

Review

Residents' Risk Perception in Developing Destinations

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Abstract: This paper addresses a gap in research concerning local communities' perceptions of emerging tourism destinations through the lens of risk perception theory. Despite extensive exploration of perceived risk across disciplines, little attention has been paid to how local communities perceive the risks associated with tourism development. This article aims to propose a framework to explore the multifaceted aspects of residents' risk perception, encompassing various types of risks, emotions, personal factors, and the role of the media. By formulating research questions that probe into these dimensions, the paper also aims to provide a background for empirical studies that validate and refine the proposed model. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of local community perceptions, offering insights for policymakers and practitioners to foster sustainable tourism practices and community engagement.

Keywords: risk perception theory; residents; residents' risk perception; developing destination

1. Introduction

Extensive research on perceived risk has been disseminated across diverse academic disciplines [1,2], including economics and psychology, among others. In the academic literature on tourism, studies on perceived risk have mostly concentrated on different aspects of travel-related experiences. Many studies examine the risks that tourists perceive [1], as well as different facets of travel, including organizing-related concerns [1,3], potential risks that travelers may face in specific locations [4,5], health [6], and physical safety [7,8]. Concern over the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to both health and personal/physical safety themes that center on risk perception [9].

Nevertheless, the perspective of risk perception from the residents of developing tourism areas remains largely unexplored, despite the longstanding tradition of studying residents' perceptions [10] and the certitude that tourism development involves a multitude of changes and impacts that may not be immediately apparent. Individuals may react differently to the new circumstances. Considering this context, there are some incipient studies that apply the risk perception theory to the local community when receiving tourists [11,12]. For example, Joo et al. [11] focus on explaining the risks associated with receiving tourists during the pandemic period, and Camprubi and Garau-Vadell [12] address the growth of Airbnb apartments.

This paper, thus, advocates for the utilization of risk perception theory to explore how residents perceive developing tourism destinations. As a conceptual paper, it aims to lay the groundwork for future empirical research in this area by means of a conceptual framework and related research questions. By exploring risk perception dynamics in the context of developing tourism destinations, this paper seeks to provide theoretical insights into the complexities of residents' perceptions, enlightening the factors influencing their attitudes and behaviors towards tourism development. This conceptual framework is expected to not only fill a gap in the existing literature but also offer practical implications for policymakers and stakeholders involved in destination planning and community engagement. Ultimately, this research attempts to significantly enhance the understanding of the local community's perceptions and enhance the sustainability of tourism development initiatives.



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2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Exploring the Concept of Risk Perception

Research yields a range of definitions regarding the concepts of risk and risk perception across different fields, each reflecting the specific focus and context of the study. Short [13] defines risk as the likelihood that an individual will face the effects of a hazard, while Vlek and Keren [14] succinctly describe risk as the likelihood of undesired consequences. Rosa [15] further elaborates, describing risk as a situation where something valuable to humans, including human life itself, is endangered with an uncertain outcome. Similarly, Sjöberg, Moen, and Rundmo [16] emphasize the association of risk with the probability of adverse events or negative outcomes. Additionally, Slovic and Weber [17] underscore the complexity of defining risk, noting its multifaceted nature encompassing hazards, probabilities, consequences, and potential threats. In tourism academic literature, risk is frequently associated with the possibility of bad things happening while traveling or at the destination [18].

In several fields of study, risk perception is defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of the likelihood of coming into contact with a certain danger [16]. This entails assessing the possibility of events happening as well as the effects of unfavorable or adverse results [1,16], as well as the degree of uncertainty [1] accompanied by apprehension, anxiety, and fear-related emotions [19,20]. According to Slovic [21], "risk does not exist 'out there', independent of our minds and cultures, waiting to be measured. Human beings have invented the concept of risk to help them understand and cope with the dangers and uncertainties of life", highlighting the inherently subjective nature of risk perception. According to a sociological perspective on risk, the understanding of uncertainty and unwanted events originates from the conception of the social construction of reality [22–24], where reality is both individually and collectively subjective.

2.2. Residents and Risk Perception

Numerous academic fields, including health studies, sociology, economics, psychology, and political science, have conducted research on how local populations perceive risk [22]. Predominantly, a collective viewpoint is embraced in such research, focusing on the societal implications of risk perception over individual perspectives. The emphasis lies on how communities perceive potential hazards or unfavorable events such as natural catastrophes [25], health issues [26], illnesses [27], economic downturns [28], or criminal activities [29]. This research primarily analyzes risk perceptions from a collective standpoint, prioritizing the perceptions about the overall health and physical integrity of the community residing in a specific area. Traditionally, the psychometric paradigm is employed to assess risk perceptions through quantitative measures [30,31], often utilizing surveys or structured interviews to gather data on individuals' subjective evaluations of hazards. This approach allows researchers to quantify and analyze various risk perception dimensions, such as controllability, perceived severity, and familiarity, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing how risks are perceived within communities.

According to Slovic, Fischhoff, and Lichtenstein [32], examining how risk is perceived in a society is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provides valuable insights into residents' behaviors and attitudes towards potential risks. By understanding how individuals within a community perceive and interpret various hazards, policymakers, urban planners, and emergency management officials can tailor interventions and strategies to address specific concerns and mitigate risks effectively. Secondly, studying risk perception allows for the anticipation of public responses to hazards. By identifying how different segments of the population perceive risks and the factors that influence their reactions, authorities can better prepare for and manage crises, facilitating more timely and effective responses. Thirdly, examining risk perception helps determine what information needs to be communicated to the public and how best to convey it. Understanding the specific knowledge gaps, misconceptions, and communication preferences within a community enables the development of targeted risk communication strategies. By employing appro-

appropriate channels, messaging frameworks, and trusted sources, authorities can enhance public understanding, engagement, and compliance with safety measures, ultimately fostering greater resilience and preparedness in the face of potential hazards.

2.3. Residents Perception of Tourism

Research on the perceptions of residents in the tourism industry spans more than three decades, and this “has undoubtedly contributed to a wider understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon” [10]. Specifically, prior research has mostly concentrated on two perspectives.

Firstly, there is an analysis of the consequences of tourism development, examining its impacts, whether positive or negative, on the economy, culture, and environment of the destination [33,34]. In the last several years, studies addressing the adverse effects of tourism have proliferated, including issues like overtourism [35,36], tourism phobia [37], and gentrification [38]. These emerging concerns underscore the complexities and challenges associated with the development of tourism in local communities.

Secondly, former research attempted to examine the way local communities perceive and endorse tourism through an analysis of residents’ viewpoints [39–41]. These investigations traditionally draw upon the principles of the Social Exchange Theory [40]. Based on this theory, the local community supports tourism when they feel that the benefits outweigh the costs. However, Sharpley (2014) [10] notes that many studies remain ‘atheoretical’ and even those that employ a theoretical framework may not fully clarify residents’ perceptions. Hence, there persists a lack of robust theoretical grounding in some inquiries. This highlights the need for further development and application of theoretical frameworks to enhance residents’ perceptions of tourism destinations effectively.

3. Residents’ Risk Perception in Developing Destinations: A Conceptual Model

One of the most important predictors of how local populations view the effects of tourism in their region is risk perception. Risk, which encompasses hazards, probabilities, consequences, and potential threats [17], is often perceived and identified before tangible tourism impacts materialize. As seen above, the study of residents’ perceptions has been fundamentally based on identifying the impacts produced by tourist activity but not the likelihood of their occurrence and/or the possible consequences of negative outcomes.

Despite the prevailing notion of tourism development as a positive force bringing new opportunities [42], not all the individuals in a local community perceive tourism positively. Novel tourism ventures may generate uncertainty, fear, and anxiety among residents. Not everyone is prepared for the change that a new tourism venture entails [12]. Consequently, like other domains, tourism can evoke a sense of risk among locals, requiring comprehensive analysis and understanding for effective management [30]. For instance, recent research by Joo et al. [11] examining residents’ perceptions of the risks associated with tourist arrivals during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the significance of this approach.

Therefore, taking into account the absence of a theoretical foundation in the examination of local communities’ perceptions, research in this area should prioritize the use of risk perception theory to delve deeper into and better comprehend residents’ perceptions. Particularly, this study aims to develop a conceptual framework that serves as a starting point to examine and analyze how the local community perceives risk in tourism destinations, and more specifically in emerging tourist destinations. Research should focus on the four main aspects depicted in Figure 1 that influence the overall evaluation of risk perception.

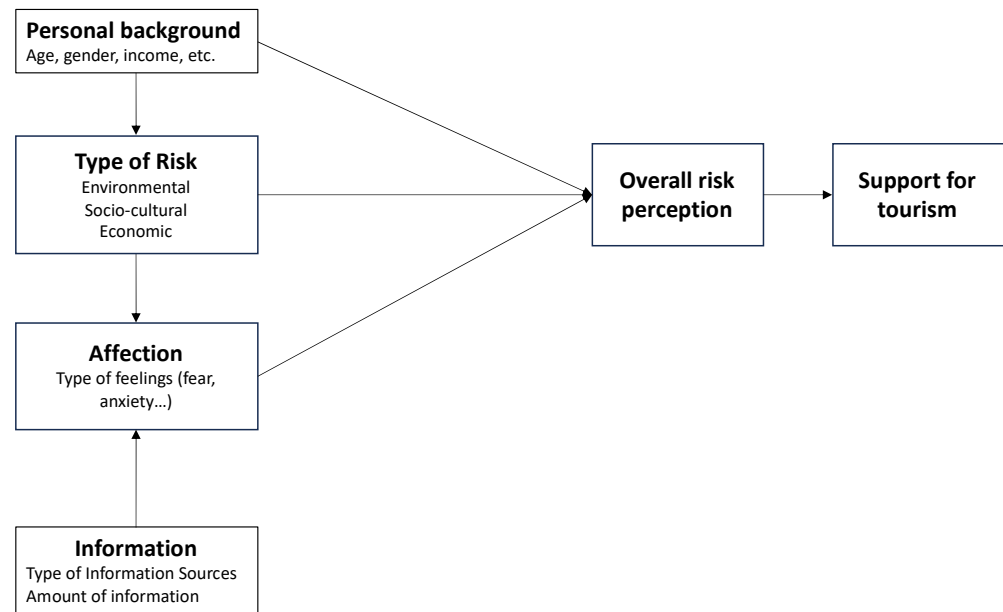


Figure 1. Model of local community risk perception.

Firstly, it is critical to comprehend the kinds and patterns of tourist development hazards that residents perceive before the effects of tourism become apparent. Taking into account previous studies (Table 1) on residents' perceptions, this could involve risks related to economics, social dynamics, cultural factors, and the environment [12,33,43]. Regarding economic risks, residents may express concerns about the poor quality of employment opportunities resulting from tourism, as well as a substantial increase in the cost of living due to inflation and real estate speculation. They may also worry about capital outflows and the inadequate estimation of the costs associated with tourism, which could lead to undesirable opportunity costs such as the transfer of funds from essential services like health and education to support tourism initiatives. Focusing on social dynamics, residents may fear the deterioration of coexistence among citizens, the expulsion of traditional residents from their neighborhoods, and a decrease in their overall quality of life. Furthermore, they may feel alienated from their own communities as tourism alters the nature of events and activities to cater to tourists, potentially leading to an increase in crime, prostitution, and social dislocation. Considering cultural factors, residents may express concerns about the loss of authenticity and tradition as tourism modifies cultural practices and heritage sites to appeal to visitors. Additionally, they may perceive tourism as bringing nothing of interest to residents while saturating spaces traditionally available to them. Focusing on environmental risk, residents may worry about the increase in pollution, including water and noise pollution, caused by tourism activities. They may also be concerned about the strain on local infrastructure, such as traffic congestion and the deterioration of neighborhood facilities, as well as environmental damage, architectural pollution, and the destruction of natural habitats and heritage sites. These hazards can lead to overcrowding, changes in wildlife behavior, the loss of vegetation, and a reduction in local biodiversity.

Table 1. Types of residents' risk perceptions for developing tourism destinations.

Type of Risk	Risk Items	Andereck et al. [33]	Camprubi & Garau-Vadell. [12]	González et al. [43]	Joo et al. [11]	Mariam [44]	Marzuke [45]	Ryu et al. [46]
Economic	Poor quality of employment		x					
	Localised inflation						x	
	Real estate speculation and the increase in housing prices			x			x	
	Capital outflows						x	
	Inadequate estimation of the cost of tourism						x	
	Undesirable opportunity cost, including transfer of funds from health and education						x	
	Fear of job security					x		
	Increasing cost of living	x	x	x		x		
	Economic disparity					x		
Socio-cultural	Higher maintenance-related expenditure in public areas and services			x				
	Deterioration of coexistence among citizens, social conflicts.		x					
	The expulsion of traditional residents from the neighborhood		x	x				
	Declining resident hospitality	x						
	Decrease in the quality of life		x					
	Social dislocation		x				x	
	Change in community structure						x	
	Changes in lifestyle					x		
	Potential increase in crime rates	x					x	
	Potential increase in prostitution	x		x			x	
	Potential increase in drugs and alcohol	x						
	Potential increase in gambling, betting, fraud, or theft	x		x				
	Health-related threats				x			x
	Severity of health threats				x			x
	Crowding of local infrastructure (healthcare, leisure, transportation, etc.)	x		x		x		
	Modification of the nature of the event or activity to accommodate tourists							x
	Degradation of the local culture and traditions	x					x	
	Loss of resident identity	x					x	
	Cultural diffusion						x	
	Effects on traditional family values	x						
Degradation of morality	x							
Cultural commercialization	x							
Environmental	Increase of pollution (including waste, water, air, and noise)	x	x	x				
	Traffic problems	x	x	x				
	More rapid deterioration of neighborhood infrastructure		x					
	Overcrowding of public places traditionally available to residents	x	x	x			x	
	Environmental and ecological damage	x		x			x	
	Changes and damages in natural processes	x					x	

Table 1. Cont.

Type of Risk	Risk Items	Andereck et al. [33]	Camprubi & Garau-Vadell. [12]	González et al. [43]	Joo et al. [11]	Mariam [44]	Marzuke [45]	Ryu et al. [46]
	Destruction of heritage							x
	Architectural pollution (large buildings that destroy views, clashing and unfitting architectural styles, etc.)	x		x				x
	Changed feeding and breeding habits of wild life cause problems related to the preservation of wildlife			x				x
	Deforestation and the loss of vegetation	x				x		x
	Reduction in local biodiversity and wildlife destruction	x						x
	Sanitation problems					x		

In this sense, residents of a destination that is developing can anticipate potential negative consequences that may amplify their levels of risk perception. As they become increasingly aware of the potential hazards associated with tourism development, their overall evaluation of risk perception in relation to tourism is directly influenced. This may result in an increasingly hesitant or lack of support for further tourism development in its place of residence. As a response to this situation, residents may feel the desire to safeguard their community's well-being and preserve its unique identity and way of life. Additionally, residents may fear the loss of control over their environment and livelihoods, particularly if they perceive tourism development as being driven primarily by external interests or neglectful of local needs and concerns. Moreover, residents' experiences with past tourism initiatives or observed impacts in other destinations can shape their attitudes and perceptions towards future development efforts. Negative experiences, such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, or social tensions, may lead residents to adopt a more skeptical stance towards tourism expansion, further amplifying their risk perception.

Secondly, former research has extensively recognized the role of feelings and their effect on risk perception [19,20,47]. Specifically, fear-related emotions have been found to amplify risk estimates [24]. According to Loewenstein et al. [19], while individuals cognitively evaluate risk, they also respond emotionally to it. Therefore, imagining the negative consequences of risk evokes negative emotions and feelings, thereby reducing individuals' willingness to participate in risky behavior [47]. Hence, it is crucial to understand the sentiments of anxiety, fear, and apprehension felt by the community within their place of residence, since attitudes supporting tourism activity may depend on this [10,11,48]. In this sense, understanding the interplay between affective responses and risk perception is essential for designing effective strategies to mitigate negative sentiments and gain support for tourism initiatives. By acknowledging and addressing the emotional dimensions of risk perception, destination stakeholders can promote a more empathetic and comprehensive approach to sustainable tourism planning and management, fostering greater community engagement and cooperation in the process.

Thirdly, taking into consideration personal factors (age, gender, income, etc.) is imperative, as academic literature has recognized the significant role that these factors play in shaping residents' perceptions [43] and, more particularly, individuals' perceptions of

risk [49]. Studies have found that both gender and age directly influence individuals' perceptions of risk and their enjoyment of risky behaviors [50–52]. Furthermore, cross-cultural studies have also demonstrated differences in risk perception and attitudes depending on individuals' country of origin [53,54]. In the tourism field, Camprubi and Garau-Vadell [12] found that different demographic groups exhibit varying levels of risk perception regarding the novelty of P2P tourism development in Mallorca. González et al. [43] also highlight that attachment to the community, including the number of years as a resident, being native or not, owning a dwelling or not, etc., can influence perceptions about tourism. Other intrinsic aspects that can also influence residents' perceptions are related to the level of involvement in the tourism sector and the cultural gap between locals and tourists (values, customs, language, etc.) [43]. Therefore, understanding how personal factors influence risk perception facilitates comprehension of how individuals evaluate and respond to potential risks when new tourism ventures are emerging in their place of residence, with the possibility of designing specific strategies that help to mitigate risk perceptions.

Finally, mass media and other types of information sources play a significant role in shaping the “social amplification of risk” [24]. It has been proven that frequent exposure to various information sources, including television, radio, newspapers, social networks, activists, and opinion leaders, among others, significantly influences individuals' perceptions of risk and their subsequent behavior [24,55]. Therefore, affective judgments may be both positively and adversely influenced by information provided by the media on the destination where tourism is experiencing growth. The information provided by these information sources has the power to evoke feelings associated with fear and anxiety among residents as they anticipate the changes that may occur within their community. In this sense, Wang [48] affirms that incorporating the perspectives of residents regarding tourism and its future evolution within their community is crucial for effective tourism planning, being beneficial to increasing positive perceptions and engaging the community. Through proactive participation in the planning process and awareness of locals' concerns, destination stakeholders may promote a more favorable tourist narrative and increase community involvement. When destination stakeholders actively address and mitigate residents' concerns, they not only reduce perceived risks associated with tourism growth but also shape the narrative in mass media. By implementing effective risk management strategies and fostering open communication channels with the local community, stakeholders can mitigate potential negative impacts and promote positive stories and experiences related to tourism development. This proactive approach helps to counteract sensationalized or negative narratives in the media, contributing to a more balanced and favorable portrayal of tourism growth. As residents witness tangible efforts to address their concerns and enhance their well-being, they are more likely to participate positively in tourism planning processes and contribute to a constructive discourse in mass media. In this way, reducing risk perception through proactive engagement and addressing community concerns not only benefits the local community but also enhances both the overall reputation and sustainability of the destination.

Based on the previously established framework, the following research questions are formulated to guide the inquiry into this area:

RQ1: What types of risks do residents perceive in relation to tourism development in their place of residence?

RQ2: How do feelings of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty among the local community impact their willingness to engage in tourism development in their place of residence?

RQ3: What role do personal influencing factors play in shaping residents' perceptions of risk in emerging tourism destinations?

RQ4: How do information sources and mass media shape residents' affective evaluations of risk regarding tourism development?

RQ5: To what extent does overall risk perception influence community engagement and support for tourism development initiatives?

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study has addressed the need to explore local community perceptions in emerging tourism destinations from the viewpoint of risk perception theory. This study adds a conceptual basis to the body of academic literature by offering a comprehensive approach to the factors that can influence the risk perception of residents regarding tourism development, including the types and patterns of risks perceived, the role of emotions and affective responses, personal influencing factors, and the impact of information sources and mass media, as well as the consequences on support for tourism when risk perception levels are high. Throughout this article, the benefit of understanding the concerns and interests of the local community is argued. Ultimately, there is a need to recognize the high levels of risk perception as a warning sign that should be taken into consideration when planning tourism development.

Hence, this conceptual framework fills a gap in existing literature by providing a better understanding of how the local community perceives and responds to the risks. Previous research focused mainly on certain adversities such as natural disasters [25], poor health [26], diseases [11,27], financial crises [28], or crime [29]. Residents' risk perception associated with tourism is an incipient development. Therefore, this paper contributes to adding new insights and perspectives to this topic by associating risk perception with an emerging tourism context.

Furthermore, it provides practical implications for policymakers and practitioners by offering a theoretical model to understand the relevance of considering risk perception as an influencing factor in local community engagement and support for new tourism ventures. Tourism development embraces sustainability across economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions. The fact that the local community perceives risk in one or more areas of the three dimensions of sustainability represents a brake on tourism development and an alarm sign that practitioners must understand and consider. In other words, it is vital to understand that a lack of local community involvement may come from seeing tourism development as a risk for their overall well-being. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge and mitigate these associated risks proactively by means of appropriate risk management strategies. Hence, this paper has highlighted the idea of making the local community part of the tourism development in order to find out their complicity and support [32]. This approach requires a shift towards collaborative governance models where local voices are heard and valued in the tourism planning process. By actively involving residents in decision-making forums, such as community workshops, stakeholder meetings, and participatory planning sessions, policymakers and practitioners can ensure that tourism development aligns with the needs and aspirations of the community. Moreover, fostering meaningful engagement with local stakeholders can lead to greater ownership and support for tourism initiatives, ultimately contributing to the long-term success and sustainability of destination development efforts. Additionally, by promoting sustainable tourism practices that prioritize environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and social inclusivity, destination stakeholders can mitigate residents' risk perception and later negative impacts on the local community while maximizing the benefits of tourism for all involved.

Future research should prioritize empirical studies that apply the conceptual framework to diverse tourism contexts, allowing for the validation and refinement of the proposed model. By examining residents' perceptions in specific destination settings and exploring the relationships between different factors influencing risk perceptions of tourism development, researchers can generate insights for decision-makers and stakeholders involved in tourism management and planning. Furthermore, the study of this topic may include both deductive and inductive methods. Using an inductive method will provide a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. In order to gather pertinent data, a sort of qualitative technique such as participant observation [56], focus groups [57], in-depth interviews [58], or a combination of them may be effective. Thematic analysis, as a method useful for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" [59], may be suitable in order to identify the key components of residents' risk

perceptions and determine whether or not they coincide with the categories established in the residents' risk perception taxonomy (Table 1). During this process, new relevant categories might emerge, resulting in an expansion of the model presented in this paper. Also, a deductive research approach can be conducted, taking into account the traditional psychometric paradigm employed to assess risk perception [30,31], using as a starting point the hazard taxonomy proposed. The knowledge gained from these empirical studies can significantly advance the understanding of residents' perceptions and, more specifically, residents' risk perceptions in tourism development.

For policymakers and practitioners, it is important to understand that by addressing the concerns of the local community and engaging community members as active participants in decision-making, destination stakeholders can foster positive perceptions of tourism development, enhance community resilience, and promote sustainable tourism practices for the benefit of all stakeholders involved.

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