

EXPLORING RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT WITHIN TOURISM



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Despite the importance of involving residents in local tourism, few research studies have investigated the concept of empowerment. A novel study conducted by UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management researchers Dr. Kayode D. Aleshinloye and Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci and their collaborators explores the drivers of empowerment within tourism and, in turn, the factors that empowerment influences. Their research highlights the potential benefits for residents, such as improved quality of life and attachment to their surroundings, and has important practical implications for tourism planners and policymakers.

Tourism has a profound impact on residents within local communities. Prior research highlights the benefits of residents being able to engage with tourism. A key aspect of this positive involvement is empowerment, whereby local communities have the authority to gather resources, make decisions, and act on issues they define as important. Resident empowerment has become an integral element of sustainable tourism, following its success within the sectors of political science, education, health, and general equality. Despite the key role empowerment plays, it remains largely unexplored within the tourism sector. Studies tend to focus on the economic benefits experienced by residents,

such as greater employment opportunities and wealth retention within the community. Aside from financial benefits, research has revealed that empowerment and attachment are the two main constructs that can help explain residents' attitudes towards tourism. Dr. Kayode D. Aleshinloye and Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management and their collaborators have undertaken research to bridge the knowledge gap in empowerment within tourism, exploring what drives this concept and how it benefits residents. Their study focuses on assessing how factors such as involvement and economic benefit may help to foster empowerment. They believe that having a better understanding of this concept can enable practitioners to focus on increasing



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empowerment among residents. The research also highlights the potential benefits that empowerment may bring to residents, such as strengthening their attachment to the local area and improving quality of life.

FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPOWERMENT

Within the tourism literature the importance of involving residents as stakeholders is well documented. These individuals have vital opinions about the impact of tourism within their community, making it imperative they have a voice that is listened to. Involving residents in a meaningful way helps to foster trust with the tourism industry. This is especially important when issues arise, and support is needed from the local community. If practitioners do not take the time to involve residents, feelings of exclusion may develop, as well as a lack of support which may prevent tourism from advancing. Research in rural Texas revealed that greater local knowledge about tourism had a positive impact upon residents' perceptions around empowerment. Based on the literature, the researchers hypothesised that the important first step towards empowerment is ensuring that residents have knowledge relating to tourism which would have a positive

impact on their psychological, social, and political empowerment.

BENEFITS OF EMPOWERMENT

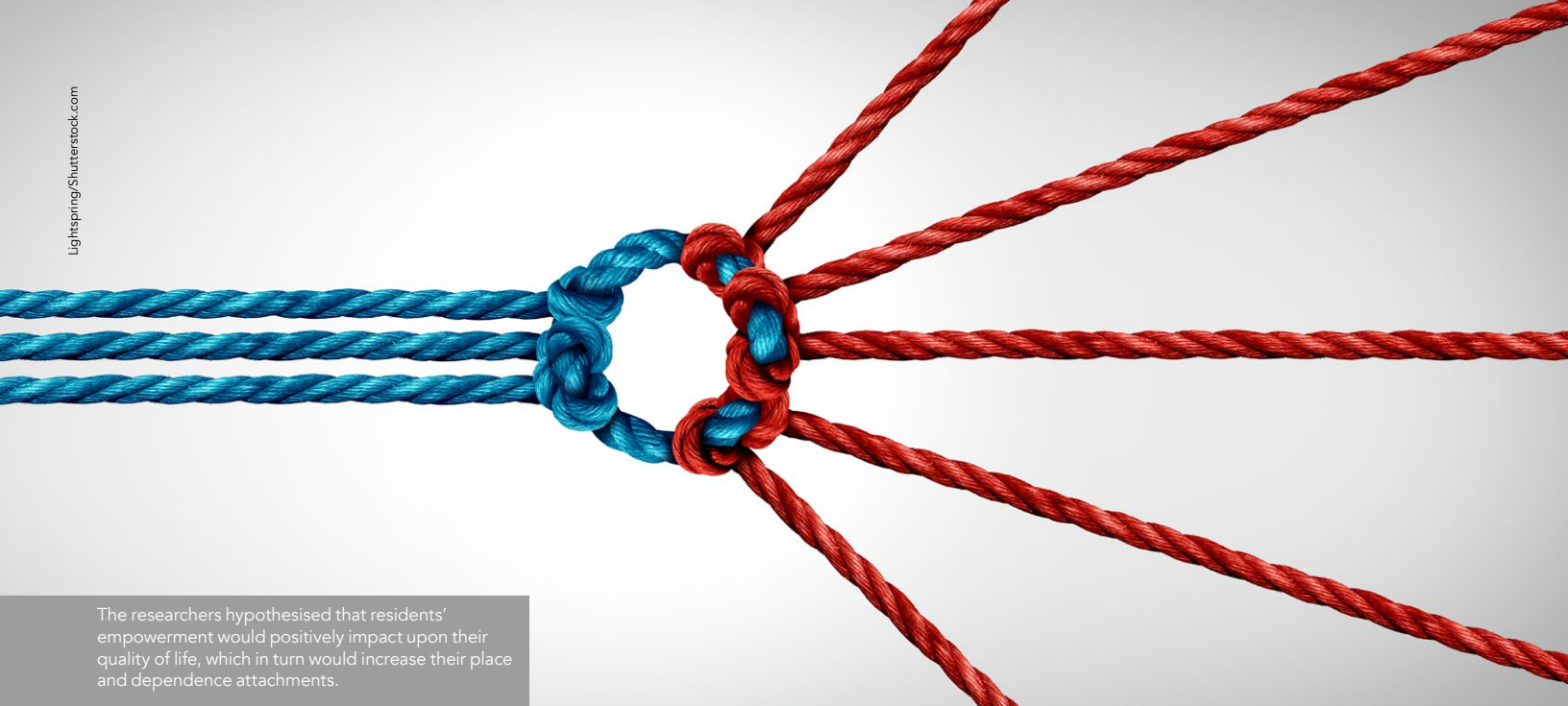
The research team were particularly keen to understand how increasing residents' empowerment may generate positive outcomes beyond tourism. A key benefit highlighted within the literature is place attachment which relates to residents developing a strong bond with their surroundings. Dependence attachment can also occur, when residents feel their local area enables them to undertake activities which meet their life goals. There are opposing

views of the relational influence between empowerment and attachment. One view is that residents who are more attached to their local community have an increased sense of empowerment. However, the researchers believe there is stronger evidence to suggest that empowerment is a precursor to influencing residents' attachment. Therefore, their research focuses on exploring whether residents who felt more empowered were also more likely to develop a sense of attachment. Aleshinloye and Tasci also investigated if residents' quality of life improved when empowerment was present. Literature around this can be contentious: quality of life is subjective and therefore difficult to measure. Despite few studies in this area the researchers felt it was logical to expect that residents' empowerment would positively impact upon their quality of life, which in turn would increase their place and dependence attachments.

MEASURING ATTITUDES OF ORLANDO RESIDENTS

The researchers chose to conduct their research within the top U.S. tourist destination of Orlando, Florida. In 2019, VisitOrlando stated that a staggering 68.55 million domestic and 6.48 million international visitors were attracted to the region. Despite visitor spending reaching \$45 billion, 19% of Orlando residents live in poverty. This is greater than the average percentage of people living in poverty within Florida state. The researchers felt this juxtaposition between tourism wealth and resident poverty necessitated the need to further investigate the attitudes of these residents. Using census data, the researchers randomly selected a number of households within the region to take part in the research. Four hundred and twenty-five residents completed a pen-and-paper questionnaire asking about their involvement and attitudes





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towards tourism. Their responses were analysed to assess residents' psychological, social, and political empowerment in relation to tourism, quality of life and attachment.

KEY STUDY FINDINGS

Results from the study revealed that Orlando residents perceive themselves as having low involvement in local tourism and receive little economic benefit from it. Interestingly, they demonstrated lower social and political empowerment than psychological empowerment. The research team believe this discrepancy could be due to residents' lack of knowledge in relation to tourism within their local area. Prior research has shown that having the correct information and involvement can lead to greater support

with tourism. Aleshinloye and Tasci believe that although residents may not be playing an active role within the tourism sector it may be indirectly influencing their quality of life.

A key element within the research was investigating the impact economic benefits have upon empowerment. Often these positive financial influences may be indirect, such as increased employment opportunities or additional funds for local governments. Interestingly, the research found that economic benefits may have a greater impact on residents' attachment to the area, compared to their overall quality of life. Despite its impact on place attachment, the study found that residents' involvement with local tourism had a much

The study highlights how important it is to generate this type of attachment, as it can change the appearance and meaning of tourist destinations, benefiting both residents and tourists. Findings also revealed that place-dependence could be predicted by all three types of empowerment. This indicates that residents who identify with an area and feel it services their personal goals are much more likely to support local tourism. Although the research revealed empowerment is a stronger predictor of attachment than quality of life, these findings provide compelling evidence for the role of place attachment when measuring residents' attitudes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TOURISM

Aleshinloye, Tasci, and their collaborators believe their findings will be of interest to a range of industry professionals including tourism practitioners and scholars. Their study is novel in its approach and addresses both the drivers and outcomes of residents' empowerment in relation to tourism. It bridges an important gap in knowledge surrounding the concept of empowerment within tourism. The study reinforces the importance of recognising residents' needs as well as encouraging their involvement as vital stakeholders. The researchers feel it is particularly important that destination marketers launch campaigns that communicate how feelings of empowerment through tourism can have a positive impact on the lives of residents, which will undoubtedly improve the experience of tourists in these regions.

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In terms of attachment, the research demonstrated that psychological empowerment had the most significant impact on place attachment and identity.

THE STUDY REINFORCES THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNISING RESIDENTS' NEEDS AS WELL AS ENCOURAGING THEIR INVOLVEMENT AS VITAL STAKEHOLDERS.

from residents, as well as giving rise to entrepreneurial attitudes. The researchers did acknowledge that it was difficult to determine whether this shortage of knowledge was due to lack of interest or low engagement from those in positions of power. Interestingly, the study revealed that residents' quality of life was high, despite their lack of engagement

RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Kayode D. Aleshinloye and Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci investigate the concept of resident empowerment within tourism.

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PERSONAL RESPONSE

Based on your research findings, what are the most effective actions tourism professionals can take to improve empowerment among residents?

// Tourism policy-makers and destination marketers should engage with residents by getting them involve in decision-making on tourism matters since they live with both positive and negative impacts. The resident involvement in tourism issues in their locality is a form of empowerment and the more they feel involved, they more they are empowered on matters affecting their quality of life. //



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