

How residents' perceptions of urban landscape authenticity affect tourism development attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

Prior research has predominantly focused on tourists, examining how perceptions of authenticity influence tourist satisfaction, loyalty, or revisit intentions. Yet, for long-term urban residents, the theoretical mechanisms by which perceptions of authenticity shape tourism development support remain insufficiently explained. This pilot study proposes two antecedents of residents' perceptions of urban authenticity: perceptions of the urban landscape and place attachment.

This study adopts Place Identity Theory (Proshansky et al., 1983) as its core theoretical framework, supplemented by Affect-Cognition Theory (Zajonc, 1980) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) to explore how residents' perceptions of the urban landscape affect their support for tourism development. According to the Place Identity Theory, this study suggests that environments with greater stability and distinctiveness more readily strengthen residents' affective bonds with the city (place attachment) and enhance perceptions of the city's distinctive character (authenticity). Affect-Cognition Theory further explains that affective states (place attachment) precede and guide cognitive interpretations (authenticity). The Theory of Reasoned Action holds that an individual's attitude toward an object (tourism development support) is determined by their subjective judgments (authenticity) of it.

This study makes two contributions. First, in landscape authenticity research, although Kienast et al. (2015) have documented variation in authenticity ratings across urban landscape types, the contributory mechanisms within individual landscape types remain unexplored. This study, therefore, specifies eleven landscape types (e.g., heritage and cultural districts, transportation hubs, civic and government spaces, commercial and financial centres, green and natural landscapes) as formative indicators, using Place Identity Theory to explain the psychological mechanisms underlying their differential contributions. Second, in resident-focused tourism research, prior studies have followed tourist research conventions by positioning place attachment as a direct antecedent or mediator of tourism development support (Stylidis et al., 2014). This study reframes place attachment as an antecedent of authenticity perception and provides empirical verification of this causal order.

METHOD

Taipei, Taiwan's capital, offers a rich and diverse range of urban landscape types—from historic districts and modern commercial cores to natural landscapes and well-developed transportation infrastructure—making it a suitable context for testing the proposed theoretical framework. Data were collected from 135 adult residents of Taipei (aged 18 and above, residing for at least one year) via an online survey using 7-point Likert scales in March 2026. The questionnaire comprised four sections: (1) expectation and perception scores for eleven urban landscape types (ENV); (2) place attachment (PA); (3) perceived urban authenticity (AUTH); and (4) tourism development support (TDS).

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed. The eleven landscape perception items were specified as a formative construct, reflecting the theoretical premise that each landscape type contributes uniquely and non-interchangeably to the overall perception of the urban environment. Reflective constructs were assessed for reliability (Cronbach's α , composite reliability) and validity (*AVE*, *HTMT*). Structural path significance was tested via bootstrap resampling (5,000 iterations).

FINDINGS

The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity: place attachment ($\alpha = .915$, $CR = .927$, $AVE = .750$), authenticity ($\alpha = .951$, $CR = .955$, $AVE = .653$), and tourism development support ($\alpha = .879$, $CR = .886$, $AVE = .734$). All four hypothesised structural paths were supported: urban landscape perceptions positively influenced place attachment ($\beta = .674$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .454$) and authenticity ($\beta = .530$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .670$); place attachment positively influenced authenticity ($\beta = .362$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .670$); and authenticity positively influenced tourism development support ($\beta = .693$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .480$). Bootstrap analysis confirmed four significant indirect effects: $ENV \rightarrow PA \rightarrow AUTH$ ($\beta = .244$, 95% CI [.125, .350]), $ENV \rightarrow AUTH \rightarrow TDS$ ($\beta = .367$, 95% CI [.282, .491]), $PA \rightarrow AUTH \rightarrow TDS$ ($\beta = .251$, 95% CI [.122, .351]), and $ENV \rightarrow PA \rightarrow AUTH \rightarrow TDS$ ($\beta = .169$, 95% CI [.083, .252]).

Two noteworthy findings emerged. First, formative outer weight analysis revealed heterogeneous contributions across landscape types. Four landscape indicators achieved statistical significance: heritage and cultural districts ($w = .300$, $p < .01$), transportation hubs ($w = .286$, $p < .01$), civic and government spaces ($w = .265$, $p < .01$), and commercial and financial centres ($w = .198$, $p < .05$). These landscapes, within the framework of Place Identity Theory, possess higher stability and distinctiveness and therefore contribute most to residents' authenticity perceptions. The remaining seven landscape types did not achieve significant outer weights, but most exhibited acceptable outer loadings ($\lambda = .485-.714$) and were retained on grounds of theoretical completeness. Second, authenticity fully mediated the effect of place attachment on support for tourism development. In a simple regression excluding authenticity, place attachment positively predicted tourism development support ($\beta = .556$, $p < .001$); however, once authenticity was included, the direct effect of place attachment became non-significant ($\beta = .112$, $p = .352$), confirming full mediation. This is consistent with Affect-Cognition Theory's proposition that affective bonds must first be translated into cognitive interpretations before shaping attitudes, and contrasts with findings in tourist studies, where place attachment directly predicts behavioural intentions.

IMPLICATIONS OR CONCLUSION

This study offers two theoretical contributions. First, Kienast et al. (2015) observed that residents in more natural landscape settings reported higher authenticity ratings and tentatively attributed the lowest-scoring suburban landscapes to a lack of stable identifying features, but provided no systematic theoretical framework. This study fills this gap by drawing on Place Identity Theory, identifying landscape stability and distinctiveness as the core mechanisms. Empirical results further demonstrate that seemingly featureless globalised landscapes—such as transportation hubs, civic spaces, and commercial centres—can evoke residents' perceptions of place attachment and authenticity, echoing Relph's (1976) observation that everyday urban landscapes shaped by long-term habitation are no less authentic than historic or cultural ones. Second, this study repositions place attachment from a mediator of tourism development support (the common framing in tourist research) to an antecedent of authenticity. Authenticity fully mediates the effect of place attachment on tourism development support—a mechanism consistent with Affect-Cognition Theory's proposition that emotional bonds must first be translated into cognitive appraisals before shaping attitudes.

For practitioners, destination managers should identify and prioritise landscape elements that residents perceive as highly distinctive and stable, even if these elements are not aesthetically striking, as they can strengthen perceptions of place attachment and authenticity and thereby foster support for tourism development. As a pilot study using online quota sampling, the representativeness of the sample is limited; future research should employ larger probability samples and conduct cross-city comparisons to examine whether the differential effects of landscape types on authenticity perceptions vary by city characteristics or residential district. Future research may also situate these findings within sustainable urban tourism governance frameworks, exploring the policy implications for Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities).

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