex:		
Man.	230	54.76%
Woman.	190	45.24%
Age:		
Less than 25.	104	24.76%
From 25 to 34.	67	15.95%
From 35 to 44.	81	19.29%
From 45 to 54.	80	19.05%
From 55 to 64.	49	11.67%
65 or more.	39	9.29%
Level of studies:		
No Studies.	8	1.90%
Primary Studies.	39	9.29%
Secondary Studies.	177	42.14%
University Studies.	196	46.67%
Birthplace:		
In the region.	181	43.10%
Outside the region.	239	56.90%
Works in Tourism:		
Yes.	243	57.86%
No.	177	42.14%

This analysis was made using Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression, a variant of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Causal analyses of residents' attitudes are usually carried out using SEM [63,66,71,77] and surveys with measurement scales for more than two decades. The methodological differences between the studies are due to the specific software used and the underlying methods of calculating the model estimates. The use of PLS for the SEM analysis has gained significant strength in recent years [3,5,26,66,77] because it works best in cases where exploratory analyses are performed, or new causal models are proposed (that is, whenever there is a clear innovation in the model). As an inconvenience, it should be noted that this method does not have as much precision as other techniques when calculating causal effects. Using SEM with the PLS technique via the Smart PLS 2.0 [38] software and applying route weighting is the most recommended approach for this type of analysis [140].

4. Results

Firstly, the measurement model was analyzed, followed by an analysis of the proposed structural model. Since the results obtained under composite reliability are greater than 0.707 [141] in all items, their individual reliability is considered adequate. Constructed reliability is usually assessed using Cronbach's Alpha [142] and composite reliability [143,144]. It can be observed in Table 2 that the values for Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability are acceptable.

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity.

	AVE	Composite Reliability	R ²	Cronbach's Alpha	Communality
Environmental Concern	0.546	0.828		0.722	0.546
Economic Concern	0.604	0.753		0.645	0.604
Economic Benefits	0.599	0.882	0.039	0.832	0.599
Socio-cultural Benefits	0.561	0.864	0.036	0.804	0.561
Environmental Benefits	0.513	0.808	0.014	0.687	0.513
Economic Costs	0.792	0.884	0.039	0.744	0.792
Socio-cultural Costs	0.555	0.832	0.024	0.734	0.555
Environmental Costs	0.602	0.883	0.075	0.835	0.602
Overall Attitude	0.627	0.871	0.353	0.802	0.627

Source: authors.

To assess convergent validity, we examined the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). AVE values should be greater than 0.5 [144] (and here they are greater) (Table 2). The two approaches proposed in PLS [143,145] are followed to assess discriminatory validity. The data obtained from the proposed measurement model were collected as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Loadings of the structural models.

Constructs	Arithmetic Average	Standard Deviation	Loading
Environmental Concern:			
Protection of the environment is more important than economic benefits.	3.548	1.161	0.743
The priority in new projects must be the preservation of the environment.	3.795	1.054	0.763
The environment cannot withstand the impacts generated by modern society.	3.740	0.979	0.769
Infrastructures cause negative impacts to the environment that are difficult to remedy.	3.600	1.041	0.680
Economic Concern:			
Young people must leave the town to find employment.	2.776	1.204	0.773
The local economic situation is worrying.	3.640	1.065	0.782
Economic Benefits:			
Tourism generates many job opportunities for residents.	4.350	0.780	0.779
Tourism generates numerous business opportunities for residents and small businesses.	4.195	0.837	0.835
Tourism generates greater opportunities for investment in the town.	4.264	0.798	0.768
Tourism generates revenue for the Administration and local organisms.	4.293	0.818	0.748
Tourism significantly increases residents' levels of income.	4.048	0.940	0.736
Socio-cultural Benefits:			
Thanks to tourism, residents have a better and more varied selection of leisure activities and entertainment.	3.740	1.072	0.684
Thanks to tourism, basic services are better.	2.967	1.276	0.761
Thanks to tourism, there are better public services.	2.855	1.225	0.778
Tourism promotes the restoration and conservation of historical heritage.	3.274	1.150	0.745
Tourism improves the quality of infrastructure and public works.	3.555	1.062	0.774
Environmental Benefits:			
Tourism encourages the protection of natural areas.	3.379	1.101	0.755
Tourism converts natural resources into a source of income for residents.	3.652	1.009	0.720
Tourism is less polluting than other economic activities.	3.429	1.118	0.707
Tourism promotes respect for the environment.	2.936	1.101	0.680
Economic Costs:			
Tourism has led to an increase in prices and the cost of living.	4.076	1.007	0.853
Tourism has led to an increase in the cost of housing and land.	4.136	0.945	0.926
Socio-cultural Costs:			
Tourism hinders the enjoyment of public spaces by overcrowding them.	3.269	1.164	0.702
Tourism has made residents feel like strangers in their own town.	2.817	1.145	0.821
Tourism has generated a negative effect on the local culture.	2.588	1.023	0.768
Tourism has generated conflicts between visitors and residents.	2.969	1.103	0.681
Environmental Costs:			
Tourism causes serious environmental pollution problems.	3.057	1.052	0.753
Tourism leads to the loss of local ecosystems.	3.002	1.025	0.822
Tourism consumes resources in excess.	3.319	1.064	0.764
Tourism has contributed to the degradation of the natural environment of the town.	3.062	1.063	0.809
Tourism has caused the saturation of some natural spaces.	3.362	1.077	0.728
Overall Attitude:			
Tourism development has been very beneficial to the town and its inhabitants.	4.093	0.836	0.772
Tourism must continue to be promoted as an essential part of the town.	4.300	0.802	0.823
Tourism is beneficial for residents' day to day lives.	3.988	0.930	0.816
There is a better quality of life thanks to tourism.	3.848	0.996	0.755

Source: authors.

The structural model analysis and causal relationships were then determined using PLS-SEM. In this investigation, the use of this technique is based on a non-parametric boot procedure [146,147], in which the results of the path coefficients, standard error, P value, and T statistic (see Table 4) are collected. Student's *t* was used to evaluate the importance of each estimate [148] by identifying critical values.

Table 4. Path coefficients of direct causal relations.

Hypotheses	Path Coefficients	Standard Error	T Statistic	p Value
Hypothesis 1:				
Economic Benefits→Overall Attitude (H _{1,1})	0.374 **	0.117	3.191	0.001
Socio-cultural Benefits→Overall Attitude (H _{1,2})	0.111 ns	0.112	0.990	0.161
Environmental Benefits→Overall Attitude (H _{1,3})	0.074 ns	0.113	0.656	0.256
Hypothesis 2:				
Economic Costs→Overall Attitude (H _{2,1})	0.106 ns	0.128	0.827	0.204
Socio-cultural Costs→Overall Attitude (H _{2,2})	−0.224 *	0.114	1.967	0.025
Environmental Costs→Overall Attitude (H _{2,3})	−0.067 ns	0.109	0.610	0.271
Hypothesis 3:				
Economic Concern→Economic Benefits (H _{3,1})	0.002 ns	0.131	0.014	0.494
Economic Concern→Socio-cultural Benefits (H _{3,2})	−0.066 ns	0.132	0.500	0.309
Economic Concern→Environmental Benefits (H _{3,3})	0.007 ns	0.139	0.048	0.481
Hypothesis 4:				
Economic Concern→Economic Costs (H _{4,1})	0.168 *	0.124	1.354	0.088
Economic Concern→Socio-cultural Costs (H _{4,2})	0.096 ns	0.129	0.746	0.228
Economic Concern→Environmental Costs (H _{4,3})	0.055 ns	0.125	0.442	0.329
Hypothesis 5:				
Environmental Concern→Economic Benefits (H _{5,1})	0.197 *	0.130	1.514	0.065
Environmental Concern→Socio-cultural Benefits (H _{5,2})	0.181 *	0.140	1.289	0.099
Environmental Concern→Environmental Benefits (H _{5,3})	0.117 ns	0.173	0.678	0.249
Hypothesis 6:				
Environmental Concern→Economic Costs (H _{6,1})	0.094 ns	0.137	0.690	0.245
Environmental Concern→Socio-cultural Costs (H _{6,2})	0.116 ns	0.134	0.865	0.194
Environmental Concern→Environmental Costs (H _{6,3})	0.266 *	0.136	1.957	0.025

p values: * *p* < 0.1; ** *p* < 0.001; ns not significant. Source: authors.

Based on the results obtained (Table 4), the direct economic benefits according to different studies [3,5,25,30,102,121,122,124] have significant importance for the respondents (H_{1,1}) compared to the socio-cultural benefits (H_{1,2}) and environmental benefits (H_{1,3}), which have no significant importance and are not in accordance with some previous studies [3,107,112,122]. This result is not exceptional if one considers that the main benefits expected by residents from tourism development are of an economic nature [1,3,25,30,53,101–104]. The rest of the benefits can be considered supplementary and are not the primary objective of tourism development. It is possible that in societies that are more aware of cultural and environmental issues, the benefits and costs of this type have greater weight. On the other hand, it should be noted that tourists travel to Uruguay mainly from culturally similar countries, and the urban development of Punta del Este is extensive, with many green areas and few points of high urban agglomeration (as can be seen in the image in Figure 2).

In relation to hypothesis 2 (Table 4), the economic (H_{2,1}) and environmental (H_{2,3}) costs do not have a significant effect on overall attitude, and do not coincide with the results of some previous studies [25,104,107,109,115]. Only socio-cultural costs (H_{2,2}) have a negative and significant effect at a significance level of 0.025 on overall attitude. The fact that there is only one cost with a significant effect on the attitudes of the residents may be due to the comments in the previous paragraph (tourists are culturally similar to residents balanced urban development is balanced). Price increases do not seem to be perceived as a direct cause of tourism (on some occasions, residents consider some problems to exist not due to tourism but due to local mismanagement; therefore, these problems would continue to exist even if there was no tourism development), and environmental costs also do not show a significant

effect. Only socio-cultural costs have a significant effect, and these costs refer to the overcrowding and conflict between tourists and residents.

In general, economic benefits are the main drivers of tourism, and social, cultural, and environmental costs are the main detriments of tourism.

The residents' economic concerns have no significant effect on tourism benefits (Hypothesis 3), and there is only a significant effect on the economic costs ($H_{4,1}$). The effect of economic concern on economic cost is positive and barely significant (at a level of 0.1). Therefore, interpretations of these costs should be made with caution. It must be kept in mind that the economic costs analyzed entail price increases, a problem that exacerbates the effects of a crisis, reducing the residents' purchasing power. In general, the residents' economic concerns have almost no effect on the perception of tourism impacts (Table 4). This is possibly due to the fact that the economic situation in the region was quite good at the time of carrying out the fieldwork. For the causal model, economic concern would not be a factor of great importance in determining the residents' perceptions about the impacts generated by tourism.

Environmental concern shows positive and significant effects on economic ($H_{5,1}$) and socio-cultural ($H_{5,2}$) benefits. This may be because the respondents consider that economic and socio-cultural improvements help to conserve the environment. However, the low level of significance of these causal relationships requires prudence. The strongest causal relationship is between environmental concern and environmental costs ($H_{6,3}$). The people most sensitive to the environment show greater concern and are more attentive to changes that occur in the natural environment (mainly on the negative impacts). This implies that, when environmental concern increases, the same negative impacts on the natural environment are perceived more dramatically by residents, which is something that local managers must take into account. However, an increase in environmental concern does not have a significant indirect effect on residents' attitudes because Hypothesis 2.3 is not significant.

5. Discussion

Based on the results obtained, in hypotheses 1 and 2, it would be advisable to make changes in the attitudes that residents possess towards the development of tourism in the study area. Measures should be implemented to enhance positive (economic) attitudes and to minimize negative (socio-cultural and environmental) attitudes.

- Economic benefits, in particular, highlight the potential for increased employment and trade opportunities. Both items refer to the development of local entrepreneurship, which is expected to generate more jobs for people residing in the area, and the possibility of the development of new businesses, which will contribute more strongly to improvements in the region (economic, social, and environmental) compared to businesses run by people from outside this geographical area that promote tourism development.
- Cultural change is one of the consequences of the development of tourism. Cultural change has an impact on the local population, who perceives a loss of its culture and traditions. These cultural changes can be lessened in two specific cases. In the first case, one can "commercialize" traditional culture, but much of it will be preserved or even strengthened. The second case is only possible for sun and beach destinations located in continents with little cultural differences, such as Punta del Este (i.e., differences between tourists and residents are almost null, and, therefore, cultural change is virtually impossible).

Both types of concerns have a small effect on residents' perceptions and attitudes. However, when comparing these concerns, it is observed that environmental concerns are more present in the sample (Table 3) and have more significant causal effects, especially on the perception of environmental costs (Table 4). Greater environmental concern implies greater sensitivity towards negative impacts on the natural environment. We also cannot rule out that this causal relationship functions in reverse (i.e., that costs cause concern). Although these concerns have low levels of significance, there is a positive

and significant relationship between environmental concerns and economic and socio-cultural benefits. A priori, this causal relationship does not seem logical and should be analyzed in future studies; however, this relationship could be mediated by another variable not studied or be used to justify tourist activities while considering the seriousness of negative environmental impacts. In the absence of further studies, greater environmental concern is related to the perception of serious negative impacts on the natural environment. Therefore, policies aimed at minimizing environmental impacts would reduce the effect of the residents' concerns.

The only significant causal relationship of economic concern is in the perception of economic costs—in this case, an increase in prices. Tourist destinations, as tourist products, allow higher prices in tourist areas without a significant loss of tourists. These higher prices are a serious problem for residents and suggest a loss of purchasing power that is very serious in periods of economic recession (with unemployment or low wages).

In general, the residents of Punta del Este showed concern for the environment but not for the economy; the main relationship of this concern is with the perception of environmental costs. Here, however, they do not have significant effects on general attitudes toward tourism. Even so, it is necessary to minimize the negative effects of tourism on the environment, to prevent opposition to tourism in the future.

A possible reflection on these concerns is that, if lobbies and the media engender social concern, they could change people's perceptions and, consequently, alter their reasoning, attitudes, and actions. In the results of this article, this possibility was detected for environmental concern, and it is possible to meditate on the implications of this result in the reasoning processes of people and in the democratic processes of societies.

6. Conclusions

In accordance with academic literature review, the results of this research emphasize that, from the residents' point of view, the main elements that contribute to the development of tourism in the geographical area under study are the economic benefits, as well as the social and cultural costs. These are the factors that should be taken into consideration if the development of sustainable tourism activity is to be accepted and supported by the local population.

For both types of concerns, the only causal relationship with high levels of significance is between environmental concerns and environmental costs, but it is necessary to ask: "What is the meaning of the causal relationship?" The environmental costs perceived by the residents possibly generated the concern and not the other way around. In any case, environmental costs must be monitored and controlled by the destination managers.

It would be interesting in future investigations to replicate this study in other geographical areas in different countries to determine whether the same behavior exists. One of the most important elements to consider in future investigations would be the concerns and perceptions between the causal relationship or its absence. Causal relationships are insignificant and confusing (i.e., positive relationships where negative relationships seem to be expected). This suggests that future studies are needed to determine what relationships are important and what sense they have (positive or negative).

The application of the model proposed in this research could be implemented in other geographical areas, which would enable researchers to examine results other than those from this investigation and contribute to corroborating the causal effects obtained. It would also be interesting to analyze these concepts through other methodologies, especially through before–after experimental studies and via neuroscience techniques. It should be borne in mind that the results of the analysis of social concerns based on people's perceptions and attitudes (direct or indirect) are of great relevance to understanding how societies work and to what extent people have influence-free reasoning, in relation to both sustainability issues and other issues that may be the subject of social concern.

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