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Empowerment's Influence on Resident Support for Tourism in rural Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

Introduction

Since the collapse of the Communist regime, the European Union has been an important agent driving socio-political changes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The EU has also influenced the course of rural development through mechanisms such as export-import treaties and loan programmes (McDonald, 2003; Steves, 2001). Flowing out of this rural socio-economic restructuring influenced by the EU has been an increased emphasis on sustainable development of rural regions (Hall et al., 2006). Within the EU's tool kit for sustainable development has been a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism (e.g. Engels, 2003; Strzelecka & Wicks, 2010). Tourism has been expected to contribute to the revitalization of the CEE periphery by offering what Hegarty and Przeborska (2005), call an attractive 'natural development path' in the process of agricultural restructuring associated with the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). European tourism authorities and policy advisors generally praise this 'natural development path' of rural tourism because it has been a promising diversification strategy and a relatively easily accessible means for rural households to achieve independence from the agriculture (Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005).

The sustainable tourism literature takes this emphasis on economic development a step further and asserts that resident empowerment is a prerequisite for tourism to be considered sustainable (Cole, 2006; Scheyvens, 1999, 2000). Following this reasoning, Scheyvens (1999) argues that sustainable tourism should start with the needs, concerns and welfare of local communities and it must strive to empower community residents. Despite empowerment being a crucial component of sustainable tourism (e.g. Boley & McGehee, 2014; Cole, 2006; Scheyvens, 1999; Sofield, 2003; Strzelecka & Wicks, 2015), few scholars have looked at how empowerment applies to rural societies within the post-communist EU member states. There has been some evidence of empowerment in the tourism context in those countries through the work Strzelecka and Wicks (2010; 2015), but these exploratory studies expose only some issues related to the implementation of participatory mechanisms in tourism decision-making and they are qualitative in nature.

To further discuss the applicability of empowerment within CEE socio-political conditions, more research is needed to examine how residents perceive empowerment and how these perceptions relate to other core tourism constructs such as support for tourism. With this gap in mind, the first goal of this study is to test the cross-cultural validity of the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) within the CEE country of Poland. The RETS is a scale recently developed by Boley and McGehee (2014) to measure resident perceptions of psychological, social, and political empowerment through tourism. Once the reliability and validity of the scale is tested, the second goal is to evaluate how empowerment predicts residents' support for tourism within a CEE context. Using a theoretical perspective that blends Social Exchange Theory with Weber's Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality, these non-economic empowerment dimensions will be coupled with a measure of resident perceptions of economically benefiting from tourism to see if Polish residents are more influenced by the economic benefits of tourism or the non-economic constructs of empowerment.

Literature Review

Residents' support for tourism is a core aspect of tourism's sustainability (Sirakaya et al., 2002). The predominant theory used to explain resident support for tourism is Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that residents conduct an internal cost-benefit analysis of tourism's impacts to determine their support or opposition to tourism (Ap, 1992). While SET is the most common theory used to explain resident attitudes, critics claim that SET has over emphasized the economic component of the exchange between residents and tourists (Woosnam, Norman, & Ying, 2009). Látková and Vogt (2012, p. 64) suggest that a possible solution would be the "application of social exchange theory in conjunction with another theory" since the combination "might provide a better insight into residents' attitudes toward tourism."

One such theory that holds promise in realigning SET and bridging the divide between either focusing solely on the economic factors influencing resident attitudes toward tourism or exclusively examining the non-economic constructs is Weber's theory of formal and substantive rationality (Andereck et al., 2005). The theory's appropriateness is derived from its explanation of human rationality that includes both market (formal) and non-market variables (substantive) such as values, beliefs, morals, and philosophy in the explanation of why humans engage in economic transactions (Kalberg, 1980; McGehee, 2007).

The substantive component of Weber's theory aligns well with the rise in importance of resident empowerment being a prerequisite for sustainable tourism over the past decade (e.g. Scheyvens, 1999; Cole, 2006; Strzelecka & Wicks, 2015). Empowerment in tourism is manifested by the capacity of individuals and groups to decide about their own affairs (Rappaport, 1987; Cole, 2006; Scheyvens, 1999). It emerges as a result of individual and community changes, interpersonal changes or changes in social structures that can impact the individual (Simmons & Parsons, 1983). Empowerment is manifested in various aspects of residents' everyday life. Tourism scholars generally distinguish 4 dimensions of empowerment through tourism which are outlined below with links to support for tourism (Scheyvens, 1999; Boley & McGehee, 2014; Strzelecka & Wicks, 2015).

Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment is one of the most crucial non-economic benefits of sustainable tourism (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008) and an essential element of successful tourism destination (e.g. Scheyven, 2000; Boley & McGehee, 2014). Psychological empowerment can occur when tourism initiatives promote resident self-esteem, pride in cultural traditions and a feeling of being able to assume new roles in their communities (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014). Boley and Gaither (in press) agree that an increase in self-esteem is linked to more positive attitudes towards visitors experiencing a local culture. This support for tourism matters especially in remote rural destinations and where interaction with locals is the core part of the tourist experience (Cole, 2006). While the past research from Boley et al., (2014) has found a strong relationship between psychological empowerment and support for tourism, the relationship has not been assessed in CEE context. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Psychological empowerment is a significant predictor of residents support for tourism

Social Empowerment

Social empowerment occurs when tourism related activities strengthen local relationships to increase community cohesion. Tourism can promote community cohesion through bringing residents together for tourism development projects (Scheyvens, 1999). These connections facilitate diffusion of resources such as information as well as generate broader identities and reciprocity (Putnam, 2000).

Strzelecka and Wicks (2010) demonstrate the potential of tourism planning mechanisms to foster community cohesion in the CEE context. They adopt interactional field theory (Kaufman & Wilkinson, 1967; Wilkinson, 1991) to discuss how tourism promotes interaction across different community groups and engages them in joint tourism-related activities. In this context tourism can be either the social glue that connects community members or the axe that splinters the community. However, Scheyvens (2003), concludes that only socially empowered individuals and groups work together to build a local tourism sector that benefits them and will be supported by local community. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H2: Social empowerment is a significant predictor of the residents support for tourism

Political Empowerment

Political empowerment increases residents' perceptions of sociopolitical control: the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as having motivation and capacity to utilize social and political resources (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Politically empowered individuals are aware of the resources available to them and they believe that they are able to achieve the desired outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995). Sofield, (2003) rightly stresses that this form of empowerment through tourism requires a supportive institutional framework. The supportive framework includes for example procedures for participatory decision-making (Strzelecka & Wicks, 2010). Cole (2006) notes that transferring knowledge to community also empowers residents as decision-makers. Farelly, (2011) stresses the importance of strong leadership in informed tourism decisions and successful knowledge transfer.

Active residents can shape future tourism according to their needs through participating in tourism decisions. In contrast, without active participation (political empowerment) locals "have inconvenience of tourism without economic advantages" (Sofield, 2003; p. 634). Therefore a scenario in which empowering residents in tourism decision-making has a positive effect on overall community support for tourism is plausible. The following hypothesis is put forward:

H3: Political empowerment is a significant predictor of residents support for tourism

Economic Benefits from Tourism

The relationship between residents economically benefiting from tourism and the positive perceptions of the industry has been a central issue discussed within the literature (e.g. Madrigal, 1993; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Sharpley, 2014). Moreover, Madrigal (1993) notes that the positive relationship between perceptions of tourism and economic reliance on the tourism industry has been the most consistent finding over the years. Scheyvens (1999, 2000) finds this emphasis on economic benefits concerning and suggests to focus on economic empowerment instead. She argues that while economic benefits from tourism are significant factor in support of

tourism, economic empowerment is more valuable indication of tourism success as it stresses lasting and widely distributed economic gains within a local community. To date there is no reliable measure for economic empowerment; however, the Economic Benefits from Tourism Scale (EBTS) is a valid and reliable measure to estimate resident perceptions of economically benefiting from tourism. Using the EBTS as a proxy from economic empowerment, the final hypothesis is:

H4: Economic empowerment is a significant predictor of support for tourism

Methods

Cross-cultural research is important for its ability to depict cultural differences that influence perceptions of various constructs (e.g. Malhotra, Agarwal & Peterson, 1996). With the importance of cross-cultural research in mind, this study sought to apply the RETS and the scales measuring economic empowerment and support for tourism in a CEE setting. The RETS' empowerment scales have been administered with a U.S. and Japanese context (see Boley & McGehee, 2014; Boley et al., 2015), but yet to be applied within a post-communist setting such CEE.

The research began with rigorous back translation of the RETS and the other scales used to ensure that they were functionally and conceptually equivalent within a Polish context. This is in line with the recommendations of Malhotra et al. (1996) to ensure functional and conceptual equivalence.

The translated scales were then administered in 17 out of the total of 29 rural towns and villages within the Choczewo District of Poland during the summer of 2015. Choczewo is a tourism destination located in the Kaszuby Seacoast region, in the northern part of the Pomeranian Province. The data collection method consisted of a self-administered, door-to-door, pen and paper questionnaire. The research team distributed 400 questionnaires in randomly selected locations. Out of 307 surveys returned to the team, 301 were usable. The data collection procedure aimed to emulate the one implemented in Boley and McGehee (2014).

Results

Prior to testing the proposed hypotheses, CFA was performed to assess model fit and the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The CFA revealed good model fit for the absolute fit indices and the incremental fit indices: chi-square (160)=321.47; RMSEA=0.06; CFI=0.94 (Table 2). Based upon RMSEA being less than 0.08 and CFI being higher than 0.90, it was concluded the model's fit was acceptable and close the standard cut off points (Hair et al., 2010). For convergent validity, Hair et al. (2010) recommend that at a minimum all factor loadings should be statistically significant with loadings that 0.5 or higher, AVE should be above 50% and construct reliability (CR) values higher than 0.7. These measure on convergent validity test the degree to which all the items of the scale consistently measuring the same latent construct (Hair et al., 2010). All requirements for convergent validity were met as seen in Table 1. For discriminant validity, all constructs AVE scores were higher than the squared correlations between other constructs indicating each construct was in fact unique.

Table 1: CFA of empowerment scales, economic benefit scale, and support for tourism scale.

Scale	Item Description	N	Mean	R	Error	AVE	CR
Psychological Empowerment	<i>Tourism in Choczewo...</i>					60%	0.84
	Makes me proud to be a Choczewo Resident	299	3.83	0.80*	0.53		
	Makes me feel special because people travel to see my county's unique features	299	3.67	0.83*	0.50		
	Makes me want to tell others about what we have to offer in Choczewo	298	3.67	0.78*	0.57		
	Reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors	298	3.60	0.70*	0.69		
Social Empowerment	Makes me want to work to keep Choczewo special	299	4.13	0.75*	0.52		
	<i>Tourism in Choczewo ...</i>					62%	0.77
	Makes me feel more connected to my community	299	3.52	0.82*	0.50		
	Fosters a sense of 'community spirit' within me	298	3.41	0.87*	0.37		
Political Empowerment	Provides ways for me to get involved in my community	300	3.51	0.66*	0.82		
	<i>I feel like...</i>					57%	0.77
	I have a voice in Choczewo tourism development	298	2.60	0.71*	0.82		
	I have access to the decision making process when it comes to tourism in Choczewo	297	2.31	0.79*	0.57		
	My vote makes a difference in how tourism is developed in Choczewo	298	2.37	0.78*	0.56		
Economic Benefit	I have an outlet to share my concerns about tourism development in Choczewo	297	2.81	0.73*	0.79		
	<i>Tourism in Choczewo helps me pay my bills</i>					57%	0.72
	Tourism in Choczewo helps me pay my bills	296	2.51	0.78*	0.76		
	A portion of my income is tied to tourism in Choczewo	298	2.22	0.81*	0.72		
	I would economically benefit from more tourism development in Choczewo	297	2.81	0.79*	0.87		
Support for Tourism	My family's economic future depends upon tourism in Choczewo	296	2.45	0.63*	1.23		
	<i>Choczewo should support the promotion of tourism</i>					56%	0.86
	I believe tourism should be actively encouraged in Choczewo	300	4.56	0.65*	0.39		
	I support tourism and want to see it remain important to Choczewo	298	4.28	0.68*	0.54		
	Choczewo should remain a tourist destination	299	4.54	0.83*	0.26		
	Choczewo should support the promotion of tourism	298	4.59	0.82*	0.26		

Note: Measure of model fit: chi-square (160)=321.47; RMSEA=0.06; CFI=0.94

R = standardized regression coefficient; AVE = average variance extracted; and CR = construct reliability.

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

*p = .001

Table 2. Correlations and Squared Correlations between Constructs

	PSY	SOC	POL	EB	ST
Psychological Empowerment (PSY)	0.60	0.45	0.03	0.15	0.39
Social Empowerment (SOC)	0.67***	0.62	0.08	0.10	0.21
Political Empowerment (POL)	0.19**	0.28***	0.57	0.07	0.01
Personal Economic Benefit from Tourism (EB)	0.39***	0.32***	0.27***	0.57	0.07
Support for Tourism (ST)	0.62***	0.46***	0.09	0.26***	0.56

Note: Values below the diagonal are correlation estimates and values above the diagonal are squared correlations. Values on the diagonal line in bold are average variance extracted estimates
 *** = correlations are significant at $p = .001$. ** = significant at $p = .01$.

Following the validation of the measurement model, hypotheses 1–4 were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). The structural model’s fit was assessed using the same model fit statistics from the CFA: chi-square (166)=503.11 ($p=0.001$), RMSEA = .08, CFI = .88.

The 4 proposed hypotheses were tested using two criteria: 1) the statistical significance of the relationship at the 0.05 level and 2) the nature of the relationship as hypothesized (+ or -). Only H 1 was supported by the SEM model (Table 3). Thus there is a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and support for tourism ($\beta=0.57^*$, $p=.000$). H2 was partially supported with a positive relationship between social empowerment and support for tourism ($\beta=0.12$), but a significance level of 0.051.

Table 3. Hypothesized Relationships between Constructs and Observed Relationship from the SEM

Hypothesized Relationship	Std. Regression Weights	P	Support for Relationship
Personal Economic Benefit → Support for Tourism	0.04	.545	N
Psychological Empowerment → Support for Tourism	0.57*	.000	Y
Social Empowerment → Support for Tourism	0.12	.051	Y/N
Political Empowerment → Support for Tourism	-0.02	.599	N

R^2 for “Support of Tourism” = 0.18

Discussion and Conclusions

The study sought to contribute to literature by examining empowerment in the post-communist setting of Choczewo, Poland. The results of the CFA confirmed the reliability and validity of the RETS in a post-communist CEE setting. The strong performance of the scale in this setting provides further justification for the RETS’ international validity and supports its use for measuring empowerment in other international settings. The results of the SEM are also of interest to resident attitude researchers because psychological empowerment was found to be the best predictor of resident support for tourism. This finding aligns with the work of Boley et al., (2014) and Maruyama, Woosnam, and Boley (under review) who have also found the increasing pride and self-esteem associated with psychological empowerment to be a great predictor of residents support for tourism.

Interestingly, hypotheses 2,3,4 were not supported by the model. It should be noted that *social empowerment* and *economically benefiting from tourism* had significant and positive correlations with support for tourism, but these were masked by *psychological empowerment* when included in the model. The lack of a link between economic benefits from tourism and support for tourism contradicts commonly accepted conviction about the relationship between economic benefits and support for tourism (mainly in western cultural context). This lack of relationship the two constructs could be linked to less developed rural tourism or values placed on tourism development and non-economic expectations from such development (such as pride, recognition) rather than economic benefits alone. An explanation for the lack of link between political empowerment and support for tourism could come through work of Strzelecka and Wicks (2015), who found disconnect between residents and local authorities within rural Pomerania. While major investments in tourism sector in rural areas are likely to come from the public sector (government or EU through local NGO-s), resident don't see how these tourism initiatives benefit them so they don't feel they want to participate in decisions making about government-led tourism development.

In summary, the results from this work in Choczewo provide further credence for the importance of approaching resident attitudes towards tourism with more holistic theories such as WFSR that allow for the inclusion on non-economic constructs like empowerment.

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