

## 1440 TOURISM BELIEFS, CONSERVATION PREFERENCES, AND SUPPORT FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN AN EMERGENT RURAL DESTINATION

### ABSTRACT

In the last 25 years a vast literature on attitudes of host communities regarding tourism development has been produced, usually modelling support for further tourism development after residents' beliefs about economic, social, and environmental benefits and costs of tourism. This paper aims contributing to the literature over two different grounds: on one hand, it includes expectations about affective outcomes of tourism, along with cognitive beliefs, to better explain overall attitude towards tourism; on the other hand, it assesses how conservation-related values do influence support for tourism. Based on literature gaps, a model was designed integrating two central features: (i) an overall evaluative attitude mediating the relationship between affective and cognitive belief composites and support for tourism; (ii) a measure of preferences regarding municipal conservation policies moderating the relationship between attitude and support. It was assessed from data collected in a quota sample of 349 residents in a municipality of North Portugal largely covered by a natural park with some natural and rural attractions. Quotas were defined proportionally according to the population distribution in typology of place (town versus villages) and in three demographic characteristics: sex, age, and education. Measures' reliability and validity and paths between variables are estimated by SmartPLS software. Results show that both positive and negative affective changes are expected, but only the positive expectations contribute to explain overall attitude. As to cognitive beliefs, most residents see no significant impacts or they are moderately optimistic regarding economic and environmental effects of tourism. A noteworthy result is that the global evaluative attitude towards tourism is much more dependent on the positive affective outcomes from tourism than on the instrumental outcomes. The overall attitude has a positive effect on support, fully mediating the contribution of beliefs to explain support. On the other hand, leaning for conservation policies negatively affects support for tourism development. There is an additional positive interaction effect between attitude towards tourism and preference for conservation, meaning that people who strongly want the municipal government body to have conservation policies tend to be less supportive for tourism development, but more responsive to the effect of attitudes. On the opposite, people who want the municipal government to be less focussed on conservation, tend to be firm supporters of tourism, so their support is less dependent on the attitude. Both business and academic discourse tend to emphasise that rural destinations' development benefits from the preservation of central features from rural physiography and culture in order to keep their attractiveness and competitiveness. However, this paper's results suggest that, at least in this particular emergent rural destination, a conflict is apparent between residents' conservation concerns and their support for tourism. We then interpret the overall favourable attitude and warm support as a manifestation of low concern with rural conservation and with potential negative impacts from tourism.

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