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Psychometrics of Tourism: A (de)Builder of Quality of Life? Evidence from the Model of Happiness in Dominican Republic

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INTRODUCTION

For small island developing states (SIDS), tourism is often seen as a passport to development and wellbeing. Several case studies focus on small island destinations to analyze this binomial: Aruba; Malta; Mauritius; Fiji; Sitka in Alaska; Magnetic Island and Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

The happiness phenomenon among residents of tourism destinations is usually linked to the concept of quality of life (QoL). According to the concept of QoL of The World Health Organization (2019:1), it is defined as the “individual perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and about their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. It is a broad-ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person’s physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, and their relationships to salient features of their environment”.

The happiness literature suggests that there is a positive correlation between happiness and income of residents in SIDS, but there is not a clear directionality (Rivera *et al.*, 2016). In this correlation a large impact of non-income factors linked to wellbeing (Kafashpor *et al.*, 2018), such as own feelings and attitudes, belonging feeling to a community, identification with cultural and natural heritage, or a fair government that fulfills residents’ needs.

QoL models include in general a total of five dimensions: material wellbeing; emotional wellbeing; community wellbeing; cultural and natural heritage-based wellbeing, and government wellbeing.

Material wellbeing includes everything related to the material needs of the individual, encompassing any tangible goods that the individual considers fundamental to maintain his existence: food, clothing, housing, normal and luxury goods...

According to WHO’s (2019:1) definition, Emotional wellbeing “is the ability to think, learn, and understand one’s emotions and the reactions of others. It is a state of balance, both within and with the environment. Physical, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, and other interrelated factors participate in producing this balance.”



Community wellbeing is the collective perception about all the dimensions contained in the concept of QoL, including factors such as lifestyles, environment, socioeconomic situation, cultural and natural resources, political situation, among others.

Cultural and natural heritage-based wellbeing is based on the construction of a common identity made by the relation of the community members with these resources as well as the interrelations made by members concerning these very resources.

Government wellbeing is the relation that a community has with the political leaders, as well as the perception of the political decisions on the QoL among the members of the community.

Thus, the goal of this research is to uncover the Caribbean model of happiness according to the relationship between tourism and wellbeing in a SIDS. In order to test this model, four initial hypotheses have been formulated:

- H1: *Material and Emotional dimensions of wellbeing have a significant and direct relationship*
- H2: *Material and Community dimensions of wellbeing have a significant and direct relationship*
- H3: *Community and Cultural and Natural heritage-based dimensions of wellbeing have a significant and direct relationship*
- H4: *Government and Emotional dimensions of wellbeing have a significant and direct relationship*

RESEARCH METHOD

To measure tourism and quality of life relationship, a total of five constructs have been analyzed according to literature review: 1) Material wellbeing; 2) Emotional wellbeing; 3) Community wellbeing; 4) Cultural and Natural heritage-based wellbeing; and 5) Governmental wellbeing.

To test this hypothetical-conceptual model of this work, a questionnaire was administered to obtain suitable data for measuring the quality of life based on a total of five constructs and 27 indicators among residents directly involved in the tourism activity.

Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) was the technique used to test this hypothetical conceptual model. This is one of the most accepted techniques in theory building, as it analyzes the cause-effect relations between latent constructs that measure theoretical concepts through *proxy* variables. The PLS-SEM model is based on a reflective approach (Mode B), as the indicators in every one of the five constructs are the mean to measure these very constructs. Thus, the analysis requires has been divided into two different stages: measurement model and structural model. The first one involves the outer part of the model that describes the relationships among the latent variables and their indicators. The second one, also known as the inner part of the model represents the relationships between latent variables or constructs.

Data collection was based on fieldwork with a total of 287 questionnaires applied during the period January-May 2019.

This sample combines people of different activities directly involved in tourism like hotels, food and beverages, handicrafts and souvenirs, as well as tours, guiding, and other activities.

The quotation sampling technique was applied to assure that the different groups (quotas) of the population were represented in the sample in the same proportion that they were found in the population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This work brings empirical evidence to the happiness literature deepening in the model of wellbeing Dominican Republic characterized by three maxims:

- *Materialism does not buy happiness and good emotions*: According to the findings of this research, H1 suggests that the Dominican model of individual happiness is not based on material goods but emotions, and thus, greed is considered a poverty condition among rich people.



Respondents of the questionnaire suggested that the single fact of having a new day on the Earth is a “blessing” and they felt thankful for having food, time to share with family and friends, as well as a bed to sleep.

The future plans become for Dominican respondents a means of procrastinating happiness. This does not mean that life plans are unsuitable for happiness, but a reason for focusing on the trail and not on the result itself. The Dominican is not so happy in as much as he possesses more goods, but in sharing vital experiences with his environment, which enriches his life. For the case of tourism, the friendly and near character of the Dominican with the tourist is the reflection of its attitude with life. In contrast to this subjective point of view, most of the respondents indicated that they were in a salary range of 10,000-15,000 Dominican pesos (\$200-250). However, according to data from the country’s Ministry of Labor (2018), the cost of living is considerably higher, where only the basic food basket is approximately 29,000 Dominican pesos (\$600).

In summary, tourism is presented as a phenomenon with a “therapeutic” effect for people who are dedicated to this activity, to the extent that it allows them to have a relationship with the tourist, in a sector associated with leisure, fun, and memorable experiences.

- *The measure of who we are is what we do with what we have:* concerning H2 and H3, having more is having more to share with. Thus, the material dimension acquires a meaning of wellbeing when it is for enhancing the quality of life for the rest of the members of the community.

Community wellbeing is made by the set of interrelations made across the members via tangible assets remarking two attributes. On one hand, as stated in H2, the dynamic side of wellbeing is built by the redistribution of material goods and resources among the community with the function of reducing inequalities and contributing to a general situation of welfare at the community level.

On the other hand, H3 suggests that the condition of wellbeing in a community is static or stable due to the cultural and natural resources that build the identity signs of the community. This heritage is not only a symbol and an identification to reinforce the feeling of belongingness but also a reason to protect and manage a series of tangible and intangible assets with several purposes agreed-upon community members.

- *The care of human life and happiness: the first and only object of good government:* According to H4, it is observed that the public sector continues to be the object of mistrust among Dominican population, without covering their expectations in terms of justice administration or reliability on political leaders, despite perceiving the political environment as stable.

This very feeling of belonging of community is altered regarding community at supra-municipal level, and thus, community wellbeing decreases, as members may feel betrayed by other members of the community (political leaders responsible for “common welfare”).

Furthermore, regarding the importance of tourism in Dominican Republic, there is a high number of foreign actors investing in a large number of tourism projects with annual investments of up to 700 million dollars a year (Dominican Central Bank, 2017). This implies that foreign stakeholders have important decision-making power on issues that directly affect community members.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that the Dominican model of happiness is characterized by three maxims: 1) Materialism does not buy happiness and good emotions; 2) The measure of who we are is what we do with what we have; and 3) The care of human life and happiness should be the only object of good government.

According to these findings, the social policies of Dominican authorities should combine an emotional and material approach to assure that wellbeing is increased.

It is also necessary to evaluate the material and emotional situation of the Dominican population to identify deprivations that may have not been identified by Dominican residents but need to be covered.



Political leaders must become trustful for the population so that political decisions can contribute to enhancing the emotional wellbeing of the population.

In conclusion, future lines of research should focus on identifying additional constructs and indicators associated with Dominican model of wellbeing as a means to test that poverty is not “romanticized” as a form of false happiness. Furthermore, more and different indicators and dimensions should be considered in the analyzed wellbeing models, as a dynamic and complex interrelated system.