



Tourism development and trust in local government



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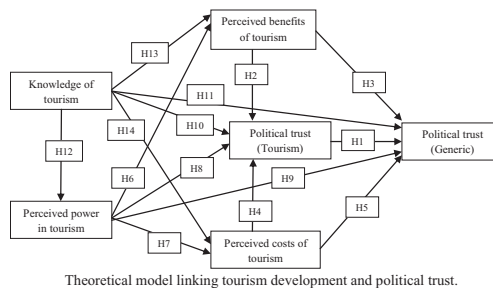
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HIGHLIGHTS

- The study provides a new perspective on the political dimension of tourism.
- Political trust in tourism influences general level of political trust.
- Community benefits from tourism influence the two dimensions of political trust.
- Residents' knowledge of and power in tourism predicts political trust.
- Tourism industry deserves more respect among political scientists.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

The relationship between tourism development and citizens' trust in government is an under-researched area. This study developed a model that established theoretical relationships between important variables of tourism development and two types of political trust: political trust in the specific context of tourism and general level of political trust. Findings suggest a significant relationship between the two constructs. Results indicate that communities should feel empowered in tourism, should be knowledgeable of the sector, and should derive benefits from development for them to trust local government. The most important lesson of the study is that if the tourism sector is properly managed and developed, it can have beneficial political effects for governments such as increasing their legitimacy vis-à-vis citizens. The paper argues that like defense and social policies, tourism development have a determining impact on political trust and the industry therefore deserves more respect among political scientists.

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1. Introduction

Trust is central to a modern society and is essential for social, political, and community relations (Freitag & Bühlmann, 2009). Consequently, the notion of trust has attracted the attention of several social science researchers. Political scientists (e.g. Hardin, 2013; Levi & Stoker, 2000) have shown a particular interest in understanding citizens' trust in government, commonly referred to as political trust. Political trust is defined as citizens' beliefs that the political system or some of it will produce preferred outcomes even

in the absence of constant scrutiny (Miller & Listhaug, 1990). Such studies are driven by the notion that trust links citizens with institutions that are intended to represent them (Bianco, 1994). Trust allows a government to maintain effective legitimacy and authority in decision-making and is important for good governance, sustainability of the political system, and democratic consolidation (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2005; Park & Blenkinsopp, 2011). Thus, maintaining citizens' trust is an important political objective of any government in power.

Government is the principal actor in the political process of tourism development (Bramwell, 2011; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2012). It cannot afford to neglect the industry in view of its huge economic, social, and political significance (Richter, 1983). In consequence, development of tourism has important

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implications for political trust. For example, inequalities arising from tourism development hinder citizens' trust in government while tourism policies promoting social equality are likely to promote trust. Also, while government and elite stakeholders often have a direct and powerful influence on tourism development discourses, public interests tend to be marginalized (Dredge, 2010). Consequently, legitimacy of government decisions can be questioned, adversely affecting citizens' trust (McAllister & Wanna, 2001). Literature is rich with evidence of such conflicts in and adverse local impacts of tourism development which may hinder public trust in government (see for e.g. Dredge, 2010; Yang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2013).

Declining trust in the context of tourism development may have implications for citizens' broader level of trust in government because studies suggest that political trust is determined by citizens' trust in specific services and their related political-administrative systems (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2005). This is particularly true for locally-based services (such as tourism) where the public are usually better acquainted with the service organizations and the service providers than those located at a greater distance (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2005). Understanding such a relationship in the context of tourism development is even more complex, yet important, because many agencies of the state, such as local government institutions have an interest in tourism planning although they are not tourism-specific institutions (Hall, 2000). Even if the connection between tourism development and political trust appears to be obvious, there is a dearth of literature on this topic. This paper fills this important knowledge gap by developing a theoretical model linking tourism development with citizens' trust in government actors (Fig. 1).

The research is grounded in political economy of state intervention in tourism and draws from social exchange theory (SET) to build the theoretical model. The latter incorporates variables such as trust, power, knowledge, and benefits and costs of tourism which are central to any exchange process between social actors (Ap, 1992; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Following recommendations of researchers (e.g. Levi & Stoker, 2000), the model distinguishes and proposes a theoretical relationship between domain specific political trust and generic political trust. The former refers to citizens' trust in local government in the specific context of tourism development while the latter refers to citizens' general level of trust in local government. Based on SET and empirical research in political science and tourism, our theoretical model proposes four

variables that influence the two dimensions of political trust: residents' perceived benefits and costs of tourism, their level of power in tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013) and their knowledge of tourism (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012). Residents' knowledge is also proposed to influence their level of power (Moscardo, 2005, 2011) and their perceived benefits and costs of tourism (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005). The model is tested using data collected from residents of Niagara Region, Canada.

This study makes some important theoretical and practical contributions to tourism literature. While tourism scholars have paid close attention to the contribution of tourism to wider objectives of government such as promoting economic growth and development (e.g. Chou, 2013) and poverty relief (e.g. Blake, Arbache, Sinclair, & Teles, 2008), the relationship between tourism development and political trust remains to be investigated. Although some tourism researchers have recently started paying attention to the concept of political trust (e.g. Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Nunkoo et al., 2012; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013), such research is limited because they do not address whether tourism development may influence citizens' general level of trust in government. Tourism and political science researchers and policy-makers have grossly neglected the relationship between tourism development and citizens' trust in government despite the fact that tourism is "immensely important politically" (Richter, 1983, p. 314).

2. Local government, tourism development, and political trust

The role of government in tourism development and planning has been a subject of academic interests for decades (e.g. Bramwell, 2011; Ruhanen, 2013). Political economy, which is a broad social theory concerned with how politics affect choices in society (Bramwell, 2011), is a useful concept for understanding government's role in tourism development and political trust (Nunkoo & Smith, 2013). For Harvey (2010), in political economy, the social system is considered as a whole, and hence the various aspects of society are part of that whole. Thus, central to political economy is the notion that the state is a "social relation", is "socially embedded" and that its "apparatuses and practices are materially interdependent with other institutional orders and social practices" (Jessop, 2008, p. 1, 5). Political economy considers government to have a central role in tourism development and planning (Wang &

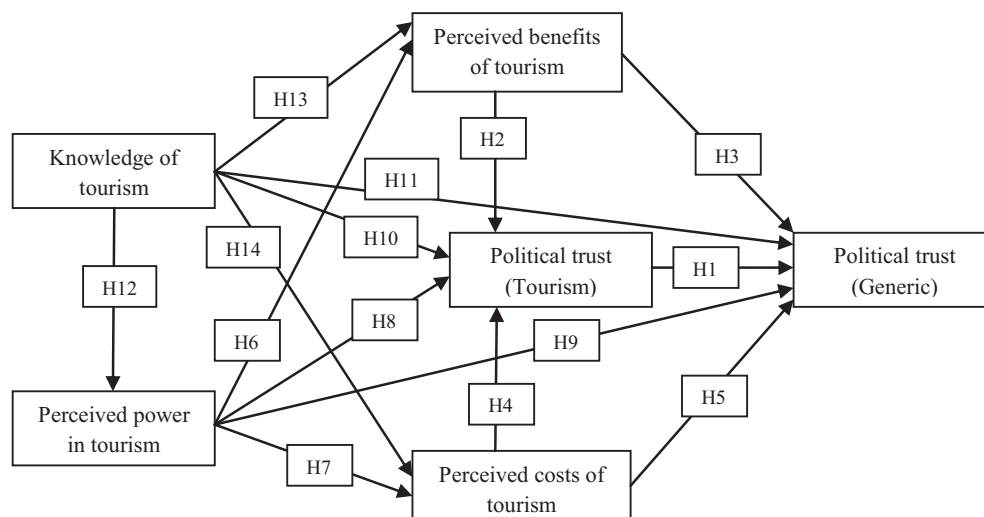


Fig. 1. Theoretical model linking tourism development with trust in government.

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