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Knowledge, empowerment, and action: testing the empowerment theory in a tourism context

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ABSTRACT

With resident empowerment widely recognized as a prerequisite for sustainable tourism development, this study tested how residents' perceived knowledge of tourism affects their perceptions of psychological, social, and political empowerment through tourism, and how these, in turn, lead to their political action regarding tourism using Rocha's (1997) theory of empowerment. Rocha (1997) conceptualized empowerment as beginning at the individual level and eventually welling up into the community level, with political action being the ultimate outcome of community empowerment. To test the hypothesized relationships, data were collected from residents of a booming wine tourism destination (i.e. Fredericksburg, Texas, USA) and analyzed via structural equation modeling. Results indicated that perceived knowledge had positive impacts on perceived psychological, social, and political empowerment, but only social and political empowerment were likely to generate political action. The positive influence of tourism knowledge on political action was partially mediated by social and political empowerment. The findings align with the Rocha's (1997) theory and suggest empowerment starts at the individual level and moves up to collective empowerment. The findings also underscore the link between knowledge and empowerment, with perceived knowledge of tourism being an important precursor to a sense of resident empowerment and political action regarding tourism.

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Introduction

Empowerment is essential to enabling “people, organizations, and communities to gain mastery over their affairs” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). Instead of relying on benevolent outsiders, the concept of empowerment emphasizes shifting power to people, organizations, and communities to serve themselves (Gallant, Cohen, & Wolff, 1985; Timothy, 2007). Empowerment has been an

important concept in research focusing on community development (Friedmann, 1992; Mohan & Stokke, 2000), community psychology (Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001; Perkins, Hughey, & Speer, 2002), and sustainable tourism as of late (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Cole, 2006a; Scheyvens, 1999).

Despite its scholarly and practical importance, empowerment remains a highly sophisticated and fluidic concept which rejects any single operationalization (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). After almost four decades having passed since empowerment emerged as a research topic, scholars view empowerment as either a process (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Mechanic, 1991; Timothy, 1999), an outcome (Bernstein et al., 1994; Boley, McGehee, Perdue & Long, 2014), or both (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Likewise, the level of analysis diverges between studies as some focus on individual empowerment (Zimmerman, 1990) over collective (i.e. organization or community) forms of empowerment (Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan, & Luloff, 2010). With this conceptual ambiguity in place, only few attempts have been made to quantitatively measure empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Speer & Peterson, 2000).

Notwithstanding the definitional and operational difficulties, resident empowerment has “become a mantra within the sustainable tourism literature” (Boley, Ayscue, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2017, p. 113). Empowering residents is commonly recognized as a vital prerequisite to sustainable tourism development with scholars such as Sofield (2003, p. 7) claiming that “without empowerment, sustainable tourism development by communities is difficult to attain” and Choi and Murray (2010, p. 589) asserting that “if the government fails to empower residents, the success of tourism development and sustainability cannot be guaranteed.”

While the importance of resident empowerment to sustainable tourism development has been well documented (Cole, 2006a; Sofield, 2003; Timothy, 2007), studies have rarely pointed to how residents become empowered through tourism and whether their sense of empowerment corresponds with their political action. This, in part, is due to the fact that studies thus far have primarily explored the qualitative aspects of resident empowerment (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010; Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Scheyvens, 1999; Sutawa, 2012). Certainly, qualitative approaches furnish valuable insights upon which further scholarly inquiries can be built. However, given their context-specific nature, a further quantitative investigation is needed to understand the antecedents and the outcomes of resident empowerment in tourism destinations. With the development of the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) (Boley & McGehee, 2014), scholars are now less fettered by the measurement issue and can continue to explore the nature of resident empowerment through tourism along with its antecedents and outcomes.

A key research gap within the nascent resident empowerment literature is how empowerment occurs among individuals and communities and what the outcomes are of empowered residents. As far as key antecedents, knowledge has been referred to as an essential ingredient to empowerment (Cole, 2006a, 2006b; Timothy, 2007; Weng & Peng, 2014; Zimmerman, 1995). However, this relationship has yet to be empirically tested. Furthermore, empowerment is believed to exist in different forms and phases that are likely to be interrelated with one another, constituting a cyclical or hierarchical order (Knight & Cottrell, 2016; Rocha, 1997). While this makes it possible to suppose that individual empowerment (e.g. obtaining new information, feeling self-confidence) serves as the foundation for more collective forms of empowerment (e.g. political action), this idea has yet to be examined, and further investigation is needed to ascertain the relationship.

The current study seeks to address these two knowledge gaps. To illustrate what makes residents feel empowered and to where empowerment takes the residents, the authors utilized Rocha's (1997) theory of empowerment ladder. The theory conceptualizes empowerment as beginning at the individual level and eventually welling up into the community level, with political action being the ultimate outcome of empowerment at the community level. Qualitative findings are drawn on from previous studies (Cole, 2006a, 2006b; Weng & Peng, 2014) to suggest residents' perceived knowledge of tourism is an antecedent to their sense of empowerment through tourism. Subsequently, using Rocha's (1997) empowerment ladder theory, political

action regarding tourism is hypothesized as an outcome of resident empowerment through tourism. To test these hypothesized relationships, survey data were collected from residents of Fredericksburg, Texas, USA; a major regional destination. Findings of this study will benefit both scholars and practitioners in tourism by delineating the relationships between residents' knowledge, empowerment, and action.

Literature review

Empowerment

Empowerment refers to individuals' or groups' efforts to gain control over their destiny by enhancing their competency (i.e. internal strength) and influencing their surroundings (i.e. external response) (Rappaport, 2002; Strzelecka, Boley, & Strzelecka, 2017; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment transforms individuals into active agents who act upon their values and interests (Miller & Campbell, 2006; Sadan, 2004). In other words, empowered individual act to solve eminent problems that they or their community is facing and to change components of social systems causing the problems (Hall, 1981; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1981, 1984). Thus, empowerment rejects a single definition, and its understanding tends to be derived from specific situations or issues (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p. 570). Nowhere is this clearer than in the work of Friedmann (1992) that highlighted the need to restore disempowered sectors, communities, and individuals by emphasizing the role of community-driven decision-making, local self-reliance, and social learning.

There are several perspectives regarding empowerment in the literature, ranging from developmental approaches (e.g. Friedmann, 1992) to social-psychological perspectives (e.g. Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Of these, the social-psychological approach is particularly relevant to examining how resident empowerment leads to political action. Zimmerman (1995, 2000), who significantly advanced the social-psychological approach, saw the transformative capacity of empowerment in its three-component structure made of intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral empowerment. The first component refers to an individual's perceived control in a specific domain and a belief of having influence in that domain. Such a belief may lead to an individual initiative (Zimmerman, 1995) that then cascades into a greater sense of control and critical awareness (i.e. interactional component). According to Zimmerman (2000), once an individual reaches this interactional level of empowerment, he or she may also become more active within their community (i.e. behavioral component).

Zimmerman (1995) also drew a distinction between empowering processes that create opportunities to control one's destiny and the behavioral outcomes of empowerment such as political action. To be specific, empowering processes engage residents in learning about opportunities to influence the elements of their environment (Zimmerman, 1995) and increase their ability to influence the decision-making process. An important consequence of such empowering processes is an increased perception of socio-political control (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Empowered outcomes, on the other hand, can be a consequence of empowering processes, such as political pluralism, policy leverage, or knowledge sharing (Warner, 1997). While the distinction has resolved some of the definitional issue surrounding empowerment, no clarification has been made regarding how long the positive effects have to last for empowerment to qualify as an outcome rather than a process.

Apart from the process-or-outcome debate, there has been much discussion about how empowerment takes place, specifically what empowers individuals and what consequences empowerment brings. Scholars have commonly assumed positive relationships among different forms of empowerment (e.g. individual and collective; cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) (Knight & Cottrell, 2016; Rissel, 1994; Rocha, 1997; Zimmerman, 1995) so that a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of empowerment can be achieved. While the theories deviate

in how they disaggregate empowerment into different components and forms, they coalesce to suggest a positive relationship between an individual sense of empowerment (e.g. self-efficacy, perceived control) and collective empowerment (e.g. political action, community agency). Zimmerman (1995), for instance, showed that more knowledgeable individuals are more likely to engage in decision-making. This also echoes what Speer and Peterson (2000) found in regard to cognitive empowerment and behavioral empowerment.

Of many empowerment theories, Rocha's (1997) ladder of empowerment offers a systematic way of understanding and examining the relationship between individual empowerment and community empowerment. The ladder suggests a continuum that runs from individual empowerment at the bottom to collective empowerment operationalized as political empowerment at the top (Rocha, 1997). From both theoretical and practical standpoints, the empowerment ladder theory (Rocha, 1997) provides multiple benefits. While somewhat simplistic in how it defines specific forms of empowerment, the theory offers a view of empowerment where the individual and collective forms of empowerment are brought together. However, due to the fragmented nature of the research surrounding empowerment and the difficulties in measuring it, it remains unclear how the ladder operates in an empirical setting.

Empowerment in tourism

While empowerment remains a relatively under-explored construct within the literature on resident attitudes toward tourism (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Sofield, 2003), scholars have extensively commented on the socio-economic benefits that tourism brings to marginalized individuals and communities (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). More recently, the focus on resident empowerment in tourism has become a more prominent requirement for sustainable tourism development that serves as the ultimate goal of the field (Clarke, 1997). For instance, behavioral empowerment (Speer & Peterson, 2000), which takes the form of residents' participation in the tourism development process, has been considered essential to achieving more sustainable tourism development (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010; Murphy, 1985; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008; Strzelecka et al., 2017; Yu, Chancellor, & Cole, 2011). Inskip (1991) specifically pointed out that residents' participation in decision-making gives them a sense of ownership of the development plans, which leads them to be more supportive of the proposed tourism activities and thereby increasing the effectiveness and implementation of the development plans.

In the context of sustainable tourism development, Scheyvens (1999) stressed the importance of psychological, social, political, and economic dimensions when understanding how tourism empowers residents. Economic empowerment refers to the monetary benefits of tourism filtering down to all residents with visible signs of improvement in the quality of their life (Scheyvens, 1999). Psychological empowerment deals with heightened pride and self-esteem that residents feel when they witness tourists appreciating and valuing cultural and natural heritages in their community (Scheyvens, 1999). Social empowerment occurs when residents become bonded to each other and work together because of tourism development (Scheyvens, 1999). Finally, residents feel politically empowered when they think they have a voice in how tourism is developed and managed in their community (Scheyvens, 1999). Arguably, residents' perceptions of political empowerment are likely to translate into political action concerning tourism development as residents are more likely to become politically active if they feel their voice regarding tourism development is heard (Timothy, 2007).

Building on Scheyvens' (1999) conceptual model of resident empowerment, Boley and McGehee (2014) developed the RTES to measure residents' perceived empowerment through tourism. Comprised of 12 items across three dimensions (i.e. *psychological*, *social*, and *political empowerment*), the RETS is one of few scales intended for assessing resident empowerment

through tourism and has been tested for its validity and reliability in multiple tourism contexts both within (Boley et al., 2014) and outside (Boley et al., 2017; Boley, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2015; Strzelecka et al., 2017) the USA. However, the RETS does not include a measure of economic empowerment and thus, economic empowerment is not considered or measured when the scale is used.

To date, the RETS has been frequently utilized to understand how residents perceive tourism development in their community (Boley et al., 2014; Strzelecka et al., 2017) or how perceptions of resident empowerment deviate between residents with diverse socio-economic backgrounds (Maruyama, Woosnam, & Boley, 2016). Most recently, Boley et al. (2017) used the RETS to show that women were likely to feel more empowered than males as a result of tourism. Still, despite the growing research utilizing the empowerment perspective to examine how tourism benefits residents, limited effort has been undertaken to study what makes residents feel empowered through tourism and how those perceptions of resident empowerment relate to their political action.

Among many potential predictors of resident empowerment, residents' knowledge of the local tourism industry has been considered as one of most elementary components. Cole (2006b) claimed "understanding tourists and tourism processes is the first stage to empowering a tourism community" (p. 1). Similarly, residents' information asymmetry or lack of proper knowledge was found as a key obstacle to their participation in the tourism decision-making process (Saufi, O'Brien, & Wilkins, 2014; Weng & Peng, 2014). This mirrors what Rocha (1997), Rissel (1994), and Zimmerman (1995) have suggested with respect to community development as individuals' knowledge serves as an essential building block of their political action. As Timothy (2007) contended, greater awareness of tourism among residents can serve to empower them (as 'knowledge is power') and ultimately equip them to influence decision-making within their community. This notion has been substantiated through the studies undertaken by Cornwall (2003), Lyons, Smuts, and Stephens (2001), and Timothy (2000).

However, given the multifaceted nature of empowerment, it is hard not to suppose other forms of empowerment functioning between knowledge and action. For instance, studies have shown that tourism can empower residents socially by improving their perceptions of community cohesion and collaboration (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Strzelecka et al., 2017). Arguably, such social benefits of tourism produce more positive interaction among residents (Strzelecka & Wicks, 2010). Indeed, when tourism fosters residents' interaction in everyday life, the residents may seek to be more politically engaged to realize their collective interests in tourism (Cole, 2006a). Thus, residents' sense of social empowerment from tourism is expected to facilitate their political action in the tourism decision-making process.

Last but not least, tourism, when sustainable, facilitates the participatory process within a community that centers on residents' vision of tourism development. Community participation can involve a range of mechanism, which at the bottom of the participation ladder starts as simple manipulation of the public and then advances toward a positive and meaningful community involvement focused on political control (Arnstein, 1969; Christens, 2012; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010; Pretty, 1995; Strzelecka & Wicks, 2010; Tosun, 1999). Arguably, when residents feel tourism creates those opportunities for them, they are more likely to get involved. In other words, tourism can give a sense of political power to residents, followed by their stronger political engagement in the tourism decision-making process, regardless of whether they support or oppose tourism in their community.

Conceptual framework

With the above research gaps in mind, this study hypothesized the following relationships between residents' perceived knowledge of tourism, empowerment through tourism, and political action (Figure 1).

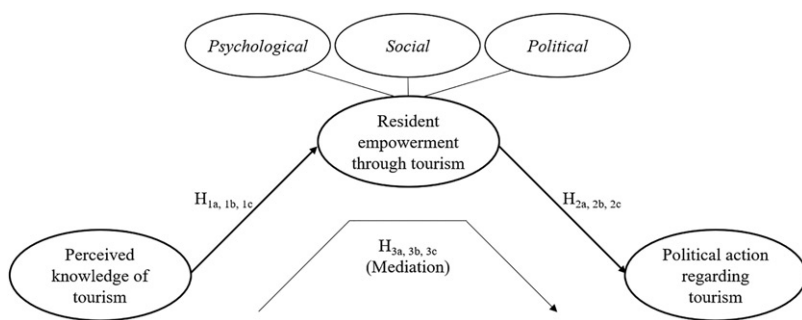


Figure 1. Conceptual model of this study.

$H_{1a, 1b, 1c}$: Residents' perceived knowledge of tourism has positive influences on their (a) psychological, (b) social, and (c) political empowerment through tourism.

$H_{2a, 2b, 2c}$: Residents' (a) psychological, (b) social, and (c) political empowerment through tourism have a positive influence on their political action regarding tourism.

$H_{3a, 3b, 3c}$: Residents' (a) psychological, (b) social, and (c) political empowerment through tourism mediate the influence that their perceived knowledge of tourism has on their political action regarding tourism.

Methods

Study site

Fredericksburg, Texas in the USA was selected as the site of this study. As a booming tourist destination, the town has been known for its rich cultural (e.g. Texas German heritage, antique shops), natural (e.g. wildflower trail), historical (e.g. war and pioneer museums), and culinary (e.g. wine) appeal (Fredericksburg Convention and Visitor Bureau (CVB), 2014). Fredericksburg has established itself as a major wine and food tourism destination among regional tourists with more than 30 vineyards and wineries located on the periphery of the town. Fredericksburg also celebrates its German immigrant heritage by hosting an annual Oktoberfest celebration that attracts more than 20,000 tourists (Fredericksburg CVB, 2016). According to the Fredericksburg CVB (2018), the town reported a net visitation number of around 150,000 in 2017. This is an impressive result for a town of roughly 11,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

Given the prominence of tourism for its size, Fredericksburg was deemed an appropriate place to investigate how residents are empowered and behave in relation to tourism development. More importantly, along with the recent tourism boom, Fredericksburg residents have become wary about the social costs of tourism (Hooks, 2016). They have been increasingly irritated by loud live music played at restaurants and bars in the town's central commercial area, the soaring housing costs (Jonas, 2016), and disorderly conduct of drunken tourists. Especially, there has been growing concern about the town being overly promoted as a wine tourism destination, overshadowing its rich cultural and historical attractions. Resultantly, this resident frustration with tourism was predicted to create an ideal environment to observe how residents' knowledge of tourism leads to their perceptions of empowerment which then turn into political action to solve problems associated with tourism (Figure 2).

Survey instrument and sampling

Data collection was conducted between March and May of 2016 using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique and a self-administered survey instrument. This study first divided

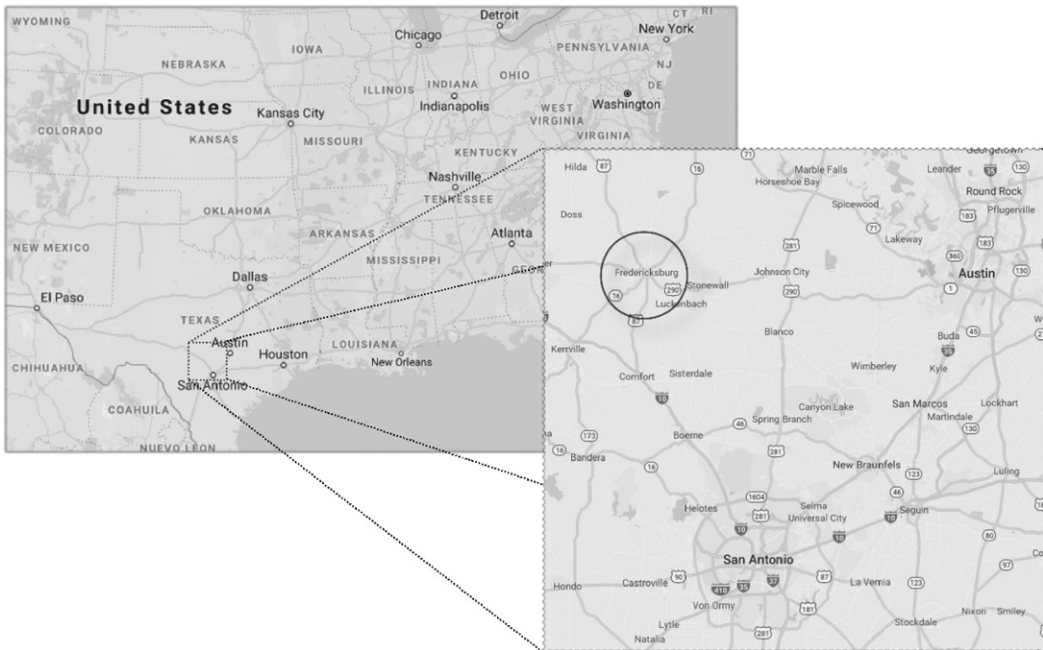


Figure 2. Geographical location of Fredericksburg, Texas.

Fredericksburg into four neighborhood clusters in line with U.S. Census Bureau census tracts and selected two at random. From the two census tracts, block groups were identified and also randomly selected. Ultimately, 10 block groups were selected, and a random point within each block group was selected as the starting point. From that point, research assistants visited every other house and asked heads of households or their spouse to participate in the survey. Once a household agreed to participate, the research assistants distributed a copy of the survey instrument which was to be recovered within a few hours.

The survey instrument contained a host of questions regarding how residents think and feel about their community, interaction with tourists, and tourism in Fredericksburg. For the purpose of this study, this study specifically focused on the following three constructs: residents' (a) perceived knowledge of tourism in Fredericksburg, (b) perceptions of resident empowerment through tourism, and (c) political action regarding tourism. Residents' perception of tourism knowledge was measured using a single item (1 = *not at all knowledgeable* and 7 = *very knowledgeable*). To assess how tourism helps residents feel empowered, the RETS (Boley & McGehee, 2014) was employed as it was the only scale developed and tested for resident empowerment engendered by tourism. The RETS has 12 items across three dimensions of *psychological empowerment*, *social empowerment*, and *political empowerment* (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Strzelecka et al., 2017), where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree* to positive statements regarding resident empowerment. Finally, Speer and Peterson's (2000) unidimensional Behavioral Empowerment Scale (BES) was adapted to measure residents' political action. Unlike other empowerment scales that address perceptions, the BES specifically focuses on behavioral outcomes, rendering itself especially appropriate for the purpose of this study. It differs from the perception of *political empowerment* measured by Boley and McGehee's (2014) RETS since the BES (Speer & Peterson, 2000) addresses specific political action taken by residents, such as petitioning, writing letters to politicians, and attending public meetings. To make the scale more applicable to the context of this study, two additional items (i.e. "attended a meeting to pressure for change of the city's approach to tourism" and "participated in a protest, march or rally regarding tourism.") were added, whereas other BES items were rephrased to fit tourism context.

Table 1. Fit indices for measurement models.

Model	$\chi^2_{(df)}$	χ^2/df	SRMR	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	PCLOSE
Initial	613.989 ₍₁₈₃₎	3.355	0.050	0.939	0.930	0.084	0.000
Final	297.441 ₍₁₄₄₎	2.066	0.049	0.977	0.973	0.056	0.120

Given the extent of the modifications, no pretest was deemed necessary. All BES items were asked using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *never* and 7 = *all of the time*).

Analysis

Prior to testing hypotheses, the authors first reviewed the data for any univariate or multivariate outliers by consulting z-scores and Mahalanobis distance values. Any responses that contained significant outliers were removed. Missing values were treated with an expectation maximization algorithm. After the data preparation stage, a measurement model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The authors re-specified a measurement model in case it showed a less-than-acceptable fit to the data and the re-specification was theoretically justifiable. Once a good measurement model was achieved, structural models were built to test the hypotheses. When testing the mediation, this study used Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure as well as bootstrapping. In doing the data preparation and analysis, SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 22.0 were used.

Results

Sample overview

Of 647 residents that the research assistants spoke with, 165 declined to participate. Thus, 482 copies of the survey instrument were distributed, and from those, the research assistants retrieved 376 copies completed by residents (58.1% response rate). However, nine of them were either disengaged (i.e. straight-lined) or incomplete (i.e. leaving more than a half of the survey instrument unanswered) thus had to be discarded. Of the remaining 367 responses, 31 responses were further removed because they were found containing multivariate outliers after comparing their Mahalanobis distance with $\chi^2_{(22, 0.001)} = 48.268$. Consequentially, 336 responses were retained and used in data analysis.

In the sample, females ($n = 204$, 60.7%) outnumbered males ($n = 131$, 39.0%), and the average age of the sample was 54.31 years. Regarding socio-economic characteristics, the sample was very well-educated (199 or 59.2% holding a bachelor's degree or higher) and represented all income groups alike. Most respondents were married ($n = 225$, 67.0%), and slightly more than a half ($n = 182$, 54.2%) of the sample were of German lineage, reflecting the historical background of the town.

Measurement model

The initial measurement model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data but there was room for further improvement (Table 1). Following what the modification indices suggested, the authors added two error covariance terms. Also, two BES items, which were intended for political action, were discarded for their poor loading (i.e. standardized coefficient less than 0.70) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) to the construct. These changes brought a noticeable improvement to the fit indices, allowing the authors to claim an excellent fit of the final measurement model to the data based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) criteria (Table 1). The authors confirmed the same three-factor and single-factor structures of the RETS and the BES, respectively. Also, as presented in Tables 2 and 3, all the factors involved in the final measurement model demonstrated high

Table 2. Descriptive and CFA statistics for each item.

Factor/item	Mean	SD	Std. loading
<i>Perceived knowledge^a</i>			
Level of knowledge about tourism in Fredericksburg	5.13	1.47	n/a
<i>Psychological empowerment^b</i> (CR = 0.958, AVE = 0.819)			
Tourism makes me proud to be a F'burg resident.	5.26	1.48	0.86
Tourism makes me feel special because people travel to see my city's unique features.	5.28	1.47	0.90
Tourism makes me want to tell others about what we have to offer in F'burg.	5.46	1.39	0.94
Tourism reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors.	5.38	1.38	0.93
Tourism makes me want to keep F'burg special.	5.74	1.35	0.90
<i>Social empowerment^b</i> (CR = 0.947, AVE = 0.857)			
Tourism makes me feel more connected to my community.	4.47	1.56	0.94
Tourism fosters a sense of 'community spirit' within me.	4.59	1.56	0.97
Tourism provides ways for me to get involved in my community.	4.50	1.56	0.86
<i>Political empowerment^b</i> (CR = 0.956, AVE = 0.844)			
I feel I have a voice in F'burg tourism development decisions.	3.34	1.64	0.95
I feel I have access to the decision-making process when it comes to tourism in F'burg.	3.33	1.64	0.96
I feel my vote makes a difference in how tourism is developed in F'burg.	3.56	1.70	0.89
I feel I have an outlet to share my concerns about tourism development in F'burg.	3.60	1.70	0.88
<i>Political action^c</i> (CR = 0.920, AVE = 0.624)			
Written a letter or made a telephone call to influence a policy or issue related to tourism.	1.66	1.20	0.79
Signed a petition concerning tourism.	1.75	1.24	0.70
Attended an event that provided information about volunteering opportunities in tourism.	1.94	1.44	0.75
Attended a meeting to pressure for change of the city's approach to tourism.	1.65	1.16	0.91
Arranged an agenda for a public meeting about tourism.	1.28	0.79	0.74
Attended a public meeting to pressure for a tourism policy change.	1.38	0.95	0.84
Attended a meeting to gather information about a tourism issue.	1.69	1.25	0.77
Had an in-depth, face-to-face conversation about a tourism issue affecting in F'burg community.*	2.06	1.52	n/a
Participated in a protest, march or rally regarding tourism.*	1.16	0.63	n/a

^aAsked in a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = not at all knowledgeable and 7 = very knowledgeable.

^bAsked in a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

^cAsked in a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = never and 7 = all the time.

*Indicates items that were removed during CFA; hence no standardized loading was reported for these items.

reliability (i.e. CR exceeding 0.70) (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010), convergent validity (i.e. AVEs greater than 0.50) (Hair et al., 2010), and discriminant validity (i.e. square root of AVEs greater than inter-construct correlations) (Hair et al., 2010).

Structural model

At this point, the authors proceeded onto structural models to test the hypotheses. First, a structural model was built without assuming the mediating role of resident empowerment. Results indicated positive effects of residents' perceived knowledge of tourism on every aspect of their perceived empowerment through tourism (Table 4). More specifically, the standardized coefficient for the path between perceived knowledge and *psychological empowerment* (i.e. H_{1a}) ($\beta = 0.277$, $p < .001$) was the largest. This was then followed by *social empowerment* (i.e. H_{1b}) ($\beta = 0.235$, $p < .001$) and *political empowerment* (H_{1c}) ($\beta = 0.183$, $p < .001$).

However, when the relationships between the RETS factors and political action were examined, only *political empowerment* (i.e. H_{2c}) ($\beta = 0.202$, $p < .001$) and *social empowerment* (i.e. H_{2b}) ($\beta = 0.103$, $p < .001$) produced meaningful results (Table 5). Resultantly, this led the authors to dismiss the influence of *psychological empowerment* (i.e. H_{2a}) ($\beta = 0.026$) on political action and declare that there was no need to consider *psychological empowerment* as a mediator (i.e. H_{3a}) given its weak association with political action.

To examine if *social empowerment* and *political empowerment* mediated the influence of perceived knowledge on political action (i.e. H_{3b} , H_{3c}), two additional structural models were built for each mediator. That is, one model assumed a direct path from perceived knowledge to political action without mediation, whereas the other contained paths between all the constructs (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Results suggested that the effect of perceived knowledge on political action was

Table 3. Values for squared root of AVE and inter-construct correlations for each factor.

	PsyEMP	SocEMP	PoIEMP	PoIACT
PsyEMP	0.905			
SocEMP	0.755	0.926		
PoIEMP	0.456	0.628	0.919	
PoIACT	0.180	0.217	0.280	0.790
Note.	PsyEMP: <i>Psychological empowerment</i>		SocEMP: <i>Social empowerment</i>	
	PoIEMP: <i>Political empowerment</i>		PoIACT: <i>Political action</i>	

Note. Squared root of AVE values for each construct are presented in the bold diagonal line.

Table 4. Results for H_{1a} , H_{1b} , and H_{1c} .

Hypothesis	Path coefficient		t-value
	Unstd.	Std.	
H_{1a} : Perceived knowledge \rightarrow <i>Psychological empowerment</i>	0.237*	0.277*	5.070
H_{1b} : Perceived knowledge \rightarrow <i>Social empowerment</i>	0.017*	0.235*	4.253
H_{1c} : Perceived knowledge \rightarrow <i>Political empowerment</i>	0.186*	0.183*	3.336

*Indicates significant at an alpha = 0.01 level after testing with 2500 Bootstrap samples.

Table 5. Results for H_{2a} , H_{2b} , and H_{2c} .

Hypothesis	Path coefficient		t-value
	Unstd.	Std.	
H_{2a} : <i>Psychological empowerment</i> \rightarrow Political action	0.012	0.026	0.460
H_{2b} : <i>Social empowerment</i> \rightarrow Political action	0.588*	0.103*	1.893
H_{2c} : <i>Political empowerment</i> \rightarrow Political action	0.078*	0.202*	3.524

*Indicates significant at an alpha = 0.01 level after testing with 2500 Bootstrap samples.

marginally mediated by both dimensions of resident empowerment (Table 6). That is, the direct path from perceived knowledge to political action took on a positive and significant standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.286$, $p < .001$) when *social empowerment* or *political empowerment* was not in place. However, even when *social empowerment* was considered as a mediator, the standardized coefficient remained significant (i.e. H_{3b}) ($\beta = 0.247$, $p < .001$, partial mediation). This was also true for *political empowerment* (i.e. H_{3c}) ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < .001$, partial mediation). Squared multiple correlations (i.e. R^2) for political action was 0.116.

Conclusion

With the growing recognition of the role that resident empowerment plays in promoting sustainable tourism development (Cole, 2006a), this study sought to expand the literature by looking into how residents' perceived knowledge of tourism affects their perceptions of psychological, social, and political empowerment, and how these forms of resident empowerment, in turn, relate to their political action surrounding tourism. Thus, this study illustrated the relations between knowledge and action in a tourism context. Much of earlier work on empowerment within the tourism literature has been driven by qualitative research methods (e.g. Mitchell & Reid, 2001; Sofield, 2003; Sutawa, 2012). While the convoluted and contextual nature of empowerment may make it well suited for the qualitative approach, employing quantitative analytic tools can shed light into how different forms of resident empowerment interact with knowledge to generate actual behavior in a way that rich qualitative research cannot. In fact, continued efforts have been made to measure resident empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014) and test its relationships with other constructs (Boley et al., 2014; Strzelecka et al., 2017), and this study tried to extend such efforts and complement earlier findings.

Table 6. Results for H_{3a} , H_{3b} , and H_{3c} .

Hypothesis	Direct effect		Mediation
	Without mediator	With mediator	
H_{3b} : Perceived knowledge \longrightarrow <i>Social empowerment</i> \longrightarrow Political action	0.286*	0.247*	Partial
H_{3c} : Perceived knowledge \longrightarrow <i>Political empowerment</i> \longrightarrow Political action	0.286*	0.244*	Partial

Note: $R^2 = 0.116$.

Note: H_{3a} (i.e. Knowledge \longrightarrow Social empowerment \longrightarrow Political action) was not tested.

*Indicates significant at an $\alpha = 0.01$ level after testing with 2500 Bootstrap samples.

Given that resident empowerment is considered a key non-economic benefit from tourism (Boley et al., 2014; Scheyvens, 2002; Strzelecka et al., 2017), it is worth discussing what conditions (i.e. knowledge of tourism) may facilitate resident empowerment from tourism and whether resident empowerment can help explain resident participation in political action centered on tourism development. This issue seems to be even more important as studies of this nature are scarce, and previous studies have primarily focused on the relationship between empowerment from tourism and resident support for tourism (Boley et al., 2014; Strzelecka et al., 2017).

With this gap in mind, this study investigated the antecedents to and the outcomes from resident empowerment in a simultaneous manner. Specifically, it proposed two hypotheses regarding the influence of residents' perceived knowledge on their psychological, social, and political empowerment (i.e. H_{1a} , $1b$, $1c$) and the influence of their psychological, social, and political empowerment on their political action (i.e. H_{2a} , $2b$, $2c$). Expanding on these hypotheses, a mediating role of resident empowerment in between perceived knowledge and political action (i.e. H_{3a} , $3b$, $3c$) was also posited.

The results supported all three hypotheses. That is, the more knowledgeable about tourism residents were, the more psychologically, socially, and politically empowered they were likely to feel ($\beta = 0.183\text{--}0.277$, $p < .001$). Two forms of resident empowerment translated into their participation in the tourism decision-making process, as the authors identified positive effects of *social empowerment* ($\beta = 0.103$, $p < .001$) and *political empowerment* ($\beta = 0.202$, $p < .001$) on political action. Also confirmed was the mediating role that residents' empowerment played between their perceived knowledge and political action. However, the mediating effect was rather limited as only marginal drops in the sizes of standardized coefficients were observed compared to the model without mediation (i.e. "without mediator" in Table 4). Still, the results were significant enough to claim partial mediation.

Theoretical implications

Theoretically, this study empirically tested the relationships between residents' perceived knowledge of tourism, perceived empowerment from tourism, and tourism-related political action. While scholars have suggested a positive relationship that stretches from residents' knowledge through empowerment to action, their ideas nevertheless have remained conceptual (Cole, 2006a; Scheyvens, 1999; Timothy, 2007) or explorative in nature (Cole, 2006b; Mitchell & Reid, 2001; Sofield, 2003; Sutawa, 2012). In that aspect, the findings from this study provide empirical support for the idea that resident empowerment from tourism can coalesce into political action as suggested by Rocha (1997), Labonte (1994), and Rissel (1994). Although the mediating effect of resident empowerment on the relationship between perceived knowledge and political action was limited, this study furnished convincing evidence that residents' empowerment at the individual level fosters their engagement in tourism planning and development and that increasing residents' knowledge of tourism is one way to foster their empowerment.

These findings open the door for scholars to consider a range of other theoretically-important antecedents to resident empowerment (arguably these can be conditions that need to be created within communities for resident empowerment to occur), as well as better predictors of political action concerning tourism. For example, only 11.6% of the variation in residents' political action was explained in this study, and this suggests that there are a range of other factors that influence residents to engage or not to engage in political action such as attending community meetings about tourism or talking to elected officials about their concerns. Relatedly, perceived knowledge is likely only one salient antecedent to resident empowerment. It is of interest to investigate how a range of socio-demographic and psychographic factors influence residents' perceptions of psychological, social and political empowerment and what other conditions are needed for residents to feel empowered through tourism.

Practical implications

Knowledge is the beginning point of empowerment (Cole, 2006b), and in a practical sense, this study illustrated the political importance of residents being knowledgeable of tourism within their community. Knowledge alone contributed significantly to both residents' perceptions of *psychological, social, and political empowerment* ($\beta = 0.183\text{--}0.277$) and to their political action ($\beta = 0.325$). Often, policy-makers overly focus on making participatory means more accessible to their residents, while the low attendance at community meetings and the sense of ambivalence may actually be related to residents' lack of knowledge of tourism. In such cases, policy makers should consider providing more educational materials along with organized meetings. Perhaps, as residents become more knowledgeable about the positive and negative impacts tourism has in their community, they will see the value of being politically engaged to ensure that the benefits of tourism outweigh the costs. Thus, the distribution of knowledge appears to be the first step to more engaged residents. In contrast, limiting access to the knowledge of tourism can be a potential tool of control that keeps residents disengaged and subsequently disempowered. While the importance of knowledge is unquestionable, different approaches can be made as to how knowledge can be effectively delivered to residents. Starting with more deliberate efforts such as mailing information about the economic and social importance of tourism to residents or publishing opinion editorials in local newspapers are likely to increase residents' knowledge of tourism. These initiatives can be paired with more proactive approaches such as workshops. Greater knowledge about the potential benefits as well as the costs of tourism translates into stronger perceptions of psychological, social, and political empowerment. It can also generate greater interest in tourism among residents and foster their political engagement. Still, practitioners should consider that communities are heterogeneous in terms of where they stand, what they face, and how they can be reached.

Limitations and suggestions

Apart from its theoretical and practical implications, this study faces some limitations. First of all, this study focused on non-economic benefits, and economic aspects of tourism were not considered. It is highly likely that residents' economic dependence on tourism exerts a significant influence on their political action. Likewise, residents who are more knowledgeable about tourism may as well be those who are more reliant on tourism. Future studies may also consider how individuals' worldviews affect resident empowerment (Knight & Cottrell, 2016; Robeyns, 2005; Rowlands, 1997), which would capture greater individualized, heterogenic perspectives among residents.

Although this study intended to cover Fredericksburg residents with diverse socio-demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, it did not focus on local inequalities and power relations among residents (Friedmann, 1992; Mohan & Stokke, 2000). Future research may take into account such

economic and political inequalities to present a more detailed picture of the relationships between perceived empowerment and political action. This will potentially provide greater insights into residents with lower incomes who have limited power within the community. In the same vein, having the head of a household as the primary participant of the survey may fail to capture what other members of the household think or feel. As such, a different approach can be made in future studies to avoid bias engendered by patriarchal culture and power differentials.

Additionally, residents' political action may not be a unidimensional construct as it appeared in this study. As each political action differs in their nature (i.e. individual or collective) and extent (i.e. proactive or passive), future research may benefit from using scales that address such differences. Likewise, future studies may use multiple items to assess residents' knowledge of tourism. Given that tourism is a multifaceted industry and a dynamic phenomenon, residents may only have a fragmented understanding of tourism in their community. For example, business owners may be very knowledgeable about the economic benefits of tourism but not aware of some of the social costs, such as excessive noise, rising property taxes, and decreased parking spots. It is suggested to measure the knowledge of tourism with a multi-dimensional scale that asks residents about their knowledge of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism and to see how knowledge in these domains influences perceptions of resident empowerment and ultimately political action in relation to tourism.

Also, there is a need to examine how residents' support for tourism influences their political action. Residents' support or opposition to tourism is one of the primary outcome variables within tourism research (Boley & Strzelecka, 2016), and there is a chance that residents do not get politically involved in tourism because they are not too frustrated by tourism's negative impacts. This type of future research could draw upon the social exchange theory (Ap, 1992), where residents' perceptions of the benefits and costs of tourism are measured and see how this residents' cost-benefit analysis leads to their support for tourism and political action. Such efforts may cast light on other possibilities regarding the relationships among knowledge, empowerment, and action.

Finally, future studies may consider the possibility of knowledge, empowerment, and action influencing each other and therefore being spirally related. While knowledge may be a primary contributor to empowerment (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010), their relationship may actually be more bi-directional and result in a feedback loop (Zimmerman, 2000). Individuals with an enhanced sense of empowerment may also be more motivated to seek new knowledge. Similarly, action may also 'predict' empowerment instead of 'being predicted.' Often, political action is driven by ideological causes and leads to heightened empowerment. As such, future studies may seek alternative explanations of how knowledge, empowerment, and action are interwoven with one another. In doing so, there is a need to pair the quantitative measurement and the qualitative understanding of empowerment. This will help to delve deeper into the relationships explored in this study and triangulate the findings. After all, empowerment is a complex construct that permits multiple approaches and interpretations across different contexts.

In conclusion, quantitative research on resident empowerment in tourism contexts is still in a nascent stage where little is known about the ways in which residents can become empowered and the outcomes of this empowerment. This study aimed to address this gap by examining how perceived tourism knowledge relates to residents' perception of being empowered through tourism and how resident empowerment through tourism influenced political action related to tourism. While all three hypotheses were supported, more research is required to better explain the relationships among the three constructs.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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