

**Using destination image and place attachment to explore support for
tourism development: The case of tourism vs. non-tourism employees in
Eilat**

Abstract: Apart from the economic motive, little attention has been given to factors such as destination image and place attachment in explaining how potential differences in intentional behavior (support for tourism, intention to recommend) develop between tourism employees and non-tourism employees in a community. This study, conducted in the remote resort of Eilat, explores whether these resident groups' representations of and attachment to their place shape their intentional behavior towards tourism; and tests the explanatory ability of the two factors to account for potential differences in groups' intentional behavior. Findings suggest that the relationships between: a) place attachment and destination image; b) place attachment and intention to recommend; and c) between destination image and intention to recommend, vary across the two groups. The study contributes to tourism theory by empirically validating the role of image and attachment as antecedent of such differentiation. Additional implications to tourism theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Tourism employees, Support for tourism, Destination image, Place attachment, Intention to recommend

INTRODUCTION

There is universal agreement in the tourism literature that local residents' support for tourism is imperative for the sustainable development of a tourist destination (Gursoy, Chi & Dyer, 2010; Maruyama & Woosnam, 2015). Residents' views, however, are not homogenous and past research on community attitudes towards tourism has already highlighted great differences in the level of support/opposition for tourism among various community groups including tourism and non-tourism employees (Weaver & Lawton, 2013), native and non-native local residents (Xie, Bao & Kerstetter, 2014) and between various ethnic minorities (Maruyama & Woosnam, 2015). For example, tourism employees tend to be more positively predisposed towards proposed tourism development projects than residents who do not have a tourism related job (McGeehee & Andereck, 2004; Stylidis & Terzidou, 2014).

Researchers further agree that it is critical to understand how such distinct resident groups' behaviour is formed (Byrd, Bosley, & Dronberger, 2009; Maruyama & Woosnam, 2015), especially as all types of residents are essential elements of destination image (Blichfeldt, 2005). Although various residents' characteristics including length of residence, level of education, gender and age have been used in the past to predict their intentional predisposition towards tourism (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Snaith & Haley, 1999), these have often produced insignificant or contradictory results and scholars' interest in them has gradually declined. In contrast, economic benefit and/or tourism employment have traditionally served as valuable antecedents of residents' attitudes and intentional behavior. Employees of tourism businesses, in particular, are among the first locals the tourists meet and their attitude and behavior towards tourism affect the way tourists are treated, thereby influencing tourists' on site experience/satisfaction and word-of-mouth recommendations (Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000). Additionally, the image tourism employees and other

residents form of their place (as a tourist destination) is known to exert a considerable effect on tourists' own image formulation and decision making in two ways: First, these groups serve as a primary source of information for tourists and visiting friends/relatives, due to their familiarity with the destination; and second, they often act as ambassadors, promoting their hometown's attractions to other people (Shani & Uriely, 2012), including not only their friends and relatives but also non-visitors especially through social media platforms (see Tamajón & Valiente, 2017). Besides that, capturing the image and place attachment tourism employees form is instrumental for enlightening their job selection process (Solnet et al., 2014). This is even more crucial where the local labor pool may be inadequate to supply the tourism industry with the required workforce, as it is often the case with remote destinations (Rosentraub & Joo, 2009). It is, therefore, pivotal to study tourism employees within the development and marketing context as they constitute the backbone of the industry (Lee & Ok, 2015).

It might be challenging though to maintain general public support for tourism in the long term, as the various community groups and in particular, tourism and non-tourism employees, which are the focus of this study, often differ in regards to their perceptions of the place they live in, level of attachment to it, etc. There is empirical evidence, for example, that tourism employees often hold more positive images of their place as a tourist destination than the rest of the local population (Sternquist-Witter, 1985), which, in turn, leads to more positive behavioral intentions towards tourism development (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011). Apart from the economic motive, however, little attention has been given to other factors such as destination image and place attachment in explaining how potential differences in intentional behavior (i.e., support for tourism) develop between tourism employees and non-tourism employees in a community. This negligence can be attributed to the greater emphasis placed

by researchers and practitioners alike on the economic contribution of tourism and its impact on local communities. Previous research, however, has demonstrated that people are often willing to sacrifice some economic benefits in favor of social or environmental conservation, and that social representations can be key in shaping people's behavior (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003). Changes incurred by tourism on a given destination challenge residents' emotional bond with a place (place attachment) along with their perceptions of its natural and built environment (destination image) (Devine-Wright, 2009) co-shaping their attitude and intentional behavior. Additionally, destination image and place attachment were recently acknowledged being pivotal in destinations' recruitment and retention strategies (Solnet et al., 2014).

This study, therefore, aims to develop a theoretical framework that contributes to a better understanding of tourism and non-tourism employees' intentional behavior towards tourism, by exploring the role of place (destination image and place attachment) as potential source of differentiation in their intentional behavior (support for tourism, intention to recommend their place to friends and relatives). The study, in particular, examines: a) the relationship between destination image and place attachment; b) the impact of destination image and place attachment on residents' behavioral intentions towards tourism; c) the applicability of the model on tourism employees; and d) the model's invariance across tourism employees and non-tourism employees. The proposed model was tested in the Israeli city of Eilat, which was selected as the study setting for several reasons: a) Eilat is the most popular destination for Israelis, b) the number of tourism jobs in Eilat is large (7,300), highlighting the importance of elucidating the image and intentional behavior of the tourism sector; this is of relevance considering the abundance of places where tourism constitutes a major employer; c) given the city's remoteness and isolation from other Israeli cities, it is especially challenging for Eilat

to attract and retain skilled workforce (Lundberg, Gudmundson & Andersson, 2009); and d) there is a dearth of research on tourist destinations in the Middle East area. The main contribution of this study is that it offers a thorough understanding of the reported differences in intentional behavior that tourism and non-tourism employees exhibit towards tourism, moving away from the economic justification commonly used to explain such differences among nested communities. This facilitates an understanding of the various stakeholders' perceptions, and contributes to policies and practices that shape their reactions (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Byrd et al., 2009). The study also sheds some light on place-based views of residents that shape their attitudes towards tourism, which is vital for the sustainable development of tourism (Gursoy et al., 2010). Within this realm, it also assists in understanding tourist employees' perceptions of their locality, which is essential in order to effectively manage human resources (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007). Lastly, the study assists tourism authorities and practitioners to enhance local residents' image, attachment and behavioral intentions, all three being critical to the success of a given destination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the premises of stakeholder theory and social representations theory. When stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) is applied to tourism, it suggests that attention should be given to the interests of all those who affect or might be affected by its development such as the tourists, tourism sector, residents, and local government officials. Stakeholder theory has been commonly used as a framework to understand residents' attitudes toward tourism development (e.g., Byrd et al., 2009; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016). The study conducted by Byrd et al. (2009), for example, reported significant differences in intentional behavior between different groups of stakeholders; entrepreneurs, in particular, appeared more positively predisposed towards tourism than the local residents. This study empirically confirmed the suitability of the stakeholder theory as a framework to understand the perceptions and intentional behavior of various community groups and highlighted the significance of such understanding for the sustainable development of tourism. Although stakeholder theory recognizes the presence of various community groups with different behavioral intentions, it fails to explain how differences develop among such groups.

Social representations theory asserts that a broader social reality influences people's attitudes and behaviors (Moscovici, 1983). Moscovici (1983) defined social representations as "systems of preconceptions, images and values which have their own cultural meaning and persist independently of individual experience" (p.122). Drawing on the work of Moscovici (1983), the way a place is perceived (destination image) can affect a matter of social interest such as tourism development (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003). Moscovici (1983) further argues that social representations may be related to specific community groups, as it is the case of

tourism employees (and non-tourism employees) in this study. Social representations theory, therefore, also highlights the need to understand the behavioral intentions of various groups of residents and it can be applied to explore the potential role of destination image in this process. This is also in line with recent calls for additional studies to embrace residents' values and perceptions into the tourism planning and marketing process (Sharpley, 2014). By applying both theories this study aims to understand whether tourism employees share different/similar representations of their place and of tourism from other local residents.

Residents' Intentional Behavior Towards Tourism Development

It has been widely acknowledged that residents' support for tourism development is critical for the success of the industry in the long run (Styliadis, Biran, Sit & Szivas, 2014). First, residents' expressed disagreement with a proposed development project can lead to its postponement or cancellation. Second, the level of hospitality provided by the locals is considered a critical element of the tourist experience, affecting tourists' satisfaction and repeat visitation (O'Leary & Deegan, 2003). Finally, supportive residents are more likely to recommend their place as a tourist destination to others including their friends and relatives (Schroeder, 1996). Understanding, therefore, the antecedents of such support has been a major area of academic enquiry (see Gursoy et al., 2010; Styliadis et al., 2014).

Studies, in particular, have investigated a variety of factors that can potentially influence the support of the local population including residents' personal economic benefit or level of community attachment (Choi & Murray, 2010; Lee, 2013). Past research has also underlined the heterogeneous nature of host communities, which comprise a number of groups of residents who share similar (within groups) views (e.g. Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Weaver & Lawton, 2013). As it has already been mentioned, people who work in tourism appear

more supportive of this industry due to their higher level of dependability on it (e.g., McGeehee & Andereck, 2004; Stylidis & Terzidou, 2014). This is in line with the self-interest theory, the assumption that individuals seek to maximize their own material gains in interactions and expect others to do the same (Eisenhardt, 1989). Especially during periods of economic uncertainty, the notion of self-interest can be among the main motives that construct human behaviour (Stylidis & Terzidou, 2014). However, limited research has been conducted in understanding particularly how tourism employees' intentional behaviour within the tourism context is formed- a gap that this study aims to fill in.

Although the 'economic gain' motive provides sound justification to explain higher levels of support for tourism among tourism employees, other factors might be used as well to explain behavioural differences between this group and other residents who do not have a tourism related job. Large scale development and urban regeneration projects trigger profound changes in the physical, built and social environment of a place, greatly influencing its appearance and character. These changes often challenge the perceptions of various clusters of residents who have different expectations about their community (Soini, Vaaralab, & Pouta, 2012) and/or bonds with it (Ramkissoon, Smith & Weiler, 2013). Studies, for example, have reported that tourism employees might have a more favourable image of their place as a tourist destination (Sternquist-Witter, 1985), highlighting the potential explanatory role destination image can play in this process. Similarly, there is a void of studies that have used place attachment to explain differences in such phenomena. Destination image and place attachment could, therefore, be additional factors shaping resident groups' intentional support for tourism development, based upon the unique characteristics of the place.

Destination image refers to people's beliefs, ideas and impressions of a place as a tourist destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). For tourism employees, the location's attractiveness and its image appear to shape part of the attractiveness of tourism jobs (Szivas, Riley & Airey, 2003). Empirical evidence also suggest that destination image positively influences residents' intentional behavior including support for tourism development (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011; Stylidis et al., 2014) and intention to recommend it to their friends and relatives (Bigne, Sanchez & Sanz, 2005; Schroeder, 1996). Word-of-mouth (WOM) is commonly defined as "informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service" (Harrison-Walker, 2001, p. 63). A positive word-of-mouth to friends and/or relatives serves as a credible source of information for potential tourists and has traditionally been considered an indication of loyalty (Chi & Qu, 2008). Schroeder's (1996) study, for example, reported that residents with more positive images of North Dakota were more likely to recommend it as a tourist destination to others. Similarly, a study conducted by Ramkissoon and Nunkoo (2011) in Mauritius revealed that local residents who held more positive images of Mauritius as a tourist destination were more supportive of further tourism development. These studies though have not differentiated between tourism employees and non-tourism employees, a gap that this study aims to fill in. Following the above discussion the first two hypotheses are:

H1₀: There is no relationship between destination image and residents' support for tourism development for both tourism and non-tourism employees

H1_a: Destination image is positively related to residents' support for tourism development for both tourism and non-tourism employees

H2₀: There is no relationship between destination image and residents' intention to recommend their place to their friends and relatives as a tourist destination for both tourism and non-tourism employees

H2_a: Destination image is positively related to residents' intention to recommend their place to their friends and relatives as a tourist destination for both tourism and non-tourism employees

Closely linked to the concept of destination image is the notion of place attachment, which refers to the process by which humans develop affective bonds to physical areas (Rollero & Piccoli, 2010). Tuan (1974) was among the first to point out that any conceptualization of a place should include the meanings and values individuals ascribe to it. Studies in environmental psychology have established that the way people perceive their place and their level of attachment to it greatly influence their intentional behaviour including support/opposition for development plans (Carrus, Bonaiuto, & Bonnes, 2005). Past research also indicates that residents with more favourable place images tend to demonstrate higher levels of place attachment (Mesch & Manor, 1998; Rollero & Piccoli, 2010), which in turn leads to higher intentional support for proposed development projects (Carrus et al., 2005). While attachment is stable and less prone to change, image is a dynamic construct that changes as the place evolves (Govers, Go & Koumar, 2007). As such, it seems more appropriate to examine both concepts as potential determinants of residents' intentional behavior towards tourism. Although studies in a number of disciplines have explored the existence of a hierarchical relationship between the two constructs, results remain inconclusive. In line with a stream of researchers, an evaluation of a place's physical features precedes the emotional bond with it (Stedman, 2002), whereas for some other scholars people with higher levels of place attachment perceive more positively the physical attributes of the

place they live in and develop stronger connections (e.g., Rollero & Piccoli, 2010).

Understanding, therefore, this relationship is another contribution of this study.

H3₀: There is no relationship between destination image and residents' place attachment for both tourism and non-tourism employees

H3_a: Destination image is positively related to residents' place attachment for both tourism and non-tourism employees

Similarly, the role of place attachment within the context of tourism development remains unclear. Some researchers reported that higher levels of place attachment are related to greater intentional support for tourism development (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Lee, 2013). Some others substantiated a negative association between place attachment and support for tourism (Snaith & Haley, 1999), whereas few studies failed to validate this relationship (Gursoy et al., 2002). For tourism employees, in particular, place attachment is important in both attracting and retaining them in a location (Solnet et al., 2014). Drawing on findings from environmental psychology and studies in tourism conducted by Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) and Choi and Murray (2010), place attachment is hypothesized in this study to be positively related to residents' destination image and their behavioral intentions towards tourism. Two more hypothesis can be formulated:

H4₀: There is no relationship between place attachment and residents' support for tourism development for both tourism and non-tourism employees

H4_a: Place attachment is positively related to residents' support for tourism development for both tourism and non-tourism employees

H5₀: There is no relationship between place attachment and residents' intention to recommend their place to their friends and relatives as a tourist destination for both tourism and non-tourism employees

H5_a: Place attachment is positively related to residents' intention to recommend their place to their friends and relatives as a tourist destination for both tourism and non-tourism employees

The proposed model is presented in Figure 1. In sum, destination image is expected to be positively related to place attachment. Additionally, both destination image and place attachment are hypothesized to positively affect residents' intentional support for tourism development and their intention to recommend their place to others as a tourist destination. The hypothesized model is expected to be applicable to both tourism employees and residents with a non-tourism related job. However, due to the previously reported differences in destination image and intentional behavior towards tourism among tourism employees and non-tourism employees, significant variances are expected between these two groups with regard to the path estimates of the hypothesized model.

H6₀ The effects of destination image and place attachment on residents' support for tourism development and on their intention to recommend their place to their friends and relatives as a tourist destination are of similar relative importance for tourism and non-tourism employees.

H6_a The effects of destination image and place attachment on residents' support for tourism development and on their intention to recommend their place to their friends and relatives as a tourist destination are of different relative importance for tourism and non-tourism employees.

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The study as such extends past research by testing the applicability of the model to two distinct resident groups with potential significant implications for the planning, development and marketing of tourism.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

STUDY METHODS

Study Setting and Sampling

Eilat (population 47,500) is situated at the northern end of the Red Sea on the Gulf of Eilat/Aqaba. It is a well-known tourism destination in the Middle East and is Israel's most highly developed sea, sun and sand resort. The city is characterized by an abundance of natural resources, primarily recreational marine attractions and diving sites, but also contrived attractions like theme parks and extensive tourism and hospitality facilities (Shani & Uriely, 2012). Eilat as a tourist destination is predominantly focusing on the leisure market and the vast majority of its visitors are domestic repeaters. Eilat offers 10,956 hotel rooms, about one-quarter (24.6%) of all hotel rooms in Israel (Israeli Ministry of Tourism, 2012). International tourists spent 1,084,000 hotel-nights and domestic tourists 5,671,000 hotel-nights in Eilat in 2011. This is about half of all the country's domestic nights (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). In line with statistics published by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism (2010), one third of respondents spent at least one vacation in Eilat during 2009. The city is significantly remote (240 km) from other population centres, making it inadequate for day trips.

The study sample comprised adults (over the age of 18) who are permanent residents of Eilat. Following Chen, Lin and Petrick (2013), self-administered questionnaires were administered by four trained research assistants to tourism employees and to non-tourism employees local residents, between November 2012 and March 2013. Non-tourism related local residents were approached mainly in selected public areas (i.e., shopping areas and neighborhoods) using a random day/time/site pattern (Bonn, Joseph, & Dai, 2005). The residents that agreed to participate were 200 out of 280 initially approached and the response rate stood to a satisfactory 71%. In the case of tourism business owners/employees, the research assistants

were required to exercise their judgment in selecting a representative number of accommodation establishments (50%), food service establishments/restaurants (25%), travel agencies/car rentals (10%), and tourist shops (15%) that were subsequently approached on/at a random day/time. After obtaining permission from the owner/manager of each establishment, employees were randomly selected to participate in the study while at work. Tourism business employees were treated as a distinct category in view of their special interests and strong stake in tourism (Byrd et al., 2009). The primary purpose was to include all opinions or views so as to enable a detailed exploration and understanding of the group's image. Of the 300 tourism employees approached in total, 168 participated in the study, resulting in a response rate of 57%. This response rate can be attributed to the setting and/or timing of the study, as respondents were approached while at work, where the availability of time is limited (see Belhassen and Shani, 2012).

Study Instrument

A questionnaire was designed to examine the image tourism employees and other residents have of Eilat as a tourist destination, their level of attachment to it and their behavioral intentions towards tourism development. The first section of the questionnaire aimed to measure respondents' image of Eilat. A pool of destination image dimensions/attributes was initially developed based on previous image research (e.g., Chi & Qu, 2008; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Qu et al., 2011). Given the variety of attributes in the literature, attention was given to 'universal attributes' (i.e., scenery, weather, accommodation), excluding attributes not relevant to the context of the city (i.e., ski facilities). Next, the attribute list was refined following a number of discussions with local residents to ensure their relevance to the locality (Poudel, Nyaupane, & Budruk, 2016). Third, a pilot study was conducted with local residents. The pilot study ensured the clarity, relevancy and suitability of the research

instrument. The final list of destination image dimensions along with the items they involve are: Natural Environment (scenic beauty, climate, beaches), Amenities (restaurants, accommodation, shopping facilities, service quality), Attractions (cultural/historic attractions, water sports, tourist activities), Social Environment (safe, friendly, clean, value for money), and Accessibility (access, infrastructure, transportation). These items were presented to a group of 10 local residents and tourism employees who confirmed their suitability for capturing Eilat's image. Following previous research, a 7-point Likert scale was used, with '1' indicating 'strongly disagree' and '7' indicating 'strongly agree' (e.g., Chi & Qu, 2008).

The second section of the questionnaire measured place attachment and behavioral intentions toward tourism. Respondents' level of attachment to Eilat was captured using three items (feel like home, interested in what's going on, feel sorry to leave) drawn from studies conducted by McCool and Martin (1994) and Gursoy and Rutherford (2004). A five-point Likert scale was used with values ranging from '1' strongly disagree to '5' strongly agree. Intention to recommend Eilat to friends and relatives ('to others') as a tourist destination was evaluated on a scale from '1' (very unlikely) to '7' (very likely) (e.g., Qu et al., 2011). Intentional support for tourism development was assessed using three items (support further tourism development, additional municipal funding for tourism promotion, increase in the number of tourists visiting Eilat), based on Gursoy et al. (2010) and McGehee and Andereck (2004), on a scale of '1' strongly disagree to '7' strongly agree. Finally, the third section involved questions about respondents' demographic characteristics.

Data Analysis

The analysis comprised three stages; in the first stage, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model's reliability and validity in the total

sample. Next, the structural relationships between the study's constructs were tested. Lastly, a Multi-Group Analysis was conducted to test for structural invariance across the two groups simultaneously. Several fit indices were used to assess the measurement and structural models. The cut-off criteria of these indices are: 3 to 1 for the ratio of χ^2 to the degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF); an index greater than 0.90 for the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI); and values below 0.08 for the Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA) (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). Before conducting CFA, common method bias was checked using Harman's single factor test. The total variance of a single factor (27.54%) was under the cut off value of 50% (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003), indicating the absence of common method bias. Next, five composite variables were developed using the five cognitive image factors' mean scores (natural environment, amenities, attractions, social environment, and accessibility) and were applied in the subsequent SEM analysis as indicators to measure the construct "cognitive image" (see Chi & Qu, 2008; Qu et al., 2011). This approach is widely applied in SEM to mitigate the potential for multicollinearity among indicators and to reduce the complexity of the model, both of which may undermine its goodness of fit (Hair et al., 2014).

FINDINGS

Sample Profile

Most tourism employees ($n = 168$) were female (54%), single (62%), under 34 years old (73%) and had been living in Eilat for less than 10 years (54%) (Table 1 in supplementary material). Overall, their profile is fairly similar to the common characteristics of tourism employees in Eilat as reported in another tourism study conducted in Eilat by Belhassen and Shani (2012). In the sample of non-tourism employees ($n = 200$), women accounted for 59% and men for 41% of the respondents. Most of them were single (57%), under 34 years old (67%), employed full-time (45%) and had lived in Eilat for less than 10 years (60%). In line with the Eilat Census (2003), 57% of the actual population is under the age of 34 and about 70% of the total population lives in Eilat for less than 10 years. According to the data recorded in the latest census it appears that the sample of residents was largely representative of Eilat's population. Lastly, tourism employees as compared to non-tourism employees perceived more favorably Eilat ($M = 4.68$ vs. $M = 4.35$), exhibited stronger place attachment ($M = 5.34$ vs. $M = 4.96$), they were more likely to recommend Eilat to others ($M = 5.60$ vs. $M = 5.36$), and to support tourism development ($M = 5.88$ vs. $M = 5.43$).

Measurement Model Evaluation

CFA was conducted (ML estimation) to establish the validity and reliability of the model's constructs. The findings indicate a quite good model fit: $\chi^2_{(41)} = 109.88$ ($p < 0.001$), CMIN/DF = 2.68, CFI = 0.95, GFI = 0.95, and RMSEA = 0.068. Given that two indicators of cognitive image (attractions, accessibility) appeared problematic in fitting the model to the data, a revised version of the model that excluded these two items was designed. The results suggested that the revised model also demonstrates a good fit: $\chi^2_{(24)} = 59.24$ ($p < 0.001$),

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CMIN/DF = 2.46, CFI = 0.97, GFI = 0.96, and RMSEA = 0.064. It appears that attractions and accessibility are of less concern for the local population in Eilat.

The *composite reliability* estimates of all the constructs exceeded 0.70, suggesting that the measures are reliable (Hair et al., 2014). In terms of *convergent validity*, the standardized coefficients were above the recommended 0.5 and significant at the 0.01 level (see Table 2) and the average variance extracted (AVE) values were very close to or above the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014).

[Insert Table 2 Here]

Lastly, *discriminant validity* was assessed by comparing the AVE values with the squared correlation between the constructs. All AVE values were higher than the inter-construct squared correlations (Table 3) (Hair et al., 2014).

[Insert Table 3 Here]

Structural Model Evaluation

Structural Equation Modelling (ML method) was used next to test the hypothesized structural relationships between the study's constructs (destination image, place attachment, support for tourism, intention to recommend). All the fit indices supported the fit of the baseline model: $\chi^2_{(31)} = 90.50$ ($p < 0.001$), CMIN/DF = 2.92, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.95, and RMSEA = 0.073. Given that both the measurement and structural models were well within the acceptable cut-off criteria, estimates of the structural coefficients were used to examine the hypothesized relationships between the constructs. The standardized path coefficients are presented in

Table 4. Three out of five hypothesized relationships were significant in the expected direction. More precisely, destination image was found to affect a) intentional support for tourism and b) intention to recommend and also c) had a positive relationship with place attachment. On the other hand, place attachment was not found to affect support for tourism and intention to recommend Eilat to others.

[Insert Table 4 Here]

Multi-group analysis was conducted next to explore whether the hypothesized relationships between the model's constructs vary across the two groups. The first step entailed testing the baseline model for tourism employees and non-tourism employees. As such the validated model was examined across the two groups without specifying any equality constraints in the parameters of the model. All the fit indices supported the model: $\chi^2_{(62)} = 126.93$ ($p < 0.001$), CMIN/DF = 2.05, CFI = 0.95, GFI = 0.93, and RMSEA = 0.054, which from now on can serve as the baseline model for testing for potential invariance across the two groups.

Before testing for invariance in the structural part of the model, the measurement part was examined to ensure that the potential differences 'are not due to differing measurement properties between the two groups' (Hair et al., 2014, p.763). The model fit was assessed and produced a $\chi^2_{(70)}$ value of 135.62. When compared with the baseline model there is a $\Delta\chi^2$ value of 8.69 with 8 df, which is not statistically significant ($p > .10$). Therefore, valid group comparison can be made when examining the structural relationships between tourism employees and other local residents.

To test for the invariance of the structural part of the model, all the path estimates in the structural part were constrained to be equal across the two groups. The constrained model demonstrated a good fit: $\chi^2_{(67)} = 142.33$, $p < .001$, CMIN/DF = 2.12, CFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.056. The chi-square difference test between the baseline and the constraint model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 15.4$, $df = 5$, $p < .05$) indicated that constraining the path regression estimates to be equal across the two groups deteriorate the model fit. Partial invariance analysis was applied next, which involves identifying and then freeing the constraints contributing to model misfit (Table 5 in supplementary material). The analysis showed that the two groups vary in the following path relationships: a) place attachment \leftrightarrow destination image; b) destination image \rightarrow intention to recommend; c) place attachment \rightarrow intention to recommend. Therefore, three out of five relationships (H2, H3, H5) of the structural model are not invariant across tourism employees and other residents (Figure 2) leading to the confirmation of Hypotheses 6. The implications of the study's findings to tourism planning, development and marketing theory and practice are discussed next.

[Insert Figure 2 Here]

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to test the capacity of destination image and place attachment to predict tourism and non-tourism employees' intentional behavior towards tourism, along with their explanatory ability to account for potential differences in such intentional behavior (support for tourism, intention to recommend their place to friends and relatives). The analysis of the findings based on the total sample revealed that a) destination image positively affects residents' intentional support for tourism (confirm H1) and their intention to recommend their place to others (confirm H2); b) destination image is positively related to place attachment (confirm H3); c) place attachment does not appear to have a significant effect on residents' intentional support for tourism development (not confirm H4) and on their intention to recommend Eilat to others (not confirm H5). Lastly, the relationships between place attachment and destination image, place attachment and intention to recommend, and between destination image and intention to recommend appear to vary across the two resident groups (confirm H6).

H1 was substantiated, as residents' destination image exercised a positive effect on their intentional support for tourism development. This is in line with the studies of Stylidis et al. (2014) and Ramkissoon and Nunkoo (2011) that also established a positive relationship between image and support for development. Nevertheless, the current study also found that destination image exerted a positive impact on residents' intention to recommend Eilat to their friends and relatives (H2). This finding extends previous research (Schroeder, 1996) since the relationship between destination image and intention to recommend appears to be stronger in magnitude ($\beta = 0.78$) among non-tourism employees than among tourism employees ($\beta = 0.44$). This is the first time such a relationship is confirmed explicitly for tourism employees, a finding which has significant implications for tourism practice (as

discussed later). It seems that some non-tourism employees develop a stronger 'proud parent syndrome' (Sternquist-Witter, 1985) and feel a greater need to promote their place to others than the residents employed in the tourism sector.

While residents' destination image has received some attention in the literature thus far, it appears to play a critical role in influencing community intentional support for tourism development and locals' intention to recommend their place to others; positive perceptions of a place lead to greater support and higher intention to recommend, and a less positive image leads to less support and intention to recommend. The study thus manages to respond to Ramkissoon and Nunkoo's (2011) call for a more rigorous investigation into the role of residents' destination image in shaping their intentional behavior towards tourism. The critical role image was found to play in this process provides a strong argument for a wider application of the social representations theory (Moscovici, 1983) to explain potential variations in residents' attitudes toward tourism. Especially in regard to the differences in the way image affects various groups' intention to recommend their place to friends and relatives as a tourist destination.

H3, which predicted a positive relationship between destination image and place attachment, was also substantiated. The more favourable a place is perceived, the stronger the levels of attachment to it and vice versa, the stronger the emotional bonds, the more positive the evaluation of the place. Place attachment occurs when the social and physical settings are adequate to satisfy the needs and wants of residents (Rollero & Picolli, 2010). This finding is in line with previous studies in environmental psychology (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Mesch and Manor (1998), for instance, reported that more positive evaluations of the physical and social environment are related to higher attachment with the place. However, this is one of

the very few occasions where this relationship has been established within the tourism context. Local residents have complex images of their place as a tourist destination as they are familiar with what the area has to offer and develop some level of psychological bond with it (Choi & Murray, 2010). The multi-group analysis conducted further revealed that although the nature of the relationship (positive) between destination image and attachment is invariant across tourism employees and non-tourism employees, what fluctuates is the magnitude. In particular, for residents with a non-tourism related job, image and attachment have a very strong interrelationship ($\beta = 0.70$), while for tourism employees this link is moderate ($\beta = 0.46$). It seems that residents who appreciate more the image of their place develop also stronger bonds with it in comparison to some tourism employees who might perceive it as a temporary residence. Numerous people who have completed their military service in Israel are attracted by Eilat and obtain work in the hospitality industry for what they envision as a temporary sojourn (Belhassen & Shani, 2012). Overall, there seems to be a link between people's emotional evaluation of a place, which is rather stable, and their image of it, which is more dynamic as it is built upon the perceived attributes of that place.

On the other hand, the results in the total sample (Table 4) failed to provide support for the relationship between place attachment and residents' intentional behavior towards tourism (H4 and H5). These findings corroborate earlier studies that failed to establish a relationship between place attachment and support for tourism (Gursoy et al., 2002), but contradict others which reported a positive or negative association between attachment and support (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). The study though extends previous research by revealing that significant differences exist among the two groups (while testing for invariance) with respect to the relationship between place attachment and intention to recommend Eilat to others (H5). More precisely, for tourism employees place attachment has a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.25$)

on their intention to recommend Eilat, whereas for non-tourism employees the effect of attachment on intention to recommend is negative ($\beta = -0.25$). That is, the more attached to Eilat a tourism employee feels, the more likely to recommend it to others, whereas the opposite holds true for non-tourism employees. It appears thus that the two effects offset each other in the total sample (see Table 4), and as a result the relationship between attachment and intention to recommend appears to be insignificant. This is a key finding for similar studies where significant subgroups can be observed. The unwillingness of some residents to promote their place to others as a tourist destination can be explained on the grounds that more attached residents are often aware of the negative impacts of tourism (Choi & Murray, 2010). This group of residents might be worried that more tourism could set in danger the local character/physiognomy of the place. Especially as the visiting friends and relatives phenomenon is widespread in Eilat, residents may refrain from promoting tourism as it has been found to disrupt their quality of life (Shani & Uriely, 2012). Tourist employees, however, who feel more attached seem to appreciate higher volume of tourists, potentially also due to the nature of their job and the relevant economic benefits (Stylidis & Terzidou, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The study's contribution to tourism theory is five-fold. First, given that past research has confined itself to the economic motive as a factor explaining the intentional behavioral (towards tourism) differences noted between tourism and non-tourism employees, the current study fills a gap by empirically confirming the role of destination image and place attachment as antecedents of such differentiation. Differences in intentional behavior observed among community groups as such are not only due to the economic benefits related to tourism as the previous studies have found, but are also stemming from peoples' perceptions and bonds with

the place. Second, the study is perhaps the first of its kind to shed more light on tourism employees' explicit intentional behavior in relation to tourism. Previous models were tested only on the general resident population, without examining its applicability to particular resident segments like tourism employees. Understanding how this community segment's support for tourism is formed is imperative for local government and policy makers, as the goodwill and cooperation of people employed in tourism is essential for the success and sustainability of any tourism development project (Gursoy et al., 2010). This knowledge is also considered critical for understanding why there are varying levels of support within the same community as well as for the theoretical advancement of the topic (Gursoy et al., 2010). Furthermore, by explicitly capturing tourism employees' image and place attachment, this study addresses a critical concern for human resource managers, especially in remote locations like Eilat. In line with Solnet et al. (2014, p.35) "an analysis of what makes a destination's or place's image positive, negative, or both may also inform a destination's tourism recruitment and retention strategy."

Third, the study extends current knowledge on residents' intentional behavior towards tourism as it is among the first efforts to develop an integrated framework encompassing both destination image and place attachment and apply it to the tourism context. Although previous studies (e.g., Choi & Murray, 2010; Lee, 2013) have commonly emphasized on place attachment and ignored destination image, this study confirmed that the latter also appears to play a key role in influencing residents' intentional behaviour towards tourism, providing empirical evidence for the wider application of the social representations theory in the tourism development context. Lastly, a methodological contribution is the use of multi-group analysis, which enables researchers to better understand the hypothesized relationships taking into consideration the heterogeneity of residents. In this study, the relationship

between place attachment and intention to recommend appeared insignificant in the total sample, but after decomposing the group effects it became clear that the positive effect (between place attachment and intention to recommend) noted in the tourism employee sample was offset by the negative effect observed among non-tourism employees. As such, researchers must account for the heterogeneity of residents when analyzing the interrelationships between the constructs of their model; otherwise some relationships might be masked by the potential counter-effects across the various sub-groups.

This research also provides useful implications to tourism practitioners. The results suggest that across the two groups a positive destination image can lead to increased intentional support for tourism and greater intention to recommend a place to others, thereby affecting the success of a tourist destination. The efforts of tourism marketers and developers to increase local support and to promote word of mouth communications should, therefore, focus on polishing the image of the place that tourism employees and other local residents have. Internal marketing initiatives targeting the local population in Eilat should highlight the positively perceived characteristics of the city. Additionally, development projects that aim to address negatively perceived aspects of a place and/or enhance positive elements are expected to improve both tourism employees' and non-tourism employees' intentional behavior. In the case of Eilat, for example, local authorities and developers could attempt to improve elements such as the transportation network and the local infrastructure, simultaneously improving the image of the city. This in turn will positively affect residents' intention to recommend Eilat to others and their support for tourism development. Considering also the central role tourism employees were found to be play in this and previous studies in relation to support and promotion of tourism, it is imperative for tourism destinations and the tourism industry to strategically plan actions that will aim to increase

employees' bonds with the place, especially in destinations like Eilat which struggle to recruit permanent employees. This research also assists tourism organizations seeking to attract, recruit and retain employees in remote locations, by providing a better understanding of what attracts/detracts employees from these locations, in this case, Eilat. Improving attributes, as previously discussed, that underperform can enhance the recruitment, selection and retention of employees. Such a focus can assist destination managers to embed staff in a location, thus improving retention and reducing staff turnover (Solnet et al., 2014). Further cultivating residents' place attachment is significant as it motivates individuals to work to improve their place. Past research, for example, has found that attached residents seek to actively participate in the decision-making for community development (Matarrita-Cascante, Luloff, Field, & Krannich, 2006).

This study is not free from limitations. First, it was conducted at a single destination and at a particular point in time. Additionally, the sample size, although sufficient, echoed the difficulties noted in the past in engaging tourism employees to participate in tourism surveys. Inevitably also some bias might have been introduced as not all tourism firms were of equal size. Conducting the study in a different context and with a larger sample would assist to cross-validate the model. Additionally, the AVE estimate of the destination image construct indicates that this study potentially excluded some image attributes or dimensions, whose inclusion may have better explained this construct. Future studies should extend the destination image measure as such to involve additional attributes. Next, this study focused on two community groups, although additional groups within a community exist (i.e., cultural, religious). Studies in the future could test the model by incorporating additional groups and stakeholders such as tourists and local authorities. Lastly, studies in the future

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could benefit by exemplifying the possible medium of recommendation (i.e., online, face to face) and further testing its relationship to support for tourism.

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Table 2. Measurement model evaluation

Constructs/ indicators	Item loadings	t-value	Composite reliability	AVE
<i>Destination Image</i>			.72	.47
Natural environment	.57	10.23*		
Amenities	.66	12.29*		
Social environment	.80	15.02*		
<i>Place Attachment</i>			.82	.61
Feel like home	.79	16.64*		
Feel sorry to leave	.84	17.77*		
Interested in what's going on	.70	14.04*		
<i>Support for Tourism</i>			.84	.64
Support for further development	.93	20.24*		
Funding for tourism promotion	.67	13.49*		
Increase in the number of tourists	.79	16.44*		

* $p < 0.001$

Table 3. Testing discriminant validity

Construct	AVE	Inter-Construct Squared Correlations		
		Destination Image	Place Attachment	Support for Tourism
Destination Image	.47	1.00	.42	.13
Place Attachment	.61	.42	1.00	.09
Support for tourism	.64	.13	.09	1.00

Table 4. Estimated standardized coefficients

Hypothesized Relationship	Stand. Estimates	t-values
H1: Destination image -> Support for tourism	.32	3.54*
H2: Destination image -> Intention to recommend	.59	6.99*
H3: Destination image <-> Place attachment	.65	14.07*
H4: Place attachment -> Support for tourism	.08	.928
H5: Place attachment -> Intention to recommend	-.02	-.281

* $p < 0.001$

Table 6. Estimated standardized coefficients

Hypothesized Relationship	Tourism employees		Other residents	
	Estimates	t-value	Estimates	t-value
H1: Destination image -> Support for tourism	.26	3.03*	.23	3.01*
H2: Destination image -> Intention to recommend	.44	4.66*	.78	5.83*
H3: Destination image <-> Place attachment	.46	5.11*	.70	11.93*
H4: Place attachment -> Support for tourism	.15	1.72**	.13	1.73**
H5: Place attachment -> Intention to recommend	.25	2.69*	-.26	-1.96*

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.10$

Figure 1. Modeling residents' intentional behavior towards tourism

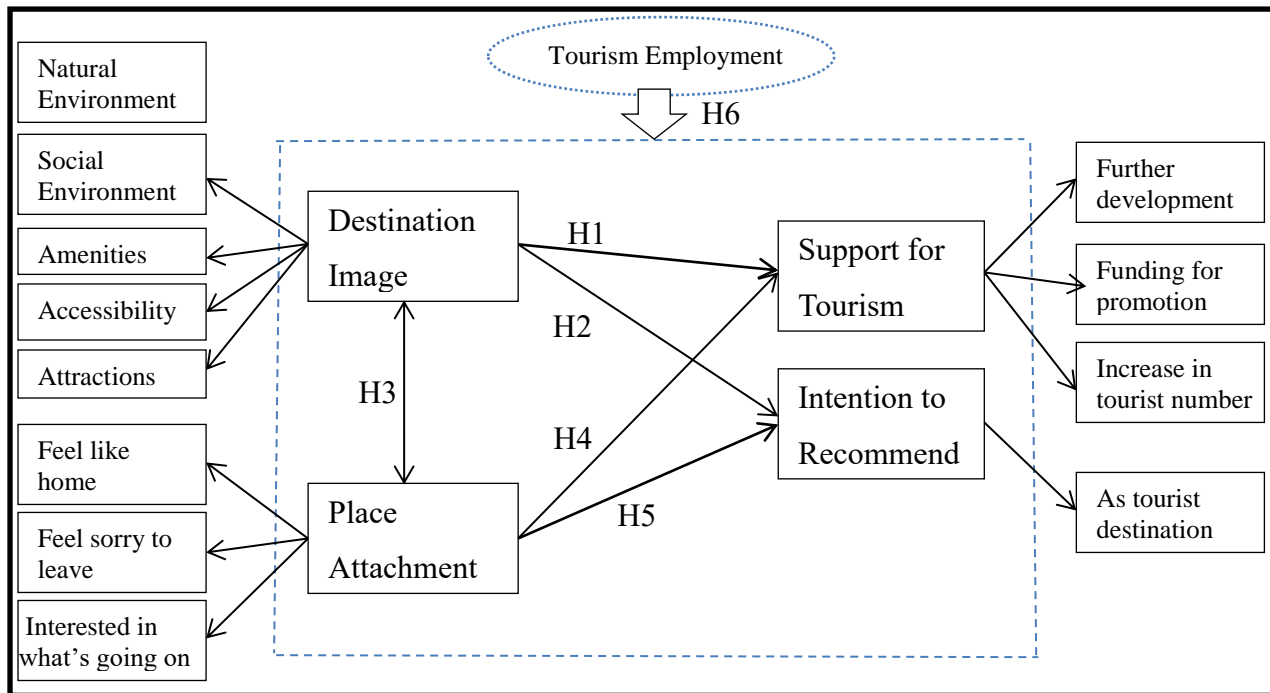
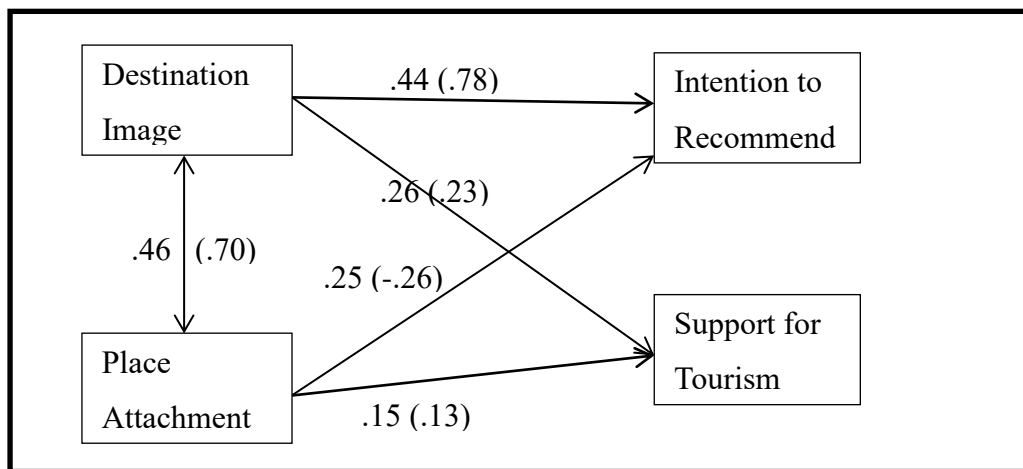


Figure 2. Modeling residents' intentional behavior towards tourism*



* Number outside brackets: tourism employees; inside brackets: other residents