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# Improving the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism through the residents' empowerment and support for tourism development: A different age group context\*

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## Abstract

*This study aims to investigate the relationships of the residents' empowerment and support for tourism development with the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism and to identify precise attributes among different resident age groups, which can be used to improve the residents' perceived contribution of sustainable tourism. Research was conducted on a convenience sample of adult Croatian residents using a survey method. The results reveal that empowerment and support for tourism development are essential predictors of perceived sustainable tourism contribution in the group of residents older than 36 years of age. Furthermore, support for tourism development positively affects the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism among younger residents. In addition, the correlation analysis identified stronger relationships between all empowerment attributes and the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism among older residents. In both age groups of residents, all tourism support attributes are positively correlated with a perceived contribution of sustainable tourism. These findings give a comprehensive framework for understanding how the residents' empowerment and tourism support development shape perceived sustainable tourism outcomes while considering age-related variations in community responses.*

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**JEL classification:** M31, Z32, Q32

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, playing a crucial role in the economic development of many regions. It has the potential to provide significant benefits, including job creation, infrastructure development, and the promotion of cultural exchange. However, tourism also introduces challenges, such as environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and social inequalities within local communities. As a result, sustainable tourism has emerged as an essential practice for balancing the economic advantages of tourism with its potential negative impacts. Sustainable tourism prioritizes the long-term welfare of destinations, focusing on preserving environmental integrity, promoting social equity, and ensuring economic benefits for local populations.

Understanding the role of resident empowerment in sustainable tourism development has gained increasing attention in academic and policy circles (Birkić et al., 2019).

A fundamental aspect of sustainable tourism is the empowerment and engagement of residents, who are key stakeholders in tourism development. Residents provide a destination's cultural and social foundations, shaping its uniqueness and appeal. Without local communities' active participation and support, tourism initiatives risk creating discontent, social disruption, and unsustainable practices. A better understanding of the residents' role in sustainable tourism development and knowledge about tailored activities that will motivate residents to engage actively in the decision-making process and apply sustainability will enable more participatory, efficient, and effective sustainable tourism practices at the destination.

A critical research gap in the previous body of research exists in fully understanding the different dimensions of resident empowerment—economic, psychological, sociological, and political—and how these forms of empowerment influence local support for sustainable tourism. Existing studies have primarily focused on the economic benefits that tourism brings to communities or the environmental challenges it presents. Furthermore, while economic and psychological empowerment has been shown to influence residents' support for tourism positively, the role of political empowerment remains less clear, with some studies suggesting a negative correlation (Ahn and Bessiere, 2022). There is also a need for more in-depth research on how the support of residents translates into tangible contributions to sustainable tourism and how these contributions vary across different social and economic contexts (Neuts et al., 2021). However, less

attention has been given to the multi-faceted nature of empowerment and how it affects residents' perceptions of and support for tourism. As Yu et al. (2018) point out, a holistic approach considering various impacts on community quality of life is essential for understanding and fostering resident support for tourism. Moreover, there is insufficient exploration of how different demographic groups within local communities, such as various age groups, experience and respond to tourism development and empowerment differently. Understanding these variations is crucial for designing tailored approaches that enhance resident participation and support for sustainable tourism initiatives.

Given these gaps, this study aims to advance insights into the complex relationship between resident empowerment and the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism, focusing on the different dimensions of empowerment. Additionally, it will examine how demographic factors, particularly age, affect the correlation of empowerment and support for tourism development attributes with the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism. By addressing these underexplored aspects, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how local communities can be effectively engaged in sustainable tourism development, contributing to both their well-being and the long-term viability of tourism destinations. It will also provide actionable insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and community leaders seeking efficient sustainable tourism practices.

Based on those mentioned above, the following hypotheses have been defined:

- *H1: Residents' empowerment significantly and positively affects the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.*
- *H2: Residents' support for tourism development significantly and positively affects the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.*
- *H3: Significant differences exist in the correlation of the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism with empowerment attributes among different age groups.*
- *H4: Significant differences exist in the correlation of the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism with support for tourism attributes among different age groups.*

The paper is organized into five main parts. After the introduction, a literature review with an overview of previous research and the development of research hypotheses is presented. The paper's third part first details the methodology description. This part explains the measurements used, the research procedure and sample characteristics, and a description of the analysis conducted. The research results and discussion follow this part. The fifth and final part is the concluding remarks.

## **2. Literature review and hypotheses development**

This chapter lays the foundation for the research by examining existing literature and developing hypotheses central to the study. It is organized into three key sections. The first section explores the role of destination residents in tourism development, emphasizing their active participation as a critical component of successful initiatives. The second section delves into strategies for empowering destination residents, highlighting their influence on fostering sustainable tourism practices. Finally, the chapter presents the development of hypotheses, integrating insights from the literature to address the study's objectives.

### **2.1. Destination resident's participation in tourism development**

Tourism development is a dynamic and ongoing global phenomenon, continuously evolving and expanding across the planet. However, alongside its growth, tourism also introduces a range of negative impacts, particularly on the environment, local cultures, and communities. As the tourism sector continues to evolve rapidly, the challenge of mitigating these negative effects has become more urgent. In response, efforts are increasingly directed toward promoting sustainable tourism—an approach that seeks to reduce tourism's environmental footprint and ensure that it benefits future generations. Sustainable tourism is defined by its focus on enhancing the quality of life for residents of tourist destinations, emphasizing the importance of economic, environmental, and social sustainability over mere profit maximization (Boley and McGehee, 2014).

A critical aspect of sustainable tourism is the central role played by the local population. Any destination's unique atmosphere, culture, and identity are defined mainly by its residents, who are essential actors alongside tourists and local authorities in shaping a distinctive tourism offering. The involvement of local communities, combined with their natural and cultural heritage, helps create a compelling and authentic destination that attracts visitors (Birkić et al., 2019). Tourism must foster a symbiotic relationship between all stakeholders to function effectively and sustainably. Residents, authorities, and tourists must feel valued, respected, and empowered to achieve this. Building and maintaining positive relationships between these stakeholders is crucial for enabling continued tourism development without compromising the residents' quality of life. Research has shown that when local communities are given a voice in tourism development, negative attitudes towards tourism are significantly reduced, as residents feel a sense of influence and agency in shaping their community's future (Lankford and Howard, 1994).

The involvement of local populations in the tourism development process can take many forms. Residents can participate in decision-making processes and manage

tourism-related activities within their community. In this context, participation encompasses any tourism ventures in which local communities are involved and derive economic benefits and social outcomes, such as improved education and tourism skills (Birkić et al., 2019). This type of involvement ensures that local populations contribute to tourism development and directly benefit from it, leading to more equitable and inclusive growth.

Access to quality education is crucial in enhancing local contributions to tourism development. Educated individuals are better equipped to contribute to various economic sectors, including tourism, and to invest in their communities. This is vital for their personal advancement and a tourist destination's overall economic prospects and reputation. Research suggests that community-based entrepreneurship significantly supports social development by offering employees opportunities to improve their skills and investing in their health and well-being (Giampiccoli and Kalis, 2012). In decision-making, active resident participation is essential for building trust between the local community and the tourism industry (Muganda et al., 2013). Residents who feel their voices are heard and their contributions valued are more likely to support tourism initiatives, leading to more sustainable outcomes. Consultations with residents also help identify appropriate solutions to community-specific challenges, fostering confidence in future tourism projects.

## **2.2. Empowering destination residents to support sustainable tourism development**

Empowerment plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable tourism. Sustainability is realized through residents' economic, social, environmental, and psychological empowerment. Empowerment is when individuals or groups move from vulnerability or dependence to relative control over their lives, communities, and environment (Boley and McGehee, 2014). This concept is crucial for individual development and the growth and sustainability of organizations and communities. When local communities are not meaningfully engaged or empowered in the tourism process, negative consequences can arise for both the community and the destination.

The ultimate goal of empowerment is to harness the strengths of individuals and communities to achieve the collective well-being of all stakeholders (Hall and Richards, 2000). The research underscores the importance of local support for sustainable tourism development. It demonstrates that when residents are empowered through leadership, participation, and capacity building, they are more likely to support sustainable initiatives (Khalid et al., 2019). The support of the local population is pivotal to the success of sustainable tourism, as their engagement directly impacts the long-term viability of tourism in a destination. Furthermore, it has been shown that there are varying levels of support for tourism development

among different segments of the local population. For example, individuals working in tourism often express the strongest support for future development, while students, the unemployed, and retirees tend to show less support (Soldić Frleta and Smolčić Jurdana, 2020).

Empowerment is a multidimensional construct encompassing psychological, economic, social, and political dimensions. Psychological and economic empowerment has positively affected residents' support for tourism. In contrast, political empowerment has been shown to have a negative relationship with tourism development (Ahn and Bessiere, 2022). Research also suggests local communities strongly support continued tourism development (Neuts et al., 2021).

Regarding education and knowledge, there was a statistically significant difference in the level of education of the questioned population and their understanding of sustainability and sustainable development. It is found that young people equally value the concept of sustainability as a whole and components of sustainable development while, at the same time, their knowledge of sustainable development is deficient (Kušljčić, 2022). Another research points out age as a significant determinant that shapes perceptions of socio-economic issues (Hübel et al., 2023a). When talking about age, a similar study was conducted among different age groups, showing that Baby Boomers tend to be less supportive of sustainable practices while also placing low importance on sustainability (Nichols and Holt, 2023). According to the research, it is clear and safe to conclude that sustainable tourism development is significantly and positively influenced by community empowerment and support by local people, regardless of age (Wani et al., 2023). Additionally, to ensure sustainable tourism management's successful implementation, it is crucial to establish a new culture of dialogue that facilitates ongoing communication between local stakeholders and decision-makers (Lee, 2013).

### **2.3. Hypotheses development**

The hypotheses of this study are designed to address the research gap identified in the literature (Gautam and Bhalla, 2024; Khalid et al., 2019) on resident empowerment and its relationship to sustainable tourism contribution. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the multidimensional nature of empowerment (economic, political, psychological, and social) and its impact on residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism contribution. Based on the comprehensive analysis of the theoretical and empirical models published between 1990 and 2020, Šegota et al. (2024) recently concluded that future research needs to move beyond the focus on the unidimensional relationship between perceived impacts and attitudes. The present study aims to investigate how resident support for tourism development and age-related differences influence these relationships based on a call of researchers to further investigate these interrelations (Hübel and Condrea, 2023b).

Each hypothesis contributes to closing the research gap by focusing on a specific underexplored aspect of resident empowerment and tourism sustainability.

The first hypothesis tests the relationship between resident empowerment and their perception of sustainable tourism contribution. The current research gap lies in the lack of a comprehensive understanding of how empowerment in various forms (beyond just economic empowerment) affects local communities' engagement with and support for sustainable tourism. As revealed by Šegota et al. (2017), highly informed and highly involved residents have better perceptions of tourism than all other groups. Furthermore, as pointed out by Gautam and Bhalla (2024) in a recent study, although the term empowerment is frequently employed in studies on resident attitudes, it is still unclear how this concept is related to others. It is essential to comprehend the components that empower and the factors that empower effects.

This hypothesis addresses whether empowering residents leads to more positive perceptions of tourism's sustainability benefits, thus providing a more holistic view of empowerment's role in sustainable tourism development.

*H1: Residents' empowerment significantly and positively affects the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.*

Within this main hypothesis, four auxiliary hypotheses were set. The first auxiliary hypothesis focuses on economic empowerment, the most widely studied in tourism literature. It explores whether residents' perceptions of personal economic gains, such as job creation or increased income, positively influence their view of sustainable tourism's contribution. Economic benefits are often highlighted as crucial for resident support (Boley et al., 2018; Li et al., 2022; Ranasinghe and Pradeepamali, 2019) and according to Šegota et al. (2024) employment and business opportunities are the most common personal benefits from tourism that influence residents to form positive perceptions of tourism impacts.

Although economic factors are often overemphasized (Šegota et al., 2024) there is a need for future research to focus on examining how residents perceive other noneconomic benefits and costs from tourism, i. e. social and cultural benefits (Šegota et al., 2024) and to clarify the relative importance of economic empowerment compared to other forms of empowerment (Aleshinloye et al., 2022; Strzelecka et al., 2017).

The first auxiliary hypothesis tests whether this aspect alone significantly influences the perception of sustainable tourism contribution.

*H1.1: Personal economic benefits significantly and positively affect the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.*



The second auxiliary hypothesis is related to political empowerment. Political empowerment refers to residents having a voice in the decision-making processes related to tourism development. Political empowerment is often considered beneficial. For example, Ranasinghe and Pradeepamali (2019) found that political empowerment influenced on positive impacts, leading to residents' support for tourism development. Also, more recently, Gautam and Bhalla (2024) found that political empowerment influenced inhabitants' quality of life most significantly. At the same time, some studies have suggested a negative relationship between political empowerment and support for tourism (Ahn and Bessiere, 2022). This hypothesis tests whether political empowerment contributes positively to residents' perception of sustainable tourism contribution or whether it introduces challenges such as dissatisfaction with the decision-making process. This hypothesis addresses the unclear role of political empowerment in sustainable tourism, helping to resolve contradictions in existing literature and offering a deeper understanding of how political involvement affects perceptions of sustainability.

*H1.2: Political empowerment significantly and positively affects the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.*

The third auxiliary hypothesis is related to psychological empowerment, which refers to the sense of agency, self-confidence, and autonomy that residents feel as participants in tourism development. Recent studies highlight the importance of psychological empowerment in tourism contexts alongside economic and political dimensions (Li et al., 2022). According to a recent study of Gautam and Bhalla (2024), psychological empowerment was the most critical antecedent of residents' support for sustainable tourism development, followed by social empowerment. Also Strzelecka et al. (2017) found that residents within Central and Eastern Europe settings are more influenced by the pride and self-esteem boost associated with psychological empowerment than the economic promises of tourism. Furthermore, psychological empowerment has been found to influence residents' place attachment and quality of life significantly (Aleshinloye et al., 2022). However, this form of empowerment is still underexplored in tourism studies compared to economic and political empowerment (Singhania, 2021). Hidayat et al. (2017) point out that while economic and social empowerment efforts have progressed, psychological empowerment is still at an early reinforcement stage (Hidayat et al., 2017). This hypothesis tests whether psychological empowerment enhances residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism by increasing their involvement and pride in local tourism initiatives. It explores the psychological dimension of empowerment, filling a gap in the literature where the emotional and cognitive aspects of resident empowerment have received limited attention. Understanding psychological empowerment's role in shaping perceptions of sustainability is essential for a more comprehensive view of community engagement.

*H1.3: Psychological empowerment significantly and positively affects the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.*

The fourth auxiliary hypothesis refers to social empowerment, which involves strengthening social networks, cultural identity, and community cohesion through tourism. Recent studies highlight the importance of community empowerment in sustainable tourism development. Social empowerment positively influences residents' perceptions of tourism's environmental impacts and participation in sustainable tourism initiatives (Shafieisabet and Haratifard, 2020). Also, community involvement in the tourism industry and decision-making processes is associated with positive perceptions of social empowerment indicators (Rachmawati et al., 2022). The study of Strzelecka et al. (2017) also found that the perceptions of increased community cohesion (i.e. social empowerment) has stronger influence on residents within Central and Eastern Europe than economic benefits of tourism. This hypothesis examines whether tourism contributes to social empowerment and how this affects residents' perceptions of its sustainability. While economic and political empowerment are commonly studied, the social benefits of tourism, such as preserving cultural heritage and strengthening community ties, are less often explored. This hypothesis fills a gap by examining how social dynamics and cultural empowerment contribute to sustainable tourism, offering new insights into tourism's social benefits beyond individual economic gains.

*H1.4: Social empowerment significantly and positively affects the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.*

The second hypothesis investigates the relationship between resident support for tourism development and their perceptions of its sustainability. While some research has suggested that support from the local population is essential for tourism's long-term success and that positive perceptions of tourism benefits are associated with increased support for sustainable tourism development (Rodrigues et al., 2014; Kodaş et al., 2022), there has been limited examination of how this support translates into perceptions of tourism's positive contributions (Pazhuhan et al. 2023). In their study in a touristic city in Iran, Pazhuhan and associates (2023) empirically confirmed that inhabitants' positive perceptions and local community participation support sustainable tourism development. This hypothesis explores whether active local support enhances sustainable tourism outcomes. It helps to clarify the importance of local support for tourism development and how it influences sustainability perceptions, contributing to the broader understanding of community-based tourism initiatives.

*H2: Residents' support for tourism development significantly and positively affects the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.*

The third hypothesis addresses the demographic variation in how residents experience empowerment and perceive tourism development. Age is an essential

factor in shaping perceptions of tourism, as different age groups may have varying levels of interest, engagement, and dependence on the tourism sector. Understanding these differences is critical for developing policies that engage all population segments (Wang, 2013). Also, as Hübel and Condrea (2023b) point out, exploring age-related perceptions is crucial for shaping sustainable tourism policies and practices. The third hypothesis explores the diversity of experiences within local communities, focusing on age as a critical variable. This contributes to closing the gap related to the heterogeneous nature of resident populations and how their demographic characteristics affect their views on empowerment and sustainable tourism.

*H3: Significant differences exist in the correlation of the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism with empowerment attributes among different age groups.*

The fourth hypothesis examines whether different age groups vary in their level of support for tourism development and how this affects their perceptions of sustainability. As Trivellas et al. (2016) point out, age may influence support, with younger residents showing less enthusiasm for tourism development. Age-related differences may arise due to generational perspectives on tourism's economic, social, and environmental impacts. For example, younger residents may be more concerned with environmental sustainability, while older residents may prioritize economic stability. Recently, Koščak et al. (2023) investigated the neglected voices of children affected by tourism employing an experimental design in six diverse European destinations. They revealed that the attitude of children towards tourists is negative, while they perceive locals to hold a subordinate position to tourists, which calls for further research in this domain. This hypothesis addresses the underexplored demographic dimension of tourism development, offering new insights into how support for tourism varies across different age groups. It contributes to the literature by highlighting the need for age-specific strategies in sustainable tourism planning.

*H4: Significant differences exist in the correlation of the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism with support for tourism attributes among different age groups.*

Collectively, these hypotheses contribute to closing the research gap by providing a multidimensional exploration of resident empowerment and support for sustainable tourism. They move beyond the traditional focus on economic empowerment, incorporating political, psychological, and social factors while considering age-related variations in community responses. This study will offer a comprehensive framework for understanding how residents' empowerment and support for tourism development shape perceived sustainable tourism outcomes, addressing critical gaps in the literature on community participation, empowerment, and demographic diversity in sustainable tourism development.

### **3. Methodology**

This part explains the measurements used, the research procedure and sample characteristics, and a description of the analysis conducted.

#### **3.1. Measurements**

Following the proposed hypotheses, a quantitative approach was taken to fulfill the research goal. Empirical research was conducted using a survey method based on a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire items were taken and adapted from previous studies by Ranasinghe and Pradeepamali (2019) for the empowerment of the local community through tourism, presented in the Appendix – Table A.1; Woosnam (2012) for resident's support for tourism development, shown in the Appendix – Table A.2 and College Values Online for the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism to the local community, presented in the Appendix – Table A.3. Questions in the first part of the instruments were related to the dimensions considered in this research: empowerment, support for tourism development, and contribution of sustainable tourism. Respondents were asked to evaluate each attribute of the abovementioned dimensions on a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree). The second part of the instruments included questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents: gender, age, education, working status, and average monthly income.

The validity of research results was ensured by designing a questionnaire based on previous studies, as mentioned above. Factors are formed as the sums of corresponding items. Factor loading was calculated within both resident groups to test the validity of the research instrument used (Table 1).

The calculated factor loading values for all proposed items are above 0.4 in both resident groups and can be used for measuring survey dimensions:

- Local community empowerment construct measured with Personal economic benefit from tourism (PEBT), Political (PE), Psychological (PSYCHE) and Social (SOCE) dimensions
- Support for tourism development (SUPPTD)
- Perceived contribution of sustainable tourism (PCST).

Table 1: Factor loading for survey dimensions (Communalities – Extraction)

CODE	18-35 years old	above 36 years old
Personal economic benefit from tourism (PEBT)		
PEBT1	0.827	0.852
PEBT2	0.843	0.863
PEBT3	0.744	0.866
PEBT4	0.694	0.799
Political empowerment (POLE)		
POLE1	0.682	0.812
POLE2	0.551	0.815
Psychological empowerment (PSYCHE)		
PSYCHE1	0.732	0.663
PSYCHE2	0.634	0.693
PSYCHE3	0.579	0.741
PSYCHE4	0.464	0.642
Social empowerment (SOCE)		
SOCE1	0.737	0.718
SOCE2	0.716	0.815
SOCE3	0.735	0.743
Resident's support for tourism development (SUPPTD)		
SUPPTD1	0.789	0.850
SUPPTD2	0.820	0.872
SUPPTD3	0.836	0.815
SUPPTD4	0.750	0.738
SUPPTD5	0.674	0.786
SUPPTD6	0.551	0.755
SUPPTD7	0.656	0.755
SUPPTD8	0.730	0.424
SUPPTD9	0.617	0.723
Perceived contribution of sustainable tourism (PCST)		
PCST1	0.543	0.676
PCST2	0.603	0.785
PCST3	0.579	0.661
PCST4	0.438	0.477
PCST5	0.626	0.728

Source: Author's calculations

The validity of the research results is also evident from the internal consistency of the scales for each dimension and within each resident's group. A reliability analysis was conducted to verify the consistency of the dimensions and validity of the used research instrument. The Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficients were calculated to test the internal consistency of dimensions (Table 2).

Table 2: Dimension's reliability

No.	Dimensions and attributes	Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ )		
		total sample	18-35 years old	above 36 years old
1.	Perceived empowerment			
1.A	Personal economic benefits from tourism	0.913	0.869	0.936
1.B	Political empowerment	0.744	0.682	0.792
1.C	Psychological empowerment	0.825	0.734	0.865
1.D	Social empowerment	0.853	0.844	0.870
2.	Support for tourism development	0.898	0.895	0.900
4.	Perceived contribution of sustainable tourism	0.845	0.797	0.871

Source: Author's calculations

The results in Table 2 show all values of the Cronbach alpha coefficients for the dimensions considered in this research: empowerment, support for tourism development, and contribution of sustainable tourism within a total sample, younger (below 35 years) and older (above 36 years) group of residents. Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be above 0.7 ( $>0.70$ ), as the recommended minimum level (Hair et al., 2014) for acceptable internal consistency. The following implies acceptable internal consistency of the scales (for Cronbach alpha values between 0.7 and 0.8), good (for Cronbach alpha values between 0.8 and 0.9), and excellent (for values of Cronbach alpha above 0.9).

Cronbach's alpha value for Political empowerment within a younger resident group (below 35 years) is lower than 0.7. For that reason, the inter-item correlation was performed. The intercorrelation stands at 0.518. Considering that intercorrelations should exceed 0.30 (Hair et al., 2014), the authors retained this factor to avoid losing useful information for destination managers.

Following above mentioned, it can be determined that Cronbach alpha values confirm the internal consistency for all analyzed dimensions and the validity of the research instruments and results, which is additionally confirmed through factor analysis and communalities – extraction values for both age groups of respondents.

Data analysis was carried out using the SPSS 23 statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze sample characteristics. Inferential statistics was implemented to examine the relationships between dimensions (bivariate correlations) and the influences of different independent variables (personal economic benefit from tourism, political, psychological, and social empowerment and support for tourism development) on a dependent variable (perceived contribution of sustainable tourism) were examined by implementing multiple linear regression analysis.

### 3.2. Procedure and sampling

The primary research was conducted in Croatia from 1st April until 1st May 2024 for the master thesis (Perušina, 2024). The questionnaire was created using Google Forms to conduct an online survey through social media. The survey was conducted on a convenience sample of adult Croatian residents. A total of 185 questionnaires were collected and included in the analysis. The sample size can be considered adequate since the observations per variable are above the recommended minimum of at least five observations per variable (Hair et al., 2014). The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Characteristics of the sample structure (N=185)

	Gender	Frequency (N)	Relative share (%)
1	Female	63	65.9
2	Male	122	34.1
	Age		
1	18-25	53	28.6
2	26-35	39	21.1
3	36-45	34	18.4
4	46-55	31	16.8
5	above 56 years	28	15.1
	Educational level		
1	Secondary school graduates	32	17.3
2	High school graduates	10	5.4
3	University undergraduates	51	27.6
4	University graduates	63	34.0
5	Master's or doctoral degree	29	15.7
	Employment		
1	Unemployed	6	3.3
2	Student	33	17.8
3	Employed	144	77.8
4	Pensioner	2	1.1
	Average personal monthly income		
1	< 300 €	16	8.6
2	301-599 €	15	8.1
3	600-799 €	10	5.4
4	800-999 €	12	6.5
5	1.000-1.299 €	56	30.0
6	> 1.300 €	76	41.1

Source: Author's calculations

Regarding sample characteristics, mostly are females (65.9%), have a university degree (34.1%), are employed (77.8%), and 71.4% of them have an average personal income greater than 1,000 € (30.3% from 1,000-1,299 € and 41.1% above 1,300 €).

Following the research concept and regarding age, respondents are grouped into two groups: 18 to 35 and older than 36. The group aged 18 to 35 in the structure of respondents makes up 49.7%, while the share of people over 36 years old is slightly higher and makes up 50.3% of the sample. It is evident that in the respondent's sample, there are equal shares of respondents under the age of 35 and over 36, which is important for the objectivity of the research conducted and the comparison of results between different age groups.

#### **4. Research results and discussion**

The multiple linear regression analysis was performed to identify influences of empowerment factors and support for tourism development on the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism for different resident age groups. Previous research also confirmed that age is crucial in shaping perceptions of sustainable tourism and social responsibility (Hübel and Condrea, 2023b).

Thus, an analysis was performed on two different age groups: the younger resident group, which was below 35 years old, and the older resident group, which was above 36 years old. Empowerment factors and support for tourism development were independent variables, and the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism was the dependent variable (Table 4).

The multiple regression results reveal that support for tourism development and empowerment are particular predictor variables for a perceived contribution of sustainable tourism among residents above 36 years (Adjusted  $R^2=0.687$ ) and explain a high 68.7% variance related to the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism. For the residents below 35 years, these predictors in the model explained only 34.3% (Adjusted  $R^2=0.343$ ) of the total variance for a perceived contribution of sustainable tourism. Following this, for the resident group below 35 years, other factors, in addition to those analyzed, influence their perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.

Within the empowering residents construct, the influence of most dimensions on the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism is insignificant. In the younger age group (under 35 years), only Personal economic benefits – PEBT ( $\beta=0.208$ ,  $p=0.043$ ) significantly influence the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism, which confirms hypothesis H1.1. In the older age group, over 36, only Psychological empowerment – PSYCHE ( $\beta=0.177$ ,  $p=0.048$ ) significantly influences the per-



ceived contribution of sustainable tourism, thus confirming hypothesis H1.3. Political empowerment – POLE and Social Empowerment – SOCE do not significantly influence the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism in either younger or older age groups. Therefore, hypotheses H1.2 and H1.4 were not confirmed.

It is evident from the above that two auxiliary hypotheses were confirmed (H1.1 and H1.3), while two were refuted (H1.2 and H1.4). Thus, it can be concluded that hypothesis H1 is partially confirmed.

Table 4: Multiple linear regression analysis – different age group’s context

Perceived contribution of sustainable tourism – PCST (18-35 years old)	B	SE	BETA	t	Sig.
Constant					
Personal economic benefit from tourism (PEBT)	0.149	0.073	0.208	2.055	0.043
Political empowerment (POLE)	-0.037	0.153	-0.025	-0.239	0.811
Psychological empowerment (PSYCHE)	0.019	0.135	0.015	0.139	0.890
Social empowerment (SOCE)	0.216	0.114	0.204	1.903	0.060
Resident’s support for tourism development (SUPPTD)	0.270	0.058	0.451	4.680	0.000
$R^2$	0.376				
Adjusted $R^2$	0.343				
Standard error	2.726				
F ratio	10.520				
Significance	0.000				
Perceived contribution of sustainable tourism – PCST (above 36 years old)	B	SE	BETA	t	Sig.
Constant					
Personal economic benefit from tourism (PEBT)	0.050	0.051	0.064	0.981	0.329
Political empowerment (POLE)	0.103	0.122	0.058	0.844	0.401
Psychological empowerment (PSYCHE)	0.204	0.101	0.177	2.006	0.048
Social empowerment (SOCE)	0.012	0.123	0.009	0.100	0.921
Resident’s support for tourism development (SUPPTD)	0.429	0.054	0.661	7.999	0.000
$R^2$	0.703				
Adjusted $R^2$	0.687				
Standard error	2.486				
F ratio	41.751				
Significance	0.000				

Source: Author’s calculations

Gautam and Bhalla (2023) identified psychological empowerment as a crucial predictor of support for sustainable tourism development, followed by social empowerment (Gautam and Bhalla, 2023), which is confirmed by the results of this research related to the psychological empowerment of the older age group. Social empowerment has an insignificant influence in both resident groups, contrary to the previous one and following Moreira dos Santos et al. (2024) findings related to the insignificant influence of social empowerment. Further, Moreira dos Santos et al. (2024) found a significant but negative relationship between political empowerment and support for sustainable tourism development, which coincides with political empowerment's influence on the younger resident groups and the significant and direct relationship between economic empowerment support for sustainable tourism development, as found in this research for younger resident groups.

The regression analysis results also indicate a positive and statistically significant influence ( $p < 0.05$ ) of support for tourism development on the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism within both age groups. Accordingly, hypothesis H2 is confirmed. The impact intensity of the support for tourism development on the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism is stronger in the older age group ( $\beta = 0.661$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) than in those aged below 35 years ( $\beta = 0.451$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

Some recent studies have also explored the relationships between community empowerment, support for tourism, and sustainable tourism development. Research indicates that community empowerment positively influences sustainable tourism development and residents' support for tourism (Khalid et al., 2019; Wani et al., 2022), and the research results follow these previous findings with specificity related to the respondent's age group.

Additionally, correlation analyses were carried out to assess the relationships between empowerment and support for tourism development attributes and the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism. The purpose was to identify precise attributes in both dimensions and for different resident age groups, which can be used to improve the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism to their tourist destinations.

The correlation analysis results of perceived empowerment attributes and perceived contribution of sustainable tourism are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: The correlation between empowerment attributes and the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism – different age group's context

No.	Dimensions/ Attributes	18-35 years old		Above 36 years old	
		Pearson correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
EMPOWERMENT DIMENSIONS AND ATTRIBUTES					
1.	Personal economic benefits from tourism (PEBT)				
	PEBT1	0.299**	0.004	0.377**	0.000
	PEBT2	0.347**	0.001	0.292**	0.004
	PEBT3	0.357**	0.000	0.347**	0.001
	PEBT4	0.188	0.072	0.243**	0.018
2.	Political empowerment (POLE)				
	POLE1	0.285**	0.006	0.245**	0.017
	POLE2	0.15	0.889	0.304**	0.003
3.	Psychological empowerment (PSYCHE)				
	PSYCHE1	0.313**	0.002	0.455**	0.000
	PSYCHE2	0.150	0.153	0.483**	0.000
	PSYCHE3	0.361**	0.000	0.637**	0.000
	PSYCHE4	0.290**	0.005	0.673**	0.000
4.	Social empowerment (SOCE)				
	SOCE1	0.220*	0.035	0.470**	0.000
	SOCE2	0.147	0.163	0.467**	0.000
	SOCE3	0.402**	0.000	0.601**	0.000
5.	PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM (PCST)	4.08		3.8	

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) ; \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: Author's calculations

The resident's empowerment is a multidimensional construct and was measured through four dimensions: personal economic benefit from tourism, political, psychological, and social empowerment. Research results indicate higher Pearson coefficient values and a significant relationship between all empowerment attributes and the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism for the resident group above 36 years. In the younger group of residents (under 35 years), the correlation values are lower with the existence of insignificance of the correlation for four

empowerment factors (one factor in each dimension: PEBT4, POLE2, PSYCHE2, and SOCE2). Following the abovementioned, the hypothesis H3 is confirmed. These results coincide with Trivellas et al. (2016) findings, which point out that younger residents show less enthusiasm for tourism development.

The Pearson coefficient ( $r$ ) was explained following de Vaus (2002). In the older age group, a strong and moderate correlation of specific psychological and social empowerment factors with the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism was identified. Psychological empowerment factors that strongly correlate with a perceived contribution of sustainable tourism are PSYCHE4 – Tourism makes me want to tell others about what we have to offer ( $r=0.673$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and PSYCHE 3 – Tourism reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors ( $r=0.637$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). In addition to the mentioned psychological factors, a strong relationship is determined by one social empowerment factor for the older resident group, and it is SOCE3 – Tourism provides ways for me to get involved in my community ( $r=0.601$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ). Following a strong correlation with the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism, destination marketing managers can primarily use these factors to influence the older residents' perception of sustainable tourism contribution to the local community. All other factors in the older residents group have a significant but weak and moderate relationship with a perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.

Four factors moderately related to the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism are identified for the younger residents group. There are identified one social empowerment factor SOCE3 – Tourism provides ways for me to get involved in my community ( $r=0.402$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ), one psychological empowerment factor PSYCHE3 – Tourism reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors ( $r=0.361$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and two personal economic benefit from tourism factors PEBT3 – Economically benefit from more tourism development ( $0.357$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and PEBT2 – A portion of my income is tied to tourism ( $0.347$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). The other five factors are weakly related, and four have an insignificant relationship with the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism for the younger residents group.

Table 6 shows the correlation analysis results between perceived support for tourism attributes and the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism.

Table 6: The correlation between support for tourism development attributes and perceived contribution of sustainable tourism to the community – different age groups context

Dimensions/ Attributes	18-35 years old		Above 36 years old	
	Pearson correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Support for tourism development (SUPPTD)				
SUPPTD1	0.435**	0.000	0.780**	0.000
SUPPTD2	0.418**	0.000	0.727**	0.000
SUPPTD3	0.438**	0.000	0.676**	0.000
SUPPTD4	0.354**	0.000	0.553**	0.000
SUPPTD5	0.384**	0.000	0.585**	0.000
SUPPTD6	0.477**	0.000	0.617**	0.000
SUPPTD7	0.304**	0.003	0.565**	0.000
SUPPTD8	0.443**	0.000	0.513**	0.000
SUPPTD9	0.358**	0.000	0.551**	0.000
PERCEIVED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CONTRIBUTION (PCST)	4.08		3.88	

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Author’s calculations

The results for both resident groups, younger than 35 and older than 36, show that all support for tourism attributes significantly correlate, at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with a perceived contribution of sustainable tourism. Comparing the values of the calculated Pearson coefficients among residents’ age groups, higher coefficient values are present in the older age group, where relationships are substantial to very strong of all support for tourism attributes with a perceived contribution of sustainable tourism. For a younger age group, these relationships are significant but moderate to substantial. These results again confirm Trivellas et al. (2016) findings, which point out that younger residents show less enthusiasm for tourism development. Following the abovementioned research results, there are no significant differences in the correlation of perceived sustainable tourism contribution with support for tourism attributes among different age groups. Thus, hypothesis H4 is not confirmed.

In previous research, local support has been found to mediate the relationship between community empowerment and sustainable tourism development (Khalid et al., 2019; Wani et al., 2022). These findings suggest that empowering local communities and fostering their support for tourism are essential for sustainable tourism development, as confirmed in this research and by taking into account specificity related to the resident age groups.

## **5. Concluding remarks**

This study aims to explore the relationships between residents' empowerment and support for tourism development with sustainable tourism's perceived contribution and identify precise significant attributes among different resident age groups. The regression analysis results indicated a positive and statistically significant influence of support for tourism development on the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism within both age groups. Additionally, for residents above 36 years, support for tourism development and empowerment are significant predictors of a perceived contribution to sustainable tourism.

Furthermore, for the resident group above 36 years, higher values of the Pearson coefficient and a significant relationship between all empowerment attributes and the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism were determined. Finally, a positive and significant correlation between all support for tourism attributes and a perceived contribution of sustainable tourism was identified for both resident groups. Still, stronger relationships were generally found in the older resident age group.

The paper has theoretical and empirical contributions. There is insufficient research, and the research gap exists in understanding the influences of different residents' empowerment dimensions and how various demographic groups within local communities respond to empowerment and tourism development in their destinations. A limited number of papers investigate age residents' context, and this paper fulfills this gap by considering age-related variations in community responses to empowerment and support for tourism development for shaping sustainable tourism outcomes. Empirical contribution is evident for policymakers, tourism planners, and community leaders that can use identified precise factors with significant and positive influence for different resident age groups to improve residents' perceived contribution of sustainable tourism to their destinations. By implementing targeting activities for residents of various age groups and improving the perceived contribution of sustainable tourism among them, destination managers will enable sustainable tourism practices that are more participative, efficient, and effective. Better understanding and perception of sustainable tourism contribution among residents will contribute to their greater engagement in the decision-making process, which can influence the efficiency of sustainable tourism development. Consequently, such an approach can lead to greater effectiveness in achieving sustainable tourism goals at the destination.

The research presented in this paper has some limitations. First, only the Croatian residents are included in the sample. This implies that other citizens may have a different perception of sustainable tourism's contribution to their destinations. Thus, future research should focus on different citizens, and it will be helpful to identify significant differences among them. Second, only age is taken as a demographic criterion in this research. In the future, other criteria can be implemented (e.g.,

gender, educational level, average monthly income) to define demographic groups within local communities. Future research should consider existing differences among different demographic resident groups related to empowerment and support for tourism development. Following this, destination marketing managers can foster more inclusive and effective sustainable tourism initiatives and practices.

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## Appendix

Table A.1: Empowerment of the local community through tourism

CODE	Taken and adapted items
PEBT	Personal economic benefit from tourism
PEBT1	Tourism helps me pay my bills.
PEBT2	A portion of my income is tied to tourism.
PEBT3	Economically benefit from more tourism development.
PEBT4	My family's economic future depends upon tourism.
POLE	Political empowerment
POLE1	I have a voice in tourism development decisions.
POLE2	My vote makes a difference in how tourism is developed.
PSYCHE	Psychological empowerment
PSYCHE1	I'm proud to be a resident here.
PSYCHE2	I feel special because people travel to see my area's unique features.
PSYCHE3	Tourism reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors.
PSYCHE4	Tourism makes me want to tell others about what we have to offer.
SOCE	Social empowerment
SOCE1	It makes me feel more connected to my community.
SOCE2	It fosters a sense of "community spirit" within me.
SOCE3	Tourism provides ways for me to get involved in my community.

Source: Ranasinghe and Pradeepamali (2019)

Table A.2: Resident's support for tourism development

CODE	Taken and adapted items
SUPPTD	Resident's support for tourism development
SUPPTD1	I support tourism and want to remain important to my place.
SUPPTD2	I believe tourism should be actively encouraged in my place.
SUPPTD3	My place should support tourism development.
SUPPTD4	I support new tourism facilities that will attract new visitors to my place.
SUPPTD5	My place should remain a tourist destination.
SUPPTD6	In general, the positive benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts.
SUPPTD7	Tourism will continue to play a major role in my place's economy.
SUPPTD8	Long-term planning in my place can control negative environmental impacts.
SUPPTD9	It is important to develop plans to manage the growth of tourism.

Source: Woosnam (2012)

Table A.3: The perceived contribution of sustainable tourism to the local community

CODE	Taken and adapted items
PCST	Perceived contribution of sustainable tourism
PCST1	Tourism brings benefits to the local economic development.
PCST2	Tourism development ensures benefits for the community and the environment.
PCST3	Tourism meets profitability and sustainability.
PCST4	Tourism becomes part of the local culture.
PCST5	Tourism reinvests in the local development.

Source: College Values Online (2024)

## Poboljšanje percipiranog doprinosa održivog turizma kroz osnaživanje i potporu stanovnika razvoju turizma: kontekst različitih dobnih skupina

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### Sažetak

Cilj je ovog rada istražiti odnose osnaživanja i podrške stanovnika razvoju turizma s percipiranim doprinosom održivog turizma, te identificirati atribute među različitim dobnim skupinama stanovnika, koji se mogu upotrebljavati za poboljšanje percepcije stanovnika o doprinosu održivog turizma. Istraživanje je provedeno na prigodnom uzorku punoljetnih stanovnika Hrvatske metodom anketiranja. Rezultati ukazuju na to da su osnaživanje i potpora razvoju turizma ključni prediktori percipiranog doprinosa održivog turizma u skupini stanovnika starijih od 36 godina. Nadalje, podrška razvoju turizma pozitivno utječe na percipirani doprinos održivog turizma među mlađim stanovnicima. Dodatno, korelacijskom analizom utvrđena je snažnija povezanost između svih atributa osnaživanja i percipiranog doprinosa održivog turizma za skupinu stanovnika stariju od 36 godina. U objema dobnim skupinama stanovnika svi atributi podrške turizmu pozitivno su povezani s percipiranim doprinosom održivog turizma. Ovi rezultati daju sveobuhvatan okvir za razumijevanje kako osnaživanje stanovnika i potpora razvoju turizma oblikuju percipirane rezultate održivog turizma, uzimajući u obzir varijacije reakcije lokalne zajednice povezane s dobi stanovnika.

**Ključne riječi:** osnaživanje stanovnika, podrška stanovnika razvoju turizma, doprinos održivog turizma, dobne skupine stanovnika, Hrvatska

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