

## TITLE

# ***CONSERVATION PREFERENCES AND SUPPORT FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS***

## Abstract

**Don't forgot to refer in your abstract: the main objective, methodology, results/conclusions, implications and originality of the study.**

This paper aims contributing to the literature about attitudes of host communities towards tourism development (Nunkoo & Smith, 2013) over two different grounds: on one hand, it includes expectations about affective outcomes of tourism development, along with cognitive beliefs (Lindberg & Johnson, 1997), to better explain overall attitude towards tourism; on the other hand, it assesses how conservation-related values do influence support for tourism, particularly in rural areas with some level of government-led protection and conservation.

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. A noteworthy result is that the global evaluative attitude towards tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010) is much more dependent on the positive affective outcomes from tourism development 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.

The anthropocentric approach to resource management tends to promote recreation and tourism as tools for rural sustainable development (Ribeiro & Marques, 2002). Reciprocally, discourse about leisure, recreation, and tourism development in rural areas tends to emphasise the benefits from the preservation of central features from rural physiography and culture in

order to keep the attractiveness and competitiveness of those areas (Swinnerton, 1999). However, this paper's results suggest that a conflict is apparent between residents' conservation concerns and their support for tourism. We then interpret the overall favourable attitude and warm support for tourism development in this protected area as a manifestation of low concern with rural conservation and with potential negative impacts from tourism.

## Keywords

Rural tourism. Residents' attitudes. Conservation. Tourism development.

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