

Sustainability and residents' perception of tourist marketplaces: the role of transportation issues in a latent class analysis.

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Extended abstract

Background and purpose of the paper

In the tourism domain, the interplay between visitors and residents growingly interacts with the social and natural environment (UN, 2020; UNWTO, 2018; Ridderstaat et al., 2016; Holden, 2016; Hardy et al., 2002). In general, positive impacts of tourism flows are linked to economic benefits, i.e., local wealth, employment, investments, etc., while negative impacts include social costs, such as pressure on fragile places and unwelcome sociocultural effects, and environmental issues, i.e., pollution, road traffic consequences, etc. (e.g., Nunkoo & So, 2016; Dwyer & Forsyth, 1997). According to the social exchange theory (SET; Ap, 1992; Ap & Crompton, 1993), residents might effectively support local tourism development based on their positive or negative perceptions (Lee & Jan, 2019). In the last years, a relevant literature studied the residents' point of view about the impact of tourism on various dimensions, such as emotional solidarity (Stylidis et al., 2020; Woosnam et al., 2009), quality of life and happiness (Godovych et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2020), place attachment and attitude (Zheng et al., 2020; Strzelecka et al., 2017). Driven by institutional pillars such as the UN2023 sustainable development goals 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), stating that “[...] *Investment in green infrastructure (more efficient transport, reduced air pollution) should result in smarter and greener cities, not only for residents but also for tourists.*”, transportation systems have rapidly become key actors for tourism development. While several studies have considered tourism-based transport issues concerning mobility (e.g., Maltese et al., 2021), travel movements and use of low-impact means (e.g., Crotti et al., 2023; Romão & Bi, 2021; Le-Klahn et al., 2015; Gronau & Kagermeier, 2007), yet an exhaustive picture of destination types and environments which can be harmed by tourism flows in terms of transport-based externalities is still far to be achieved. In particular, among various destinations, rather scarce attention has been devoted to the role of tourist marketplaces in the understanding of

sustainability and transport-related issues at a local level. From a sustainability perspective, tourist marketplaces are indeed suitable to assess the effect of transportation on tourism sustainability for two main reasons. First, they attract different stakeholders, including vendors, residents, and tourists, which generate mobility flow and impact on road traffic conditions (Petrovic, 2021; Schappo & Van Melik, 2017; Watson, 2009; Snepenger et al., 2003). Second, positive or negative externalities related to the marketplace activities and caused by transport choices are clearly observable by residents (Jannsens and Sezer, 2013; Morales, 2011; Snepenger et al., 1998) and are more likely to be object of local stakeholders' involvement for policy improvement and/or citizens' supportive actions. In this paper we study the extent at what transportation features related to a tourist marketplace might affect the residents' perception about the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the shopping space. As such, the following research questions are addressed: (i) *What is the residents' view on the sustainability of tourist marketplaces?* (RQ1); (ii) *Is it possible to segment groups of residents based on sustainability dimensions?* (RQ2); (iii) *How this residents' point of view could be affected by transport-related issues?* (RQ3).

Methodology

As a case study, we considered the Mercato di Luino, a historical tourist marketplace created in 1543 in the province of Varese (Italy) and bordered with Switzerland by the Lake Maggiore, which attracts hundreds of foreign tourists but also local visitors (Chamber of Commerce of Varese, 2021). In the last years, the shopping lanes of the Mercato di Luino have enlarged their catching area, thus the potential harm for sustainable living in town has increased. For the purpose of the study, we followed two steps. In the first step, we collected primary data about residents' perception on the sustainability of the tourist marketplace and we checked the validity of the proposed conceptual model. Mostly based on the findings in Lee and Jan (2019), and after refinements through focus groups with experts on transport planning and Luino's municipality officers, we developed an on-line survey in which questions about economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability were measured on a ten-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 10 for "strongly agree"). Items consistency is checked by using Cronbach's alpha and item analysis, while Chi-square goodness-of-fit was used to test whether the used samples of each resident community were representative. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) validated the relationship between the considered variables and the three latent sustainability constructs. Besides socio-demographics, in the questionnaire we include residents' transport choices to reach the Mercato di Luino and their perceptions about the impact of transportation issues on marketplace sustainability. In the second step of the analysis, by following the Latent Class Analysis (LCA) approach (e.g., Weller et al., 2020; Magidson & Vermunt, 2004), we contrasted two models. In the first model, only socio-demographics are considered as predictors of classes, while in the second model also transport-based characteristics were added. In both cases, we identified three latent groups of MdL users having in common unobserved views on sustainability issues.

Contribution/impact of the paper

By considering residents as primary stakeholders when designing local development policies, this research proposed a novel conceptual framework to evaluate the perceived sustainability of an important type of tourist place, especially in Italy, that is, tourist marketplaces. By considering the key role of transport externalities perceived by residents, this study contrasts two frameworks.

In the first case, if the segmentation is conducted without including transportation issues, then we found that the analysis might likely overestimate the share of citizens perceiving the studied marketplace as a highly sustainable tourist marketplace. Instead, if residents' transport-related choices and their view about mobility issues linked to the marketplace are added, the share of residents with positive evaluation of the marketplace is substantially reduced, and the latent groups of residents displays a segmentation for which citizens' support might be harmed in case of lacking transport policies to smoothen the hindrances of tourist flows. As a result, residents' opinions about transport issues are found to have a key impact on their perception of sustainability related to the tourist marketplace studied.

The relevance of this paper for the Special Session is two-fold. From a methodology perspective, first this study contributes to the literature on residents' perception of sustainability and its measures. Specifically, by disentangling residents' views on each sustainability dimension, i.e., socio-cultural, economic, and environmental, this research aims at enriching the role of transportation issues in the assessment of sustainable destinations and contributing to the refinement of latent class measures of residents' perception. Second, focusing on tourist marketplaces as traditional places where residents directly interact with tourists and provide them with cultural experiences and products by local manufacturers or farms, this research encompasses residents as being primary stakeholders in local tourism planning and development (e.g., Lee & Hsieh, 2016). In the presence of negative perception of marketplace sustainability due to transportation externalities, therefore, this study enables policymakers to consider the important role of mobility and transport-related impacts, and act to develop policies to reduce residents' concerns about sustainability.

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