


Article

What Affects Support for Wetland Tourism? A Case Study from Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Development of sustainable tourism is not possible without the support and involvement of the local community. Thus, it would be beneficial to understand how residents perceive tourism development. This study investigates the main factors that influence residents' support for tourism development in the context of wetland tourism. The study was conducted in one of the most extensive wetland areas in Sri Lanka, situated not far from the capital, Colombo. The main instrument for data collection was a survey applied both to residents living inside the Muthurajawela Wetland and to residents living outside but in the proximity of the wetland. The data collected were subsequently processed, evaluated, and explained using SPSS 26. Besides descriptive statistics, a binomial logistic regression was employed to understand which factors influence residents' attitudes toward future tourism development. The study found that six factors could predict support for tourism development: gender, age, employment (connected or not to tourism), residence (inside or outside the wetland), interaction with tourists, and satisfaction with the current level of tourism development. The results were then discussed in the context of the extant literature and limitations were acknowledged.

Keywords: wetland; wetland tourism; residents' attitudes; binomial logistic regression; Muthurajawela and Negombo Lagoon; Sri Lanka



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1. Introduction

Wetland tourism is a type of tourism that is dependent on a natural element preserved in a quasi-natural state [1], although wetlands could also be manmade [2]. Interest in wetland tourism has grown recently [3], especially in Asia, where these areas are visited by millions of tourists annually [4,5]. For example, four wetland areas in South Korea received more than 21 million visitors between 2007 and 2012 [6]. Here, wetland parks are important destinations especially for domestic tourists and city dwellers [7].

According to the Ramsar Convention, wetlands could be defined as “areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters” [8]. The definition is somewhat ambiguous as there are many different interpretations of the elements that make up the definition. Thus, there are many different types of wetlands. However, in principle, the term “wetland”

refers to those habitats that are characterized by “continuous, seasonal, or periodic standing water or saturated soils” [8].

Wetlands are very important ecosystems because they supply water, food, fuel wood, grazing land, forest products, building materials, transportation, fishing, agriculture, livestock, and coast protection, besides providing public education as well as tourism and recreation opportunities [9–12]. As of more recently, wetlands play increasingly important roles in recreational activities and tourism [13–15]. Tourism operations need to be profitable and, at the same time, ecologically sustainable; thus, tourism should provide satisfying experiences to visitors while, at the same time, having a positive impact on the residents’ standard of living [16].

Tourism could generate direct and indirect income for residents and destinations [12,17], and these revenues could be used for poverty alleviation and sustainable socio-economic development of local communities [14,18–20]. Moreover, tourism could empower residents on the condition that benefits are distributed equitably in the community [21] and could become an incentive for nature conservation [12,17].

On the other hand, poorly planned tourism development could cause major problems [22], especially in environmentally sensitive areas, such as the wetlands [14,23,24]. An unsustainable increase in the number of visitors could disrupt wildlife and could lead to overuse of the natural resources, thus, negatively affecting the livelihoods of the local residents [6,25,26]. It is, then, understandable why locals are concerned about wetland degradation [27]. The impact on ecological diversity is so far minor, but limiting the entry of non-residents is already being considered in some places [28].

In conclusion, wetland tourism could bring both positive and negative effects [29]. Its impact on community development is most significant when considering the stakeholders involved in the tourism development of a wetland [17,30]. Whether the impact of tourism development is positive or negative may depend on the participation of residents in the planning process [31]. Community stakeholders have different priorities than extra-community stakeholders [32], but their views are often ignored [33]. However, if tourism is to develop in a sustainable way, it must satisfy the needs of the local residents [33,34]. This is why monitoring how residents feel about tourism is of critical importance; their opinions should be taken into consideration when planning for future tourism development [35–42].

Understanding perceptions of local residents is crucial to alleviate the negative impacts and build on the positive ones [40]. Development of sustainable tourism is not possible without the support and involvement of the local community [43–45]. Therefore, it would be beneficial to understand what the main factors that influence residents’ support for tourism development are. Residents’ attitudes toward and support for tourism development are among the most studied themes in tourism research [46,47], among many others. However, most of these studies were conducted in developed countries, and, especially in the United States [48], with very few studies being directed in the developing countries [49–51]. To the authors’ knowledge, no such study has been so far published in Sri Lanka, even though tourism has seen tremendous development in this country in the last decade; thus, in our view, such a study would be timely and needed to fill in a gap.

Sri Lanka may be an ideal setting for this case study: on the one hand, it needs tourism for development after many years of economic stagnation due to the civil war and possesses numerous resources for this, including rich and diverse ecosystems, such as wetlands, which appeal to both local and international tourists. Muthurajawela Wetland, the subject of this case study, is the largest saltwater peat bog in Sri Lanka and is famous for the diversity of its ecosystem. On the other hand, this wetland ecosystem is already under severe stress because of population pressure and unsustainable economic development. Thus, tourism development needs to happen in a sustainable manner: it must contribute to the well-being of the local residents but do so without threatening the wetland’s ecosystem.

This study will investigate local residents’ attitude toward further tourism development and how these attitudes were influenced by various sociodemographic characteristics

as well as by other factors. The proposed conceptual framework incorporates the following sociodemographic variables: gender, age, and education. Other variables included in the model were personal benefits from tourism, distance from the attraction, interaction with tourists, perception that benefits exceed the costs, and satisfaction with current level of tourism development.

The paper will proceed as follows: after a thorough literature review on residents' perception of tourism development and the factors that influence this perception, the paper will include a description of the study area underlining the role of tourism in the economic development of the region and the country. This will be followed by a description of how the data were collected, processed, and evaluated. Next, the study will outline the main results and findings, which will be then discussed in the context of the literature review. The paper will end with a few concluding remarks, a discussion of the limitations of the study, and some directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Residents' Perception of Tourism Development and Factors That Influence Perception

Perceptions, as individuals' own mental interpretations of experiences, could be positive or negative [52] and cannot be assimilated to reality [53]. The first studies investigating residents' attitudes toward tourism development that tried to identify the main factors that influence attitudes were conducted in the 1970s [54]. Those early studies assumed that local populations were homogeneous in their attitudes toward tourism development. Subsequent studies started to report significant differences in tourism development attitudes among community members based on different factors [54]. Since then, the literature on this topic has been rapidly growing [55].

Today, residents' perception of tourism development is one of the most popular topics in tourism studies. Some of the studies have been conducted under various theoretical frameworks, such as institutional theory [56], bottom-up spillover theory [57], theory of emotional solidarity [58], place attachment theory [59], social representation theory [60], and stakeholder theory [44,61]. The most popular, however, is the Social Exchange Theory (SET) [48,62]. SET was originally proposed in 1976 by Emerson in sociology [63] and was applied to investigate residents' perception toward tourism development in the early 1990s [64]. The theory suggests that residents are likely to support tourism development if they perceive some personal benefits associated with tourism and believe costs will not exceed benefits [65]. Although increasingly questioned in recent times [66], especially because it tends to ignore affective components in understanding resident attitudes [67], SET has remained the main theory connected to the research on residents' attitudes [46,61,68].

Views toward tourism development are highly dependent on where one lives [69–72]. Many studies found that sociodemographic characteristics influence how residents feel about tourism development [38,40,41,51,69,70,73,74]. Among these sociodemographic characteristics, the most frequently found in the literature are gender, age, education, and employment. Other factors that could influence residents' attitudes toward future tourism development as found by previous studies are distance from the tourist attraction, interaction with tourists, perception of tourism benefits versus costs, and satisfaction with the current state of tourism development.

2.1.1. Gender

While Rasoolimanesh et al. [75] found that gender does not affect residents' attitudes toward tourism development, many other studies have shown that gender does play an important role in determining perception of and attitudes toward tourism development [39,51,76–78]. A number of studies found that females tend to be more supportive of tourism development [39,41,79,80]. Other studies have arrived at the conclusion that, on the contrary, males are more supportive of tourism development [50,81–83] or that women have more negative perceptions of tourism than men [51,82,83]. In general, in developing countries, tourism is expected to bring jobs and economic gains. Studies

conducted in developing countries found that women have a stronger perception of the economic benefits than men [82]. This can be explained by the fact that many tourism jobs in developing countries are for women. This transforms women into supporters of tourism development because the economic gains would allow them to take care of their families [83]. On the other hand, in developed countries, potential economic gains are not perceived with the same enthusiasm because unemployment rates are much lower and tourism jobs are less valued due to the seasonality of the industry and the lower wages. In these countries, other issues become more important when evaluating the prospect of tourism development. In this context, women were proven to perceive more the negative impacts of tourism development, such as increased traffic, noise, and crime; thus, they tend to be less supportive [81].

2.1.2. Age

Age was also presented as an important predictor for residents' support for tourism development [49,77]. In general, older residents were found to show more support for tourism development [51,73,75,84,85]. The most likely explanation for this behavior is that they have more capital to invest and, thus, economically profit from tourism development [73] and are less concerned about environmental issues [84]. However, a few studies concluded that younger residents tend to be more positive toward tourism development [41,50] or that older residents perceive tourism development more negatively [38,49]. This is true especially in developing countries where unemployment rates are high, particularly among the younger population [41,50].

2.1.3. Education

Another sociodemographic attribute that was found to be important in predicting support for tourism development is education [46,86–88]. The majority of the studies reviewed agree that more educated residents have a more positive attitude toward tourism development [38,46,50,51,89,90], whereas less educated residents tend to see tourism development less favorably [91]. This can be explained by the fact that residents with higher education are better informed about the potential benefits that can be derived from tourism development [46]. Moreover, less educated residents have fewer opportunities for economic gain from tourism development [51]. There are, however, a few exceptions to this conclusion. For example, Egresi and Kara [85] found that less educated residents perceived tourism more positively, while another study, by Andriotis and Vaughan [60] found that the most likely to support tourism development are, actually, medium-educated respondents. This is explained in both cases by the fact that educated residents are more knowledgeable not only about potential benefits but also about costs.

2.1.4. Employment and/or Personal Benefits in Tourism

Most previous studies have found that residents with tourism-related jobs [46,50,89,92,93] or who depend economically on tourists [47,88,94–96] or personally benefit from tourism development [47,73,79] have a greater tendency to identify the benefits of tourism development and ignore its costs. Attitudes could differ depending on whether the residents perceive their locality as a place for earning a living or a place to live [97]. There were, however, also a few studies that either found the opposite—those who are employed in tourism-related jobs do not hold favorable views of tourism development [46,51,98]—or reported that this factor does not play a significant role in influencing residents' support for tourism [94]. While the first situation does not need any explanation as it is in accordance with SET, the situation in which residents employed in tourism-related jobs express negative views on tourism development is rather intriguing. This attitude could be explained by the low wages of tourism-related jobs and the seasonal character of these jobs [51] or by the negative experiences these people or their family members had at the job [46].

2.1.5. Distance from the Attraction

Distance from tourist sites was also found to influence residents' attitudes [34,40,51,58,82,87,96,99–101]. However, in terms of how exactly distance from tourist sites may influence residents' attitudes toward tourism development, the findings of previous studies are inconclusive. Some found that those residents who live close to the tourism attraction will tend to have negative perceptions of tourism development [89,96,102]. The reason may be that the cost they pay outweighs the benefits they get from being near the tourist attraction. On the other hand, when tourism development brings more benefits than problems, residents who live close to the tourist area will have a more supportive attitude toward tourism [103–107]. Finally, other studies found that those residents who live farther from tourist areas harbor more favorable views [82,107]. This may be because they get the benefits but not the costs. Additionally, those who live farther from the tourism area have a better sense of tourism impacts [96].

2.1.6. Interaction with Tourists

In general, researchers have found that those residents who interact more with tourists tend to be more open to tourism [42,108–110].

2.1.7. Perception That Benefits Exceed the Costs

If residents perceive that they benefit more from tourism development than they incur costs (consistent with the Social Exchange Theory), they will support further development of tourism [79,111–115]. Support for tourism development is stronger when residents perceive the impact of tourism as positive overall [116]. Perceived benefits are more important in influencing residents' support for tourism development than potential negative impacts [34,79,113,114,117,118], especially when they are distributed equitably within the community [35] and enhance the residents' quality of life [97]. Residents want the economic growth brought by tourism development, but they also want preservation of natural resources [78]. On the other hand, residents who acknowledge certain negative impacts are not necessarily opposed to tourism development [119].

2.1.8. Satisfaction with Current Level of Tourism Development

Most researchers believe that positive perception of current tourism impact will determine positive attitudes toward additional tourism development [39,113,118]. Similarly, Woo et al. [117] and Suess et al. [120] found that those residents who were satisfied with the changes in the quality of life determined by the development of tourism were more likely to support further tourism development.

3. Research Hypotheses

In light of the literature on the factors that influence residents' attitudes toward tourism development, we propose sixteen hypotheses to guide the assessment of the relationship among variables in the model. These are as follows:

Hypotheses H1 (H1). *There is a relationship between gender and support for tourism development.*

Hypotheses H1a (H1a). *Women are more supportive of tourism development.*

Hypotheses H2 (H2). *There is a relationship between age and support for tourism development.*

Hypotheses H2a (H2a). *Older residents are more supportive of tourism development.*

Hypotheses H3 (H3). *There is a relationship between education and support for tourism development.*

Hypotheses H3a (H3a). *More educated residents are more supportive of tourism development.*

Hypotheses H4 (H4). *There is a relationship between personal benefits from tourism and support for tourism development.*

Hypotheses H4a (H4a). *Residents who derive personal benefits from tourism are more likely to support tourism development.*

Hypotheses H5 (H5). *There is a relationship between distance from the attraction and support for tourism development.*

Hypotheses H5a (H5a). *Residents who live further from the attraction are more likely to support tourism development.*

Hypotheses H6 (H6). *There is a relationship between the degree of interaction with tourists and support for tourism development.*

Hypotheses H6a (H6a). *Residents who interact more with tourists are more likely to support tourism development.*

Hypotheses H7 (H7). *There is a relationship between the perception that benefits exceed the costs and support for tourism development;*

Hypotheses H7a (H7a). *Residents who perceive that benefits exceed the costs are more supportive of tourism development;*

Hypotheses H8 (H8). *There is a relationship between satisfaction with current tourism impact and support for tourism development.*

Hypotheses H8a (H8a). *Residents who have a positive attitude toward tourism development are more likely to support further development.*

4. Area of Study

Sri Lanka is an island nation situated southeast of the Indian Subcontinent. Situated only 10–30 km from Colombo [121], the Muthurajawela Wetland is the largest coastal saltwater peat bog in Sri Lanka, located on the southwest coast of the island [122,123] and one of the twelve priority wetlands in Sri Lanka [124] (Figure 1).

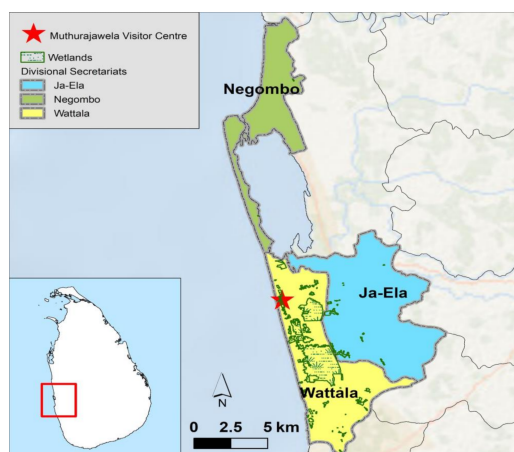


Figure 1. Map showing the Muthurajawela Wetland and Negombo Lagoon. The area comes under three Divisional Secretariats (DSs) namely Wattala, Ja-Ela, and Negombo. The data were collected from the three DSs with proximity to the Muthurajawela Visitor Center.

The two areas, the Muthurajawela marshland and the Negombo Lagoon, covering over 3000 ha each, should be considered together because they are ecologically interdependent and form one contiguous wetland system [121,123]. The wetland area is characterized by rich and varied flora and fauna [121] and is an important habitat for mangroves [125]. Sixteen mangrove species (including three nationally endangered species) belonging to nine families grow there [125]. The mangroves of Muthurajawela offer shelter to over 190 species of wildlife [126]. While few large mammals remain, the wetland is a habitat for many species of birds, reptiles, and amphibians [121]. Due to the high ecological value, the

northern section of the Muthurajawela marshes, covering an area of 1777 ha, was declared in 1996 a sanctuary under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance and is administered directly by the Department of Wildlife Conservation [127].

The wetland's ecosystem is under severe stress because of population pressure and unsustainable economic activities (mainly fishing) [121,128]. The Gampaha District, in which the wetland is situated, has the highest population density in Sri Lanka, after Colombo [128]. The population living in the wetland ecosystems has increased considerably over the years; they, generally, occupied land in the wetland illegally, forced by poverty and the lack of alternative places for them to live [128]. Therefore, most wetland inhabitants are very poor, and there are very few economic opportunities for them other than fishing [121]. Only a few people are employed or are engaged in small-scale trade [126].

In order to encourage economic development and, at the same time, ensure environmental sustainability, the focus should be on green growth [129]. Colombo has recently received the Wetland City Accreditation from the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands [129]. This could be another argument for the development of ecotourism, for which Sri Lanka is a regional leader in the field [129]. Visitors would like to see the quality of wetlands maintained and are willing to pay for the possibility of using the wetlands for recreational activities [125]. This "green" form of tourism could also earn locals a significant income [130].

Given the proximity to Colombo and its main international airport, easy access from the city, abundance and wide variety of wildlife and plants, and the existence of guide services and hospitality infrastructure, the wetland has great ecological and recreational value and attracts numerous wildlife enthusiasts [121,123,131]. The number of (domestic and foreign) tourists is on the rise [123]. Tourists and day visitors arrive at the wetland to fish, swim, and watch the wildlife [132].

The Muthurajawela and Negombo Lagoon Foundation is a community-based organization established in 1996. Its major objective was to develop wetland ecotourism and handle the largest proportion of the ecotourism operations, including boat safari operations, wetland interpretation, and guide services to tourists [123].

Tourism and Wetland Tourism in Sri Lanka

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors and a driving force of post-war economic development in Sri Lanka [133–135], with two million tourists visiting the country in 2016, who stayed an average of ten days and generated about USD 3.5 billion [136]. Throughout much of the first two decades of the new millennium, there has been a continuous increase in international tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka [137], the island country becoming one of the fastest-growing tourism destinations in the world [45]. Although the number of tourists declined in 2019 due to terrorist attacks and again in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector has remained important for the Sri Lankan economy [138]. Tourism is an important way of earning foreign exchange [123] and has a positive impact on the economic growth of Sri Lanka [137].

Sri Lanka has much to offer to visitors, from beautiful beaches to rich cultural heritage and diverse natural ecosystems [133,139]. Sri Lanka is also a hotspot for wildlife tourism [45,140] and has a great potential for the development of wetland tourism [141].

Most wetland tourism occurs in developing countries [6,12]. Here, as much as 20% of tourism income comes from ecotourism [142]. Sri Lanka is endowed with a great number of wetland areas that boast a great diversity of flora and fauna [123]. Six wetlands in Sri Lanka were designated by the Ramsar Convention as wetlands of international importance or Ramsar Sites, which together have 198,178 hectares [143]. There are also 41 wetlands in Sri Lanka included in the directory of Asian wetlands, and these are considered to be of national importance. Another 35 wetlands, which are not listed in the directory, were listed by a group of researchers and are also considered of national importance [128].

With the notable exception of the Bundala, Wilpattu, and Kumana (all Ramsar sites), tourism has seen little development in most wetlands [143], while large portions of the wet-

lands are lost annually due to landfill for housing, commercial and industrial development, prawn farming, and aquaculture activities [144].

5. Materials and Methods

The main instrument for data collection was a survey applied both to residents living inside the Muthurajawela wetland and to residents living outside but in the proximity of the wetland. The questionnaire was prepared in English and translated to Sinhala by one of the authors who is bilingual. It was then pre-tested on ten residents who live close to the Muthurajawela Visitor Center. After the few minor issues were ironed out, the questionnaire was deemed appropriate to be used in the survey. The questionnaire included several parts and more questions; however, only a small part of the data resulting from the questionnaire is analyzed in this study.

The three authors involved in data collection used systematic sampling to select the residences to be included in the survey. More precisely, they selected each tenth house on a street or in a group of houses. If the household head or an adult was not at home or did not agree to participate, they moved on to the next house. The survey was conducted in the Wattala, Ja-Ela, and Negombo Divisional Secretary's (DS) Divisions of the Gampaha District between 10 February and 15 March 2020.

The data collected were subsequently processed, evaluated, and explained using SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics were used to collect sociodemographic information on our resident sample, their perception of tourism benefits, their level of satisfaction with the current level of tourism development, and their attitude toward future tourism development.

A binomial logistic regression was then used to understand the effects of these variables on the residents' attitudes toward future tourism development. Linear regression models were not used because the multivariate normality assumption or other critical assumptions were not met. Binomial logistic regression is ideal in situations in which one wants to predict the presence or absence of a characteristic or outcome based on values of a set of predictor variables. In this case, the dependent variable was residents' attitudes toward further tourism development and the independent variables included were a number of sociodemographic characteristics (such as gender, age, education, employment, and residence) as well as frequency of interaction with tourists, satisfaction with current level of development, and belief that benefits of tourism development outweigh the costs. A binomial logistic regression not only provides a measure of how appropriate a predictor is but also indicates the direction of association (positive or negative).

6. Results

6.1. Results from the Descriptive Statistics

In the end, some 351 questionnaires were collected. The sample included more men than women (Table 1). This could be explained by the fact that, primarily, family heads were interviewed and these, predominantly, were men. In addition, more than three-quarters of the respondents were younger than 45. This is also rather normal for populations in developing countries, which tend to be younger than populations in the developed countries. Only one in three respondents were high school graduates or had higher education, and only one in five respondents were employed in tourism or had a family member employed in tourism (Table 1). In terms of the location of their residence, the respondents were almost evenly divided between those who lived within the wetland and those who resided outside the wetland area. Furthermore, the group of residents who interact with tourists often was just a little bigger than the group of residents who never or seldom interact with tourists. Furthermore, more than three-quarters of the residents perceive that the benefits from tourism development exceed the costs, and over 56% of them are satisfied with the current level of tourism development. Finally, almost 80% of the residents had a positive attitude toward future tourism development (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of the descriptive statistics on residents' socioeconomic background.

Variable	%	Variable	%
Gender (n = 351)		Interaction with tourists (n = 343)	
Male	62.7	Often (at least once a week)	52.2
Female	37.3	Seldom or never (less than once a week)	47.8
Age (n = 351)		Residents perceive that benefits from tourism development exceed the costs (n = 351)	
Younger (18–44 years old)	76.1	No	23.4
Older (45+ years old)	23.9	Yes	76.6
Education (n = 351)		Residents are satisfied with the current level of tourism development (n = 347)	
Less than high school	63.8	No	43.2
High school or higher	36.2	Yes	56.1
Respondent or family member employed in the tourism industry (n = 351)		Residents' attitudes toward future tourism development (n = 347)	
No	80.1	Negative	20.7
Yes	19.9	Positive	79.3
Location of residence (n = 351)			
Within the wetland	49.3		
Outside the wetland	50.7		

6.2. Results from the Binomial Logistic Regression

A binomial logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of gender, age, education, location of residence, tourist interaction, employment in tourism industry, acknowledgement of tourism's beneficial effects, and satisfaction with the current level of development on residents' attitudes toward future tourism development. The logistic regression model was statistically significant ($\chi^2(8) = 67.914$, $p = 0.000$). The Hosmer–Lemeshow test was not statistically significant ($p = 0.150$), indicating that the model is not a poor fit. The model explained 28.2% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in residents' attitudes toward future tourism development and correctly classified 78.8% of the cases at a cutoff value of $p = 0.5$. Sensitivity was 91.8% and specificity was 30.6%, while positive predictive value was 83.0% and negative predictive value was 50.0%. There were seven standardized residuals with values over 2.5 standard deviations, which were kept in the analysis. Of the predictors included in the model, six were statistically significant (as shown in Table 2). Thus, six of our hypotheses are validated: H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, and H8. Two other hypotheses are not supported: H3 (“there is a relationship between education and support for tourism development”) and H7 (“there is a relationship between the perception that benefits exceed the costs and support for tourism development”).

Table 2. Logistic regression predicting residents' support for further tourism development.

	β	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(β)
Intercept	2.987	0.620	23.176	1	0.000	19.830
Male	−0.683	0.324	4.440	1	0.035 *	0.505
Younger	−1.376	0.455	9.153	1	0.002 *	0.253
Less than high school	0.083	0.325	0.066	1	0.797	1.087
Employed in tourism	−0.866	0.357	5.910	1	0.015 *	0.420
Within the wetland	1.010	0.352	8.228	1	0.004 *	2.745
Seldom or never interact with tourists	0.661	0.343	3.715	1	0.054 **	1.937
Residents do not believe that benefits of tourism development outweigh the costs	−0.002	0.325	0.000	1	0.996	0.998
Residents are not satisfied with current level of tourism development	−1.073	0.324	10.963	1	0.001 *	0.342

Dichotomous dependent variable: attitude toward future tourism development; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.10$.

The results have revealed that

- Being male increases the odds of having a positive attitude toward future tourism development by 0.505, or females are 1.98 times more likely to agree with tourism development in the future. Thus, hypothesis H1a is supported.
- Being younger (up to 44 years old) the odds to agree with more tourism development increases by 0.253, or being older (45 or older) increases the chances to agree with more tourism development in the future by a factor of 3.95. This means that hypothesis H2a is validated.
- Being employed in the tourism industry or having a close relative employed in the tourism industry increases the odds to agree with more tourism development by 0.42, or those who are not employed in the tourism industry or do not have family members employed in the tourism industry are 2.38 times more likely to agree with more tourism development in the future. This result does not support hypothesis H4a that residents who derive personal benefits from tourism tend to be more supportive of tourism development.
- Those who live within the wetland are 2.75 times more likely to agree with more tourism development in the future. Hypothesis H5a is, therefore, not supported.
- Those who meet tourists seldom or never are 1.94 times more likely to agree with more tourism development in the future. This result does not support hypothesis H6a.
- Those who are not satisfied with current tourism development are 0.34 times more likely to agree with more tourism development in the future, or those who are currently satisfied with the level of tourism development are 2.94 times more likely to have a positive attitude toward more tourism development in the future, thus, validating hypothesis H8a.

7. Discussion

This study revealed that women were more inclined to agree with further tourism development. These results are contrary to the findings of the majority of the previous studies [51,81,83]. This could be because women have more chances to find jobs in the tourism or tourism-related (informal) sector [145], whereas men can feel that tourism provides them only few respectable and acceptable opportunities [146]. Jobs empower women [147], freeing them from economic dependency on men and society [148], and change their lives in a positive way [146]. However, women gaining economic and social independence as a result of tourism development also challenges traditional gender division of labor and could lead to conflict between partners [101,149], which explains why men are more reserved in their attitudes toward possible tourism development.

Further, it was found that older residents were more likely to agree with further tourism development than younger residents, which is consistent with the findings of most other studies [73,75,84,85]. This could be explained by the fact that older residents tend to value the benefits of tourism development more than younger residents and perceive the costs less negatively [73,85]. They may also be more tolerant toward foreigners and have less concern for environmental issues [84]. Finally, older residents may have more experience and more capital to invest in tourism-related (self-employing) businesses so they may derive more benefits from tourism development [73].

Surprisingly, this research arrived at the conclusion that residents who are not employed in tourism or who do not derive any benefits from tourism are more likely to support further tourism development. Thus, our study does not support the majority opinion in the literature that personal economic benefits are an important determinant of residents' support toward tourism [150,151]. The explanation may be that those who, currently, are not employed in tourism want to see that tourism in the area develops so that they could also benefit. However, those who are already involved in tourism may not want to share the benefits with others.

The study also found that those who reside within the wetland are more likely to agree with further tourism development, which is contrary to Andereck and McGehee's [152]

finding that those who live further from the tourism area tend to be more supportive of tourism development. This may be because those who live within the wetland have benefited more from tourism development and can see more economic improvement than those who live further away from the wetland (which is congruent with Andereck and McGehee's [152] findings). Moreover, those who live within the wetland need more economic opportunities whereas many of those who live outside the wetland have jobs and see the wetland as their playground for leisure activities. Our results and interpretation support Jurowski and Gursoy's [107] conclusion that distance from the tourist area could seriously affect residents' evaluation of tourism impact.

Another result is that those residents who interacted with tourists only seldom or never were more inclined to accept further tourism development. This may be because, while they may have, indirectly, benefited from tourism development they did not have to share the costs. Our findings could also be explained by Doxey's [153] Irritation Index: in the first stage of tourism development, there is less contact between tourists and residents and the perception of locals toward tourists and tourism is characterized by "euphoria". With continuous tourism development, these attitudes could change [46]. Bimonte and Punzo [110] also contended that residents' perceptions have to be analyzed as part of an exchange process involving both tourists and residents. Both populations have their preferences and expectations with regard to the benefits and costs deriving from tourism. As long as they are in equilibrium, both populations are satisfied.

Further, our study found that those residents who are satisfied with the current level of tourism development are more likely to agree with further tourism development. Thus, our results validate the findings of previous studies that unanimously arrived at the same conclusion [64,90,118,154,155].

Unlike Almeida-Garcia et al. [38], this study did not find education level to be a good predictor for residents' support for tourism development. In addition, whether or not residents perceived that benefits from tourism development exceed the costs did not influence their attitude toward further tourism development. This finding contradicts previous work by Ribeiro et al. [151], which showed that residents who perceive positive impacts more than negative impacts are more likely to support tourism, and is consistent with the findings of Chow et al. [155] that residents' perceived impacts were not significantly associated with their support for future tourism development.

Although the residents' attitude is one of the most researched topics in tourism studies, there is still little understanding of which factors influence these attitudes [66]. This study supported the conclusion of previous studies that attitudes toward tourism development vary between individuals. It has also supported some results of previous studies, while contradicting others. This demonstrates once again that studies on residents' attitudes are context dependent, and we are still far from being able to propose a model that would fit all contexts. What this research has achieved is perhaps less ambitious: it has provided a framework to better understand the main factors that influence residents' attitudes toward wetland tourism in a developing country.

The findings of this study have practical implications for local authorities when planning, designing, and implementing future tourism development ideas in the wetland area [156]. They suggest that monitoring residents' attitudes is important if authorities are determined to work with policies that would maximize the benefits of tourism development and minimize the negative impacts [68,155]. Special attention should be paid to the opinion of those segments of the population that reject tourism development [157]. Involving residents in decision-taking may also be important [38]. This could help them better understand the importance of tourism in their community. Thus, it is critical that local authorities inform residents about future programs relating to tourism development and mention not only the economic opportunities made available to them but also the potential risks [13]. When they are involved in the decision-making process, residents are more willing to accept the inconveniences associated with tourism development [38] and the development of more sustainable tourism plans.

One limitation of the study is that it investigated residents' attitudes at only one wetland region in Sri Lanka. Some of the findings may be extended to other wetland areas in Sri Lanka and in the world. However, we do not expect the results to be generalizable because the results of any study on residents' attitudes is context dependent, and the conditions of each local context are different [38]. This situation explains the very high number of studies focused on this issue and the diversity of results. However, this does not detract the merits of this study. It could constitute a starting point for future investigations on residents' attitudes toward tourism development in wetland areas that display similar conditions as the Muthurajawela Wetlands. By finding some common denominators this line of research could eventually lead to findings that are generalizable to a larger context.

Another limitation of this study is that it employed only quantitative methods to learn how a series of factors affect residents' attitude toward future tourism development. The problem with these methods is that, while they may describe which factors affect residents' attitudes toward tourism development and how they affect them, they do not explain why these factors affect local people's attitudes the way they do [65], considering that some of our results were surprising in light of previous research. The authors tried to speculate on the explanations, but a future study based on interviews is needed to strengthen (or, perhaps, reject) the explanations provided.

8. Conclusions

This study examined the effects of sociodemographic and personal economic factors on residents' propensity to support further tourism development in a wetland location. It found that most of the factors considered in the analysis did have an influence on locals' attitudes toward further tourism development. These variables were gender, age, personal benefits from tourism, distance from the attractions, interaction with tourists, and satisfaction with the current level of tourism development. Factors that were not confirmed to influence residents' attitudes toward further tourism development are education and perception that benefits outweigh the costs.

As this study has shown, most residents agree with further tourism development in the Muthurajawela Wetland and Negombo Lagoon. However, we must specify that tourism development in this area is a relatively new phenomenon. In the early stages of tourism development, the negative impacts are minimal and barely visible. Thus, residents tend to see the potential benefits and ignore the costs. With additional development, residents' attitudes may change. A longitudinal study using the same survey at a five-year interval needs to be undertaken to assess these potential changes.

Another issue is that attitude is not synonymous with behavior [157]. The fact that residents have a positive attitude toward future tourism development does not guarantee that their behavior will also be favorable [158,159]. In fact, a number of previous studies have already identified an "attitude-behavior gap", meaning that attitudes toward tourism development are not always confirmed by actual behavior [160]. Future studies could focus on wetland residents' intention to act (what they say they will do) and their actual behavior (what they actually do).

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