



Measuring empowerment in an eastern context: Findings from Japan



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Cross-cultural validity of Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) tested.
- Cross-cultural validity of RETS confirmed in Oizumi, Japan sample.
- CFA found RETS to have construct, convergent, discriminant and nomological validity.
- RETS presented as cross-culturally valid scale to measure resident empowerment.
- RETS confirmed a tool for managers to assess resident perceptions of empowerment.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 September 2014

Accepted 14 January 2015

Available online 14 February 2015

Keywords:

Empowerment

Sustainable tourism

Cross-cultural validity

Scale development

Confirmatory factor analysis

Resident attitudes toward tourism

Community participation

ABSTRACT

With the empirical research on resident empowerment in its infancy, this study sought to add to the scant literature by testing the cross-cultural validity of the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) within the town of Oizumi, Japan. Such a destination was chosen because it provided a culture vastly different from the original rural Virginia, U.S. sample across Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) performed on the Oizumi sample ($n = 456$) demonstrated that the RETS and its factors of psychological, social, and political empowerment were construct valid and shared the same psychometric properties originally found in Boley and McGehee's study (2014). These findings from the Oizumi, Japan sample support the international applicability of the RETS and provide managers with a valid tool for tracking the effectiveness of their marketing and management efforts aimed at increasing resident empowerment.

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1. Introduction

Within the tourism literature's movement toward sustainability over the last 30 years (McGehee et al., 2013), there has been an overwhelming consensus that resident involvement is essential for tourism to be considered sustainable (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005; Cole, 2006; Di Castri, 2004; Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon, 2013; Scheyvens, 1999; Sofield, 2003). This increasing focus on resident involvement has pushed the concept of resident empowerment into the spotlight of sustainable tourism (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Boley, McGehee, Perdue, & Long, 2014; Cole, 2006; Scheyvens,

1999; Sofield, 2003). Cole (2006, p. 631) distinguishes empowerment from community participation by referring to empowerment as the "top end of the participation ladder where members of a community are active agents of change and they have the ability to find solutions to their problems, make decisions, implement actions and evaluate their solutions." Resident empowerment is seen as an important research area because of its far-reaching intrinsic and extrinsic implications to not only resident attitudes towards tourism (Boley et al., 2014), community well-being (Buzinde, Kalavar, & Melubo, 2014), and international development goals (Scheyvens, 2002; Sofield, 2003), but also to destination competitiveness through including residents in marketing initiatives aimed at highlighting the destination from a local perspective (Boley et al., 2014; Bosak, Boley, & Zaret, 2010).

While empowerment has been at the center of the rhetoric around sustainable tourism development for quite some time and

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there have been numerous conceptual and qualitative articles published on the subject, the empirical measurement of empowerment is only in its infancy. Constituting this nascent literature is Boley and McGehee's (2014) development and validation of the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS). According to Boley and McGehee (2014), the RETS is a 12-item scale designed to measure resident perceptions of psychological, social, and political empowerment through tourism development.

Even though the RETS was developed following Churchill's (1979) rigorous scale development procedures and demonstrated construct validity in its original sample, the scale's widespread applicability is currently hindered from the original sample being limited to only one culture (Virginia, USA) and one setting (rural). While scale development is a common technique within the tourism literature (i.e. Boley, Nickerson, & Bosak, 2011; Woosnam & Norman, 2010), few studies have taken the initiative to go beyond the initial scale development process and examine the cross cultural validity of measures (Hosany, Prayag, Deesilatham, Caušević, & Odeh, 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Sirakaya-Turk, Ekinci, & Kaya, 2007). This is a significant limitation that undermines the validity of many of the measures used within the tourism literature. Hosany et al. (2014) strongly recommend that in order to develop measurement norms for international tourism research, the cross-cultural validity of scales needs to be tested.

With this research gap in mind, the present study seeks to test the cross-cultural validity of the RETS using a sample of residents from the fairly urbanized town of Oizumi, Japan. Oizumi, Japan was chosen because it represents a significantly different culture from the Virginia sample in the United States across Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980, 1994). The Virginia, USA sample and the Oizumi, Japan sample specifically differ across Hofstede's cultural dimensions of 1) power distance, 2) individualism, 3) masculinity, 4) uncertainty avoidance, and 5) indulgence with Japan being a more hierarchical society than the U.S., more collectively focused, more masculine, having less of a tolerance for uncertainty, and less indulgent than the United States (see Hofstede, 2014 for more specifics). In addition to providing an international application of the scale across different cultures, Oizumi, Japan, with a population of 41,098 residents and a density of 2292 people per km², provides a more urban application of the scale compared to the rural Virginia sample with approximately 25 residents per km². If the RETS's validity is confirmed through this Japanese sample, it will provide stronger justification for the scale's acceptance as a universal measure of resident perceptions of empowerment. The paper proceeds with a literature review on the dimensions of empowerment (i.e., psychological, social, and political) included in the scale before presenting how the scale's validity was tested in accordance with Malhotra, Agarwal, and Peterson (1996) and Choudhry's (1986) criteria to determine scalar/metric equivalence of measures across cultures.

2. Literature review

Empowerment is at the philosophical core of sustainable tourism (Cole, 2006; Sofield, 2003) and has strong ties to multiple disciplines and their respective struggles to overcome social injustices. Perkins and Zimmerman (1995, p. 571) write that "empowerment has become a vital construct for understanding the development of individuals, organization and communities." Growing out of the early work on empowerment by Freire (1973) focused on the liberation of poor communities in Brazil through education, empowerment has become part of the popular vernacular and has proliferated as a compelling research area across many disciplines including psychology, education, and

sustainable development (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Sofield, 2003).

This dynamism centered on empowerment is evident within the tourism literature as well, but the term empowerment has been often embedded in the broader literature on public participation, community well-being, and resident attitudes toward tourism (Buzinde et al., 2014; Byrd, 2007; Byrd, Cárdenas, & Greenwood, 2008). Examples of empowerment within the public participation literature include Byrd et al. (2008, p. 201) emphasis that "stakeholder involvement is a critical part of sustainable tourism development" and that "for sustainable tourism to be successful, stakeholders must be involved in the process" (Byrd, 2007). Byrd is not alone with this call for broad stakeholder inclusion in the tourism planning process. Many other including Beierle (1998), Ellis and Sheridan (2014), and Marzuki and Hay (2013) have reached the same conclusions and make similar proclamations about the importance of including residents in the planning process. Within the tourism and community well-being literature, Buzinde et al. (2014) recognize the strong connections between empowerment and a community's well-being. They specifically write

"community well-being is ontologically premised on the view that it is paramount for development to meaningfully incorporate local indigenous perspectives on issues of community well-being, and to empower the community to draw on local indigenous knowledge in order to devise long-term sustainable solutions. In this sense the literature on community well-being is closely related to the theory of participatory development which emphasizes local decision making in the development processes and advocates for meaningful involvement of locals and indigenous knowledge." (Buzinde et al., 2014, p. 23).

They continue to make the connections between community well-being and empowerment by stating "such orientations are valuable because they empower marginalized groups and aid eventual emergence from poverty" (Buzinde et al., 2014, p. 23). The resident attitude literature is also full of references to the importance resident power plays into how they perceive the positive and negative impacts of tourism and their ultimate support of tourism (Látková & Vogt, 2012; Madrigal, 1993; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012) even though it has now only been recently been referred to as empowerment and included as a direct antecedent (Boley et al., 2014).

While these efforts at increasing public participation and stakeholder involvement are noteworthy and have laid the groundwork for the current discussion of empowerment within the tourism literature, they fall short of the broader literature's interpretation of empowerment in two main ways. First, Arnstein (1969) and Choguill's (1996) both recognize empowerment as the highest form of community participation and mention that mere calls for public participation does not guarantee empowerment. Second, the above conceptualization of public participation and stakeholder involvement does not necessarily embrace the multi-dimensional nature of empowerment recognized across the psychology and development literature (Friedmann, 1992; Rappaport, 1984).

Even though empowerment of the local residents underpins all three of these areas of tourism research mentioned above, the term did not start to become more frequently used within the tourism literature until Scheyvens' (1999) seminal article depicting what empowerment looks like within an ecotourism context. Using the development literature's multi-dimensional conceptualization of empowerment, Scheyvens (1999) outlined how

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