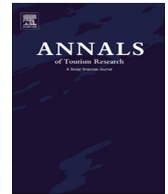




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# Place attachment and empowerment: Do residents need to be attached to be empowered?



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## ABSTRACT

Within resident attitude research, place attachment and empowerment are two of the most prominent non-economic constructs used to explain residents' attitudes toward tourism. This research explores the relationship between the two and whether residents' perceptions of place identity, place dependence and nature bonding affect perceptions of being empowered through tourism. The relationship is tested within the rural destination of Choczewo, Poland. Results reveal that place identity, place dependence, and nature bonding directly influence residents' perceptions of psychological and social empowerment through tourism. However, only place dependence predicts residents' ability to feel politically empowered through tourism. Results from this study extend the model of residents' attitudes toward tourism by explaining how societal factors such as resident bonding with the socio-physical environment enable residents to become more empowered through tourism development.

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## Introduction

Within resident attitude research, place attachment and empowerment are two of the most prominent non-economic constructs used to explain why residents support or oppose tourism development (Boley, McGehee, Perdue, & Long, 2014; Kaján, 2014; Strzelecka, Boley, & Strzelecka, 2017; Styliadis, Biran, Sit, & Szivas, 2014). While these two constructs have been independently used to explain residents' attitudes toward tourism, the relationship between them has yet to be explored.

Place attachment concerns the positive emotional bonds that develop between individuals and their socio-physical environment (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Gustafson, 2001; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Stedman, 2002). These attachment bonds are essential in planning for tourism development because of how tourism affects not only the appearance of local places, but also the meanings of places and the connections residents have with others and nature within the places visited by tourists. Tourism can either threaten or enhance special meanings ascribed by locals to these places (Kaján, 2014; Manzo & Perkins, 2006). While place attachment has been shown to predict resident attitudes toward tourism (e.g., Gu & Ryan, 2008; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Wang & Chen, 2015), the examination of how perceptions of place attachment influence residents' perceptions of empowerment through tourism is an under-researched area, which if

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addressed, has the potential to contribute greatly towards better understanding how residents' bonding with local places enables them to benefit from tourism.

The resident empowerment literature, in turn, describes how the tourism development process can either psychologically, socially, politically, and economically empower or disempower residents depending on how tourism affects residents' self-esteem, community cohesion, agency, and economic development (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Cole, 2006). With empowerment being one of the more important non-economic benefits from tourism (Boley et al., 2014; Scheyvens, 2002), residents' bonds with local places will arguably affect perceptions of tourism development, and thus influence how empowered individuals can become through tourism. Essentially, peoples' positive emotional bonding with their socio-physical environment could be an important prerequisite for empowerment. Tourism's well-documented ability to change destinations' socio-physical environments for the better or worse will either strengthen or weaken the effects of psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment.

With little research focusing on the relationship between these two important constructs, this paper seeks to consider the effect of place attachment on residents' perceptions of psychological, social and political empowerment. The construct of place attachment is guided by Raymond, Brown, and Weber's (2010) multi-dimensional perspective, which considers the construct comprised of place identity, place dependence, and nature bonding<sup>1</sup>. Empowerment is operationalized using the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (Boley, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2015; Boley & McGehee, 2014; Strzelecka et al., 2017).

While place attachment and empowerment currently hold prominent positions within the extended Perdue, Long, and Allen (1990) model of resident support for tourism independently, this study makes an important theoretical contribution by combining the constructs within the same model to see how well place attachment explains residents' ability to become empowered through tourism. Moreover, with residents' empowerment building upon identity, social relations, local politics and economy (Boley et al., 2014; Strzelecka et al., 2017), it is essential to investigate how these societal factors influence perceptions of this form of empowerment.

The hypothesized relationship between place attachment and empowerment is tested within the tourism destination of Choczewo, Poland located along the coast of the Baltic Sea. Choczewo municipality is an interesting locale to explore this relationship between place attachment and empowerment given Poland is a former communist state with a post-collective, farm-based economy, which has most recently considered tourism a highly viable option for rural development.

## Literature review

### *Resident empowerment*

Empowerment occurs as a result of "a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs." (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). In a tourism context, empowerment may be linked to individual changes, interpersonal changes and social structural changes (Kieffer, 1984; Simmons & Parsons, 1983). While many scholars have focused on empowerment using a unidimensional 'political power' perspective (e.g., Cole, 2006; Moswete & Lacey, 2014), a recent trend in tourism research is developing to view empowerment as a multi-dimensional construct, with psychological, social, political, and economic facets (Boley et al., 2014; Scheyvens, 1999; Strzelecka et al., 2017). Given the fact that reliable scales have only been developed for the psychological, social, and political dimensions of empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014), this study will consider hypothesized relationships between residents' place attachment and these three empowerment dimensions.

### *Psychological empowerment*

Psychological empowerment occurs when tourism initiatives promote residents' self-esteem and pride (Ramos & Prideaux, 2013). It can arise from situations when pride and self-esteem are enhanced from visitors who recognize the value of the natural and cultural resources within a community they visit (Scheyvens, 1999). The pride and self-esteem associated with psychological empowerment have been recognized as some of the most fundamental non-economic benefits of tourism (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008) and is an essential element of a successful sustainable tourism destination (Scheyvens, 1999). Boley et al. (2014) also found psychological empowerment to be one of the best predictors of resident support for tourism.

With this in mind, it is of interest to explore how well place attachment explains residents' ability to be psychologically empowered from tourism. It is widely accepted that tourism can affect the socio-physical connection residents have to their local cultural landscapes (e.g., Cohen, 1988; Cole, 2007; Wang, 1999). This positive or negative effect of tourism on residents' perceptions of place attachment is believed to influence residents' ability take pride in their communities.

<sup>1</sup> Raymond et al.'s (2010) place attachment dimensions of family bonding and friend bonding were not included in the study because the scales are currently under-identified, each with only two items, and were found to have marginal coefficient alpha reliability estimates in previous studies (i.e., 0.70 and 0.65 respectively).

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