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Tourism and Resident Well-Being: Balancing Economic Gains, Social Dynamics, and Environmental Challenges Across Urban and Rural Divides

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of tourism development on the well-being of impoverished residents in the urban area of La Candelaria, Bogotá, and the rural area of La Macarena, Meta. The participants were recruited using Colombia's SISBÉN classification system by approaching individuals in public spaces such as bakeries, markets, and restaurants. After confirming their residency, only those classified in categories A (extreme poverty), B (moderate poverty), or C (vulnerable population) were included in the study. Data collection took place in May 2017, resulting in 307 surveys from the participants across both locations. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the findings reveal that economic benefits are the most influential factor, significantly enhancing happiness and life satisfaction. While cultural and environmental benefits are acknowledged, they are less directly linked to personal well-being. The study highlights tourism's complex role in promoting economic growth and shaping the social, cultural, and environmental aspects of community life. However, it also identifies potential risks, such as environmental degradation and social disruption, particularly in different spatial contexts. The research underscores the need for tourism development to provide tangible, personal benefits that align with residents' economic and emotional priorities, ensuring sustainable and equitable outcomes, especially considering the spatial disparities between urban and rural areas that influence tourism's effectiveness in improving well-being and alleviating poverty.

Keywords: subjective well-being; tourism; poverty; Colombia; happiness; life satisfaction



Citation: Croes, R.; Park, J.-Y.; Bonilla, J. Tourism and Resident Well-Being: Balancing Economic Gains, Social Dynamics, and Environmental Challenges Across Urban and Rural Divides. *Tour. Hosp.* **2024**, *5*, 1217–1235. <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp5040068>

Academic Editor: Lewis Ting
On Cheung

Received: 28 September 2024
Revised: 24 October 2024
Accepted: 15 November 2024
Published: 17 November 2024



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1. Introduction

In the post-pandemic era, developing countries face a significant challenge: balancing the economic advantages of tourism with the social costs borne by local communities. While tourism is a crucial source of income and employment, it also brings environmental, cultural, and psychological impacts that can negatively affect residents' quality of life [1–4]. Research shows that tourism can have both positive and negative effects on well-being, depending on factors such as the type, scale, and intensity of tourism development, community involvement, and the level of social and environmental sustainability [5,6]. Given that well-being is a multidimensional concept encompassing both subjective (hedonic) and objective (eudaimonic) aspects of human flourishing [7], it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach when assessing tourism's impact on local residents, considering their material and non-material needs and aspirations.

The literature on tourism's impact on well-being has primarily focused on econometric analyses, examining how tourism drives economic growth and its broader effects on quality of life [8–10]. While these studies provide valuable insights, they often overlook the subjective experiences of residents, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Uysal and Sirgy [4] emphasize the importance of aligning tourism with quality-of-life policy goals, such as poverty reduction. The COVID-19 pandemic reversed

many of the poverty alleviation gains achieved over the past decade [11], pushing an estimated 120 million people into extreme poverty [12].

This setback underscores the urgency of examining the relationship between tourism and well-being, particularly among impoverished populations, before allocating scarce resources in developing countries to promote tourism. A thorough understanding of residents' subjective well-being (SWB) within the tourism context is crucial for a more comprehensive evaluation of tourism's impact [9]. A review of the literature reveals a significant gap in research on SWB in tourism, especially among poor or low-income populations. A search of the Web of Science yielded 388 studies on SWB and tourism, but only 13 focused on respondents from low-income backgrounds, and only 9 were directly related to tourism, highlighting the limited attention given to this demographic. Interestingly, some studies suggest that poor living conditions do not necessarily correlate with lower SWB [7,8,13].

Research has indicated that economic income does not always serve as a decisive factor in determining high subjective well-being (SWB). Interestingly, individuals with low incomes can exhibit higher levels of SWB following tourism experiences [8,14–16]. This paradox highlights the necessity for further exploration into the intricate relationship between tourism and SWB, especially in regions like South America, where poverty and inequality are prevalent (Croes et al., 2020) [5]. Additionally, empirical evidence shows that the role of tourism in alleviating poverty varies significantly across different regions and countries [8,17]. This study seeks to fill this research gap by investigating how tourism impacts the well-being of impoverished residents in Colombia, the second most populous country in South America. Specifically, we will examine how the perceptions of tourism among poor residents influence their emotional well-being (happiness), cognitive well-being (life satisfaction), and personal benefits, focusing on three critical aspects of tourism's impact: environmental, economic, and cultural. Key research questions include the following: How do residents' perceptions of tourism's economic benefits correlate with their happiness and life satisfaction? In what ways do environmental and cultural factors associated with tourism influence residents' overall quality of life? How do these perceptions differ between urban and rural settings?

To comprehensively understand tourism's effects on residents, our research will compare two distinct settings in Colombia: La Candelaria, an urban area in Bogotá, and La Macarena, a rural region in the Eastern Plains of Meta. These locations were selected to represent different types of tourism destinations and varying levels of poverty, allowing for a nuanced comparison of tourism's outcomes in diverse environments. Understanding the definitions of urban and rural areas is crucial for analyzing development dynamics, as outlined by the World Bank [18]. Urban areas typically exhibit higher population densities, extensive infrastructure, and greater access to services and economic opportunities, whereas rural areas are characterized by lower population densities, a reliance on agriculture and natural resources, and limited access to essential services like healthcare and education. In Colombia, these distinctions are particularly relevant, given the significant disparities between urban centers, such as Bogotá and Medellín, and rural regions like La Macarena, which often struggle with poverty and limited service access [19]. Recognizing these differences can help policymakers develop targeted strategies that address the unique challenges and opportunities in both contexts, ultimately promoting more sustainable and inclusive development.

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of tourism's multidimensional impact on the well-being of local communities in developing countries. By focusing on Colombia, a nation with rich cultural and environmental diversity, this research provides valuable insights into how tourism influences not only economic development but also the social, cultural, and environmental aspects of residents' lives. Furthermore, our findings highlight the importance of considering residents' subjective experiences and perceptions when developing tourism policies aimed at enhancing community well-being. This paper advances the existing literature by addressing critical gaps in our understanding of

tourism's impact on SWB, particularly among economically disadvantaged populations in South America.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Tourism and Poverty Alleviation*

Tourism is often promoted as a facilitator for economic growth in impoverished countries, with promises of job creation, poverty reduction, and infrastructure development [8,20,21]. However, the relationship between tourism and development is complex, as the real impact of tourism is significantly influenced by the attitudes and perceptions of local residents [4,22]. Building on this complexity, the effectiveness of tourism as a tool for poverty reduction varies widely based on regional characteristics [17]. For example, in Ecuador, Ponce et al. [23] found that tourism not only reduced poverty within certain regions but also had positive spillover effects on neighboring areas. This broader impact of tourism on poverty reduction is not limited to individual countries. Llorca-Rodriguez et al. [2] demonstrated that tourism has contributed to significant poverty reduction across 60 countries, highlighting its potential as a global strategy for economic improvement.

However, the macroeconomic effects of tourism are not uniform across nations. Kim et al. [17] noted that tourism is more effective in reducing poverty in developing countries with low economic growth and income levels. Within countries, the impact also varies. Zhao and Xia [24] observed that, in China, the effectiveness of tourism as a poverty alleviation strategy differs across regions, with varying results in the western, central, and eastern parts of the country. Conversely, Oviedo-Garcia et al. [1] reported that in the Dominican Republic, tourism has not only failed to alleviate poverty but has actually exacerbated it and increased income inequality.

2.2. *Residents' Perceptions of Tourism in Poor Countries*

Studies on residents' views of tourism in economically disadvantaged areas reveal a wide range of opinions, from positive to negative [25]. Positive perceptions often highlight economic benefits, such as job opportunities, increased income, and improved access to goods and services [8,20]. Residents may also view tourism as a platform for cultural exchange and an opportunity to present their destination to a global audience [26]. On the other hand, negative perceptions are also common, particularly when tourism is seen as poorly managed or exploitative [27]. Concerns often arise around environmental damage, social disruption, and the loss of cultural identity [20]. These negative views can sometimes lead to conflicts and tensions between tourists and local communities.

The overall impact of tourism on residents in poor countries is influenced by various factors, including the type of tourism, the characteristics of the destination, and the effectiveness of tourism management practices [8,28,29]. When tourism is well managed and its benefits are equitably shared among local communities, it can contribute to positive economic and social development. Conversely, poorly managed or exploitative tourism can exacerbate existing inequalities and social challenges, leading to detrimental effects on residents [30].

The antecedents of personal benefit—local culture, local economy, and local environment—are fundamental in shaping individuals' well-being and satisfaction within their communities [31,32]. Local culture fosters identity, belonging, and social cohesion, while the local economy influences personal benefits by providing job opportunities, financial security, and avenues for entrepreneurship. The local environment enhances health, recreational access, and the overall quality of life. Together, these factors form an integrated system where individuals can flourish, drawing personal fulfillment from their community's unique attributes [31,32].

The direction of the hypotheses in this study is grounded in the understanding that residents' perceptions of tourism in economically disadvantaged areas are shaped by a complex interplay of positive and negative influences. Based on the literature, we can posit that residents who perceive tourism as beneficial will report higher levels of subjective

well-being, while those who view it negatively may experience lower levels of satisfaction and well-being. Thus, we hypothesize that positive perceptions of tourism will be positively correlated with residents' emotional well-being (happiness) and cognitive well-being (life satisfaction). This hypothesis is supported by findings that link tourism to economic benefits such as job creation and improved access to goods and services, which are often seen as crucial for enhancing residents' quality of life [8,20].

Conversely, we also hypothesize that negative perceptions of tourism—stemming from concerns about environmental degradation, cultural disruption, and social conflicts—will be negatively correlated with residents' overall well-being. When tourism is perceived as exploitative or poorly managed, it can exacerbate existing inequalities and social tensions, thereby diminishing residents' satisfaction and sense of belonging within their communities [27,30]. Furthermore, the antecedents of personal benefit—local culture, local economy, and local environment—will be assessed for their role in mediating these relationships. We propose that a strong local cultural identity and thriving local economy will enhance emotional well-being, while a healthy local environment will contribute positively to both emotional and cognitive well-being. This integrated approach recognizes that the overall impact of tourism is not merely a reflection of economic gains but is also deeply influenced by social and cultural factors that shape the residents' lived experiences [31,32].

2.3. Impact of Residents' Perceptions on Personal Benefit

The sociocultural impacts of tourism, traditionally analyzed through Social Exchange Theory (SET), are increasingly being reconsidered to incorporate emotional factors that play a significant role in shaping residents' attitudes. Rua [31] addresses this shift by examining intangible influences such as community attachment, involvement in the tourism sector, and the personal benefits derived from tourism. The concept of "benefit" is central across disciplines, guiding decisions and policies, with its multidimensional construct. For example, in economics, benefits are measured by utility, which forms the basis for cost–benefit analyses aimed at maximizing net gains [33]. In psychology, benefits are perceived subjectively and are influenced by personal values, highlighting their complexity [16]. These varying interpretations of benefits are particularly relevant when considering residents' benefits in tourism, where both material and intangible outcomes directly affect their well-being and support for tourism development.

We conceptualize resident's benefits as the positive outcomes of a relationship for a resident. The relationship between benefits and subjective well-being (SWB) is crucial, with both material and intangible benefits directly affecting the quality of life. While material benefits like income can improve life satisfaction, their impact on happiness diminishes after a point, emphasizing the importance of intangible benefits like social connections and personal growth [16,34]. Tourism exemplifies these dynamics, offering emotional, psychological, and social benefits that contribute to long-term well-being [35–37].

This study emphasizes the importance of tourist–resident interactions in enhancing these personal benefits, revealing that residents with a strong attachment to their community are more inclined to support tourism development. This support is often fueled by the pride residents feel when tourists appreciate and value their local culture [38]. Residents' emotional responses to tourists stem from a cognitive assessment of how tourism impacts their well-being. When residents view tourism as a positive force for their local culture, their emotional well-being and sense of pride are elevated, leading to an increased sense of personal benefit. These interactions with tourists facilitate meaningful social exchanges, allowing residents to share their stories, engage in cultural dialogues, and reinforce both personal and communal identities [31]. As local culture attracts tourists, economic opportunities arise, enabling residents to gain financial benefits through cultural engagement. These findings highlight the need to integrate economic, cultural, and emotional considerations into tourism development strategies to maximize personal benefits for residents. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *Residents' perception of tourism's impact on local culture increases their perceived personal benefit.*

The economic contributions of tourism are well documented, with increased tourist arrivals often leading to job creation in service sectors, thereby boosting residents' financial stability [39,40]. Employment growth in areas such as hospitality, transportation, and retail are particularly crucial for local economies, especially in regions heavily reliant on tourism [41]. The multiplier effect, where tourists' spending supports local businesses and infrastructure [42–44], plays an important role in community development, indirectly benefiting residents by maintaining a robust economy.

Moreover, investments in tourism often lead to infrastructural improvements, with revenues frequently directed toward public works that enhance living standards [39,45]. Improvements in amenities, public spaces, and utilities funded by tourism income significantly contribute to residents' quality of life [46]. These tangible benefits from tourism development shape residents' perceptions, leading to increased support for tourism activities and a recognition of the personal advantages they gain from the industry [47]. Based on these observations, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: *Residents' perception of tourism's impact on the local economy increases their perceived personal benefit.*

Tourism's impact extends beyond financial gains, encompassing crucial environmental and social dimensions as well. Liasidou et al. [48] illustrate how rural residents perceive tourism and its effects on their environment, finding that these residents highly value sustainable tourism practices that protect the environment while fostering economic growth. While residents acknowledge the economic benefits of tourism, they also express concerns about environmental degradation, such as noise pollution and infrastructure strain, indicating that sustainable tourism requires a delicate balance [10].

For these residents, health and environmental well-being are top priorities, leading them to favor tourism that promotes environmental conservation and enhances their quality of life [39]. Tourism, especially ecotourism, can act as a catalyst for environmental conservation, as protected areas attract eco-conscious visitors and strengthen preservation efforts [38]. Additionally, many residents are establishing eco-friendly businesses that combine economic stability with environmental responsibility, bringing both personal and communal benefits.

This broader perspective aligns with Weaver and Lawton's [49] assertion that eco-centric tourism can enhance community well-being. Buckley [50] further argues that ecotourism businesses provide a pathway to sustainable development. Moreover, Gössling et al. [51] demonstrate that sustainable tourism practices lead to an improved quality of life for residents, reinforcing the notion that residents' perception of tourism's environmental benefits increases their perceived personal benefit. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: *Residents' perception of tourism's impact on the local environment increases their perceived personal benefit.*

2.4. Impact of Residents' Perceived Personal Benefit on Well-Being (Happiness and Life Satisfaction)

The relationship between tourism and the well-being of residents is deeply intertwined, with the personal benefits derived from tourism playing a crucial role in enhancing both happiness and life satisfaction [52]. Economically, tourism serves as a catalyst for job creation, offering residents employment opportunities across various sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and retail. This job influx not only boosts individual financial stability but also contributes to broader community development by enhancing local services and infrastructure [53]. When residents perceive that tourism directly contributes to

their economic well-being, their life satisfaction improves as their material needs are better met, leading to an enhanced quality of life [17].

Socially, tourism fosters a sense of community pride and belonging, significantly impacting residents' happiness [46]. Interactions with tourists allow locals to showcase their culture, traditions, and way of life, leading to a heightened sense of pride and cultural validation. This social exchange not only enriches residents' lives by strengthening community bonds but also boosts their happiness as they feel appreciated and recognized by outsiders. The positive reinforcement from these interactions contributes to a more cohesive and supportive community environment, where residents feel valued and connected.

Furthermore, the environmental aspects of tourism are increasingly recognized as critical to residents' well-being [54]. Sustainable tourism practices that prioritize conserving natural landscapes and ecological balance resonate deeply with local communities. When residents observe that tourism efforts align with environmental preservation, their happiness is enhanced by a sense of security and pride in the protection of their surroundings. This approach not only benefits the current generation but also ensures that future generations can enjoy the same natural beauty and resources. As a result, integrating economic, social, and environmental benefits from tourism is essential in fostering a holistic sense of well-being among local residents, making them more supportive of tourism development that aligns with their values and aspirations. These insights collectively support the following hypotheses:

H4: *Perceived personal benefit has a positive impact on happiness.*

H5: *Perceived personal benefit has a positive impact on life satisfaction.*

2.5. Impact of Residents' Happiness on Life Satisfaction

Happiness and life satisfaction are closely related concepts that have been widely studied across various fields. Happiness is generally understood as a subjective state of well-being, characterized by positive emotions and a sense of contentment with one's life. In contrast, life satisfaction is a broader cognitive evaluation of one's life, reflecting how individuals assess their overall quality of life based on their personal standards and criteria [55]. Research consistently shows that happiness is a key predictor of life satisfaction, with individuals who experience higher levels of happiness typically reporting greater life satisfaction [56,57].

The relationship between happiness and life satisfaction is a key focus in understanding subjective well-being (SWB), as the two concepts, while distinct, are closely intertwined. Happiness generally refers to short-term emotional states characterized by feelings of joy and positive affect, while life satisfaction involves a more stable cognitive assessment of one's overall life fulfillment and achievement of personal goals [58]. Research consistently shows a positive correlation between the two, indicating that individuals who experience higher levels of happiness also tend to report greater life satisfaction [56,59]. However, the nature of this relationship can be influenced by various factors, including cultural context, personal circumstances, and social connections [60].

Happiness is shaped by numerous factors, including personal traits, achievements, relationships, and environmental conditions. In the context of tourism, residents' happiness can be significantly influenced by their perceptions and attitudes toward tourism development and its impacts. Tourism can provide various benefits to local communities, such as economic growth, job creation, cultural exchange, and enhanced social cohesion. These benefits can boost the happiness of residents who perceive tourism positively and appreciate its advantages. This increase in happiness can then extend to other life domains, thereby elevating overall life satisfaction [61,62].

However, tourism also presents challenges and costs for local communities, including environmental degradation, overcrowding, inflation, and cultural conflicts. These negative impacts can diminish the happiness of residents who are critical to tourism and its consequences. This decrease in happiness can negatively influence other areas of life, leading to a reduction in overall life satisfaction [54,63].

Recent studies reinforce these findings, highlighting the complex relationship between tourism and residents' well-being. For instance, Croes et al. [64] emphasize that while tourism can enhance life satisfaction through economic and social benefits, it can also lead to stress and dissatisfaction if not managed sustainably. Similarly, Munanura et al. [38] argue that the balance between tourism's positive and negative impacts is crucial in determining residents' overall happiness and life satisfaction.

These insights underscore the importance of carefully managing tourism development to maximize its benefits while minimizing its costs, thereby enhancing both happiness and life satisfaction among residents. Based on this understanding, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6: *Happiness has a positive impact on life satisfaction.*

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework, and Table 1 provides a summary of the hypotheses.

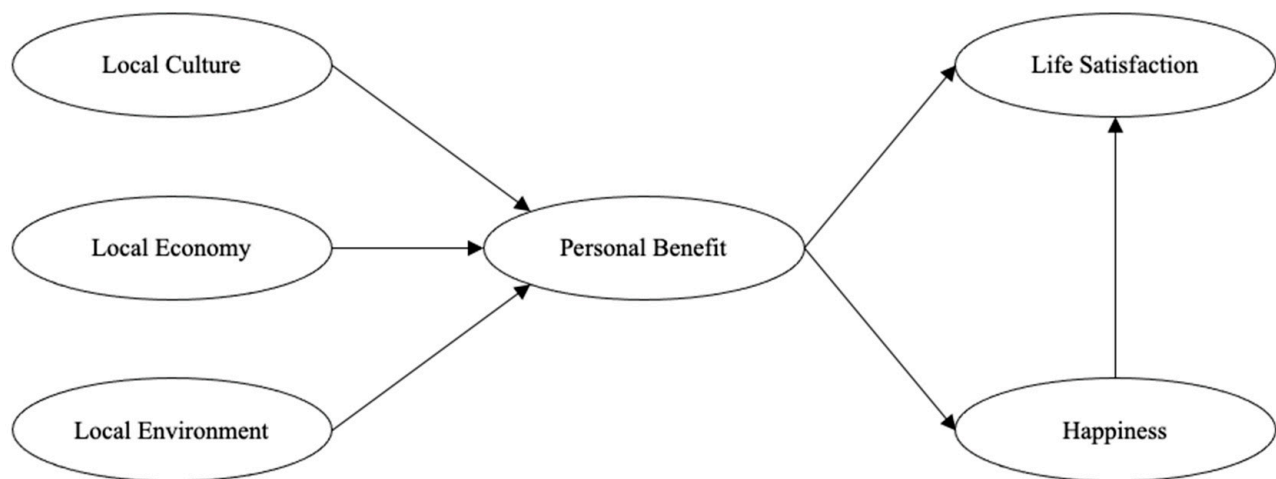


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Table 1. Hypotheses summary.

Hypothesis	Label	Expectation
H1	Residents' perception of tourism's impact on local culture increases their perceived personal benefit.	Positive
H2	Residents' perception of tourism's impact on the local economy increases their perceived personal benefit.	Positive
H3	Residents' perception of tourism's impact on the local environment increases their perceived personal benefit.	Positive
H4	Perceived personal benefit has a positive impact on happiness.	Positive
H5	Perceived personal benefit has a positive impact on life satisfaction.	Positive
H6	Happiness has a positive impact on life satisfaction.	Positive

3. Methodology

3.1. Case Study Approach

A case study approach is particularly effective for capturing subjective well-being (SWB) because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex and deeply personal factors that shape an individual's experience of life [65]. By delving into the unique context, personal narratives, and the interplay of emotional, cognitive, and environmental influences, case studies provide a rich, nuanced understanding that standardized measures often miss [66]. For instance, exploring the life of a refugee adapting to a new country through a case study can reveal how cultural adjustment, community support, and personal resilience contribute to their overall life satisfaction. This method not only captures the intricacies of SWB but also humanizes the data, making them more relatable and insightful, particularly when tracking changes over time and across different life circumstances [67].

Tourism has become a cornerstone of Colombia's economy, contributing 4.8% to the nation's GDP and providing 5.5% of its employment, with revenues reaching a record COP 15.5 billion in 2024 (WTTC). In 2023, the country welcomed 4.34 million visitors [68]. Beyond its economic impact, tourism is now recognized as a tool for poverty reduction and human development, particularly through pro-poor tourism strategies aimed at boosting life satisfaction and reducing poverty via strategic economic growth [23].

Colombia's poverty landscape is challenging, with 33% of the population living below the poverty line and 11.4% in extreme poverty, according to 2023 data from the National Administrative Statistics Department (DANE) [69]. The Multidimensional Poverty Index, which considers various factors like education, health, and service access, shows that 12.1% of Colombians are impoverished. Rural areas are disproportionately affected, with poverty rates three times higher than those in urban areas—25.1% in rural regions compared to 8.3% in cities. Regions such as Meta, for example, display significantly higher poverty and inequality than urban centers like Bogotá. Furthermore, quality of life surveys indicate noticeable disparities in life satisfaction and happiness between urban and rural populations, underscoring the need for focused interventions [70].

La Candelaria in Bogotá and La Macarena in Meta highlight the varied potential of tourism to address these issues. La Candelaria, a historic district in Bogotá, draws visitors with its rich cultural history, while La Macarena, once scarred by conflict with the Farc guerrilla, has become a symbol of hope and resilience through tourism [71]. The development of Caño Cristales, often hailed as "the most beautiful river in the world", has turned La Macarena into a key tourist destination, driving both economic growth and community development. This transformation illustrates how tourism can help close the gap between urban and rural Colombia by creating economic opportunities and improving the well-being of its people.

While Bogotá ranks as Colombia's top tourist destination, La Macarena holds the 215th position among 239 tourist sites, according to the Colombian Tourism Thinking Centre [72]. Despite drawing up to 13,000 visitors annually before the pandemic [73], it is still working to recover and aims to attract 15,000 tourists by 2024. La Macarena remains a vulnerable area, contrasting with La Candelaria in Bogotá, which received 1,386,000 foreign visitors in 2023, surpassing pre-pandemic levels by 4% [74].

3.2. Data Collection

This paper examines the impact of tourism on the well-being of impoverished local residents, focusing on their perceptions of tourism and how these perceptions influence their personal benefit, happiness, and life satisfaction. The study is set in Colombia, a country characterized by a large population, significant poverty and inequality, and diverse tourism resources. The research targets poor residents from two distinct areas: an urban area, La Candelaria in Bogotá, and a rural area, La Macarena in the Eastern Plains of Meta. These locations were selected because they represent different types of tourism destinations and varying levels of poverty.

The study utilizes Colombia's SISBÉN classification system, which categorizes households based on their capacity to generate income and their living conditions, including factors such as housing, access to public services, education, health, income, and sociodemographic background. The SISBÉN groups households into four categories: (A) extreme poverty, (B) moderate poverty, (C) vulnerable population, and (D) not poor or vulnerable.

For this research, participants were specifically selected from groups A, B, and C. To conduct the surveys, students from Externado University and Nuestra Señora de la Macarena School were trained to administer questionnaires in La Candelaria and La Macarena. The survey process involved approaching people in public spaces like bakeries, markets, restaurants, and other areas frequented by locals. Participants were first asked if they were residents of the area, followed by a question about their SISBÉN classification. Only those who confirmed their classification in groups A, B, or C were included in the study.

The data collection process followed a two-stage survey approach similar to that used by Gilbert and Abdullah [75], with an initial pilot phase conducted on 12 May 2017, in La Candelaria. Following the pilot, the actual data collection took place from 15 May to 26 May 2017, during which 307 surveys were collected from the two areas. After excluding incomplete responses, 278 surveys were analyzed (94 from La Macarena and 184 from La Candelaria). The data were subsequently uploaded to the Qualtrics platform, where they were processed for further analysis. This study aims to provide insights into how tourism impacts the well-being of residents in poverty-stricken areas, with a particular focus on their perceptions and the resulting effects on their happiness and life satisfaction.

3.3. Research Instrument

This study utilized a 48-item questionnaire to gather data on participants' demographic characteristics, life conditions, happiness, life satisfaction, and the perceived impact of tourism on local culture, economy, and environment. To assess the impact on local culture, three items were included: "Tourism promotes the authenticity of our region", "Tourism increases residents' pride in their local culture", and "Tourism encourages the participation of residents and the enjoyment of local arts such as music". The economic impact was measured with three items: "Tourism holds great promise for our region's economic future", "Tourism provides residents with many valuable employment opportunities", and "Tourism has improved our region's economy". The environmental impact was assessed using a single item: "The development of tourism in general has improved the image and cleanliness of our area".

For the perceived personal benefit from tourism, three items were used: "Tourism provides me with economic opportunities in the future", "Tourism offers me very good job opportunities", and "I benefit from tourism investments made in a community economic environment". Participants' happiness was measured with a single item: "I like to enjoy life no matter what and make the most of everything". Life satisfaction was also measured with a single item: "I am satisfied with my life". All items were adapted from previous studies and measured using a 7-point Likert scale.

3.4. Analysis Method

The data analysis employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a method well suited for maximizing explained variance in dependent variables while minimizing errors in the structural model [76]. PLS-SEM is particularly advantageous for exploratory research and theory development [77] and is especially effective for analyzing reflective measurement models. This is particularly relevant when working with single-item constructs, as PLS-SEM directly estimates factor loadings from observed indicators [77–79].

In this study, PLS-SEM was chosen because it accommodates single-item constructs—appropriate for well-established concepts like happiness and life satisfaction, which are unlikely to exhibit significant variance across multiple items. Empirical research supports the use of single-item measures for such constructs, as a well-designed question can adequately capture these dimensions [80]. PLS-SEM also provides the flexibility to model relationships without requiring multiple items per construct, enabling a streamlined yet reliable model [77].

Given the inclusion of three single-item constructs in this study—local environment, happiness, and life satisfaction—PLS-SEM was the ideal choice. It effectively balances the complexity of the model with the simplicity of measurement, without sacrificing accuracy or validity.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Profile of Participants

The demographic analysis of the participants, depicted in Table 2, revealed that 50.9% were female and 49.1% were male, with an average age of 41.7 years across all the participants. Regarding the marital status, 36.7% of the participants were single, while 31.3% were married. A significant majority of the participants reported an annual family income ranging from COP 201,000 to 1,000,000, equivalent to approximately USD 68.00 to USD 339. Additionally, 44.4% of the participants lived in rental houses, whereas 29.3% owned their homes. When asked about their household size, the participants reported living with an average of 3.45 people.

Table 2. Demographic information.

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	136	49.10%
	Female	141	50.90%
Marital Status	Single	102	36.69%
	Widowed	9	3.24%
	Divorced	16	5.76%
	Married	87	31.29%
	Separated	23	8.27%
	Don't want to answer	41	14.75%
Income	COP 200,000 or less	28	10.61%
	COP 201,000–COP 400,000	18	6.82%
	COP 401,000–COP 600,000	53	20.08%
	COP 601,000–COP 800,000	68	25.76%
	COP 801,000–COP 1,000,000	53	20.08%
	COP 1,001,000–COP 1,500,000	22	8.33%
	COP 1,501,000 or more	22	8.33%
Residential Status	Own house	79	29.26%
	Parents' house	15	5.56%
	Family house	39	14.44%
	Rental house	120	44.44%
	Other	17	6.30%
Residential Area	La Macarena	94	33.81%
	La Candelaria	184	66.19%

4.2. Measurement Model

First, the factor loadings were examined. All the indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating strong associations between the indicators and their respective constructs (Table 3). We calculated Cronbach's alpha for the combined score for happiness and life satisfaction to justify the use of a single-item measurement for these constructs. The results revealed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.442, reflecting poor internal

consistency. This low alpha score suggests that happiness and life satisfaction represent distinct dimensions of well-being and should not be combined, as merging them would compromise the measurement reliability. Therefore, it is methodologically sound to retain them as separate single-item measures to preserve the integrity of each construct and the overall model.

Table 3. Measurement model.

Construct	Measurement	Loading	Mean	SD	VIF
Happiness	I like to enjoy life no matter what and make the most of everything	1	3.590	1.105	
Life Satisfaction	I am satisfied with my life	1	3.874	0.949	1.000
Local Culture	Tourism promotes the authenticity of our region.	0.832	3.597	0.965	1.449
	Tourism increases residents’ pride in their local culture.	0.882	3.741	1.075	1.700
	Tourism encourages the participation of residents and the enjoyment of local arts, such as music	0.857	3.788	0.983	1.594
Local Economy	Tourism holds great promise for our region’s economic future.	0.832	3.511	1.085	1.771
	Tourism provides residents with many valuable employment opportunities.	0.882	3.590	1.051	2.223
	Tourism has already improved our region’s economy.	0.857	3.421	1.003	1.762
Local Environment	The development of tourism in general has improved the image and cleanliness of our area	1	3.460	1.068	1.000
Personal Benefit	Tourism provides me with economic opportunities in the future.	0.895	3.259	1.156	2.309
	Tourism offers me very good job opportunities	0.895	3.151	1.175	2.488
	I benefit from tourism investments made in a community economic environment.	0.815	3.086	1.217	1.634

The convergent validity was assessed by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE). All the AVE values surpassed the 0.5 threshold, indicating that the constructs captured a sufficient proportion of variance from their indicators (Table 4). Additionally, Cronbach’s alpha values for local culture (0.765), local economy (0.820), and personal benefit (0.837) exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency reliability for these constructs. The composite reliability values (rho_a and rho_c) for these constructs ranged from 0.773 to 0.902, further supporting their internal consistency (Table 4).

Table 4. Reliability and validity testing results.

	Reliability and Convergent Validity				Discriminant Validity (HTMT Matrix)					
	Cronbach’s α	CR (ρ-a)	CR (ρ-c)	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6
Happiness	-	-	-	-						
Life Satisfaction	-	-	-	-	0.283					
Local Culture	0.765	0.773	0.865	0.681	0.229	0.232				
Local Economy	0.820	0.824	0.893	0.735	0.159	0.210	0.765			
Local Environment	-	-	-	-	0.078	0.117	0.435	0.507		
Personal Benefit	0.837	0.846	0.902	0.755	0.144	0.119	0.485	0.632	0.387	

The discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). All the HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, confirming that each construct was empirically distinct (Table 4) [78]. The low correlation values in the HTMT matrix indicated that the constructs uniquely captured their intended phenomena without significant overlap. For instance, the correlation between local environment and

happiness was notably low (0.078), which aligns with theoretical expectations given their distinct dimensions.

To assess the multicollinearity among the exogenous variables, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were examined. All the VIF values were below 2.48, indicating no evidence of multicollinearity (Table 3). The model's predictive power was evaluated using the variance explained (R^2) values, which ranged from 0.043 to 0.301, reflecting a moderate level of predictive accuracy for most of the dependent variables [79–82]. The standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) was 0.073, well below the recommended threshold of 0.08 by Hu and Bentler [83] and Voorhees et al. [84], suggesting a good fit for the structural model.

4.3. Structural Model

The PLS-SEM model was employed to assess the direct impact of each variable (Table 5). The analysis revealed that the local culture did not have a significant impact on the perceived personal benefit ($\beta = 0.098$, $p > 0.05$), indicating that H1 was not supported. In contrast, the participants' perceptions of tourism's impact on the local economy significantly increased their perceived personal benefit ($\beta = 0.420$, $p < 0.01$; $f^2 = 0.152$), supporting H2. Similarly, the perception of tourism's impact on the local environment had a marginally significant effect on increasing the personal benefit ($\beta = 0.120$, $p < 0.10$; $f^2 = 0.021$), providing some support for H3.

Table 5. Results of PLS-SEM.

	Path	Coefficient	t-Value
H1:	Local Culture → Personal Benefit	0.098	1.420
H2:	Local Economy → Personal Benefit	0.420	6.047 ***
H3:	Local Environment → Personal Benefit	0.120	1.884 *
H4:	Personal Benefit → Happiness	0.136	2.057 **
H5:	Personal Benefit → Life Satisfaction	0.075	1.264
H6:	Happiness → Life Satisfaction	0.273	4.515 ***
	Local Environment → Personal Benefit → Happiness	0.016	1.413
	Local Environment → Personal Benefit → Life Satisfaction	0.004	1.336
	Local Environment → Personal Benefit → Happiness → Life Satisfaction	0.009	0.956
	Local Economy → Personal Benefit → Happiness	0.057	1.873 *
	Local Economy → Personal Benefit → Life Satisfaction	0.032	1.220
	Local Economy → Personal Benefit → Happiness → Life Satisfaction	0.016	1.675 *
	Local Culture → Personal Benefit → Happiness	0.013	1.056
	Local Culture → Personal Benefit → Life Satisfaction	0.008	0.777
	Local Culture → Personal Benefit → Happiness → Life Satisfaction	0.004	0.987
	Personal Benefit → Happiness → Life Satisfaction	0.037	1.806 *

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

H4 hypothesized a positive impact of perceived personal benefit on happiness, and the results confirmed this, showing a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.05$; $f^2 = 0.024$). However, H5, which posited that the personal benefit would positively impact the life satisfaction, was not supported by the data, as the results showed no significant effect ($\beta = 0.075$, $p > 0.10$). Finally, H6, which hypothesized a positive impact of happiness on life satisfaction, was supported, with happiness significantly increasing life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.01$; $f^2 = 0.085$).

The analysis uncovered notable indirect effects within the data. Specifically, an increase in the personal benefit was found to enhance the life satisfaction indirectly through a boost in happiness ($\beta = 0.037$, $p < 0.10$). Moreover, perceptions of the local economy positively influenced happiness via personal benefit ($\beta = 0.057$, $p < 0.10$) and further affected life satisfaction indirectly through the combined effects of personal benefit and happiness ($\beta = 0.016$, $p < 0.10$). The study also examined whether the survey location (La Macarena and La Candelaria) moderated the relationship between the participants'

perceptions and personal benefit. The findings revealed that while the location emerged as a significant independent variable, its moderating effect on this relationship was not statistically significant (See Table 6).

Table 6. Moderating effect of survey location.

Path	Coefficient	t-Value
Survey Location → Personal Benefit	0.312	2.547 **
Survey Location × Local Environment → Personal Benefit	0.183	1.393
Survey Location × Local Economy → Personal Benefit	0.029	0.191
Survey Location × Local Culture → Personal Benefit	−0.080	0.518

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

The findings of the study provide valuable insights into the relationship between tourism, residents' perceptions, and their well-being. The analysis did not support H1, as the impact of residents' perception of tourism on local culture was not significant in increasing their perceived personal benefit ($\beta = 0.098$, $p > 0.05$). The lack of support for H1 suggests that while residents may appreciate the cultural aspects of tourism, such as the promotion of local traditions and pride in their heritage, these factors alone may not translate into tangible personal benefits. Residents may perceive the cultural impacts of tourism as beneficial to the community as a whole rather than directly enhancing their individual well-being. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that cultural benefits are often seen as collective gains rather than personal ones, highlighting the need for tourism development strategies that ensure cultural preservation leads to direct individual benefits for residents.

H2 was supported, with a significant positive relationship between the residents' perception of tourism's impact on the local economy and their perceived personal benefit ($\beta = 0.420$, $p < 0.01$; $f^2 = 0.152$). This result underscores the critical role that economic benefits play in shaping residents' perceptions of personal gain from tourism. When residents observe that tourism contributes to local economic growth, job creation, and improved financial stability, they are more likely to perceive personal advantages. This aligns with the existing literature emphasizing that economic impacts are often the most direct and noticeable benefits of tourism for residents. The strong support for H2 indicates that economic considerations are paramount in residents' evaluation of tourism's value, reinforcing the importance of developing tourism policies that prioritize economic inclusivity and benefit-sharing.

H3 was marginally supported, with a positive but weaker impact on residents' perception of tourism's impact on the local environment on their perceived personal benefit ($\beta = 0.126$, $p < 0.10$). The marginal support for H3 suggests that while residents may recognize the environmental improvements brought about by tourism, such as cleaner public spaces and better-maintained natural areas, these improvements are not as strongly linked to their perception of personal benefit. This finding could indicate that environmental benefits are seen more as community-wide improvements rather than direct individual gains. It also suggests that residents may require more tangible or immediate environmental benefits, such as access to eco-friendly jobs or improved living conditions, to significantly enhance their perceived personal benefit from tourism.

H4 was supported, with the perceived personal benefit showing a significant positive impact on the residents' happiness ($\beta = 0.275$, $p < 0.01$; $f^2 = 0.108$). The support for H4 confirms the centrality of personal benefits in contributing to residents' happiness. When residents perceive that they are personally benefiting from tourism, whether through economic opportunities, improved infrastructure, or social recognition, their overall happiness increases. This finding reinforces the importance of ensuring that tourism development leads to direct and meaningful benefits for local residents, as their well-being is closely tied

to their perception of personal gain. The positive impact of perceived benefits on happiness highlights the need for inclusive tourism practices that directly address residents' needs and aspirations.

H5 was supported, with the perceived personal benefit significantly contributing to life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.177$, $p < 0.01$; $f^2 = 0.043$). The confirmation of H5 emphasizes that the perceived personal benefits from tourism not only enhance residents' happiness but also contribute to their overall life satisfaction. This finding indicates that when residents feel they are personally gaining from tourism, it leads to a more favorable assessment of their overall quality of life. The impact on life satisfaction, although slightly weaker than on happiness, suggests that while immediate emotional responses (happiness) are strongly influenced by personal benefits, longer-term cognitive evaluations of life satisfaction are also positively affected. This highlights the importance of sustainable tourism practices that consistently provide long-term benefits to residents, thereby enhancing their overall life satisfaction.

H6 was strongly supported, with happiness showing a significant positive impact on life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.519$, $p < 0.01$; $f^2 = 0.301$). The strong support for H6 aligns with extensive research indicating that happiness is a major predictor of life satisfaction. The significant impact of happiness on life satisfaction underscores the interconnectedness of emotional well-being and cognitive evaluations of life. Residents who experience higher levels of happiness, particularly through the personal benefits derived from tourism, are more likely to report higher life satisfaction. This finding emphasizes the importance of fostering a positive emotional environment for residents, where the benefits of tourism are not only material but also contribute to their overall sense of well-being and contentment with life.

5.2. Conclusions

This study underscores the need to align tourism development with the specific needs and perceptions of residents. Economic benefits emerged as the most influential factor in shaping residents' perceptions of personal gain, consistent with Brida et al. [41], and positively correlated with their happiness and life satisfaction, aligning with Diener et al. [56]. Research by Neal et al. [61] and Andereck et al. [46] further supports the idea that the happiness derived from tourism development significantly impacts residents' overall life satisfaction.

While cultural and environmental benefits were acknowledged, they were less directly linked to personal gain, echoing the findings of Rua [31]. This study affirms that tourism has a multifaceted impact, influencing economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of local communities, thereby enhancing the overall well-being [85,86].

To maximize tourism's potential for enhancing residents' well-being, it must deliver tangible benefits that align with the economic and emotional priorities of the local population. Residents' perceptions of tourism's impact on the local economy and environment are crucial, as they significantly influence their sense of personal benefit, which, in turn, affects their happiness and life satisfaction. However, the study also highlights the complexities and potential challenges of tourism, such as environmental degradation and social disruption, which can negatively impact residents' well-being if not managed sustainably.

The research underscores the pronounced spatial disparities between urban and rural areas, where factors such as geographic location, infrastructure, market access, and local socio-economic conditions play a critical role in shaping tourism's ability to enhance residents' well-being and reduce poverty. This aligns with Perez's [87] findings in Colombia, which identified spatial dependence at the departmental and municipal levels, emphasizing geographic location as a key determinant of poverty. Similar patterns have been observed in studies by Kim et al. [17], Croes and Rivera [8], and Zhao and Xia [24], further highlighting the importance of spatial context in tourism's impact.

5.3. Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the literature on tourism and poverty alleviation by offering a nuanced understanding of how tourism influences residents' well-being in poor regions. It extends the application of Social Exchange Theory (SET) by incorporating emotional and subjective well-being factors, providing a more holistic view of the resident–tourism relationship [88,89]. The research also underscores the importance of considering both tangible and intangible benefits of tourism, such as economic opportunities and cultural pride, in shaping residents' attitudes and perceptions. This approach broadens the theoretical framework by integrating economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions, offering a more comprehensive analysis of the impacts of tourism on residents' well-being.

5.4. Managerial Implications

For policymakers and tourism developers, the findings highlight the need for a balanced approach to tourism development that maximizes benefits while minimizing negative impacts. Sustainable tourism practices that prioritize environmental conservation and equitable economic opportunities are essential to enhancing residents' well-being. The study suggests that efforts to improve the local economy and environment through tourism should be coupled with strategies to foster cultural pride and community engagement. Additionally, tourism development should be tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of each region to ensure that its benefits are widely shared among local communities, thereby reducing poverty and improving life satisfaction.

To maximize the positive impact of tourism on residents' well-being, destination managers must adopt a balanced approach that prioritizes economic benefits while safeguarding environmental and cultural sustainability. Since economic gains significantly shape residents' perceptions of tourism's value, initiatives that boost local employment and support small businesses are crucial. However, these economic efforts must be coupled with sustainable tourism practices to prevent environmental degradation and social disruption, ensuring long-term community support. By engaging local communities in planning and tailoring strategies to the specific needs of urban and rural areas, destination managers can ensure that tourism development enhances residents' life satisfaction, preserves cultural heritage, and promotes environmental stewardship, resulting in a more sustainable and equitable tourism model.

Destination managers can drive sustainable tourism by focusing on economic growth and preserving the local culture and environment. For instance, community-based ecotourism projects in rural areas can create jobs for residents while protecting natural resources, fostering a sense of ownership and pride. In urban settings, promoting cultural heritage tourism—through festivals, historical tours, and local crafts—can boost the economy while preserving traditions and enhancing community identity. By integrating these strategies with sustainable infrastructure and community involvement, managers ensure that tourism benefits residents financially and improves their overall quality of life in the long term.

5.5. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research is context-specific, focusing on selected regions in Colombia, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other settings. The unique socio-economic and cultural conditions of these regions may not reflect those of other areas with different tourism dynamics. Second, the cross-sectional design of the study provides a snapshot of tourism's impact on residents' well-being at a specific point in time, but it does not allow for the examination of long-term effects. As such, the sustainability of the perceived benefits or any potential negative outcomes remains unclear. Moreover, the study focuses on residents' perceptions, omitting other key stakeholders such as tourists, local businesses, or government agencies, whose perspectives could offer a more comprehensive understanding of tourism's impact on the local community. Lastly, the reliance on self-

reported data introduces the possibility of biases, such as social desirability or recall bias, which may affect the accuracy of the responses.

Future research should address these limitations by exploring the long-term effects of tourism development through longitudinal studies that can track how residents' well-being evolves over time. This would provide deeper insights into whether the economic, cultural, and environmental benefits of tourism are sustained or diminished. Additionally, future studies should investigate how cultural and environmental impacts can be transformed into more tangible personal benefits for residents, ensuring that tourism-driven cultural preservation efforts translate into individual gains, not just collective community advantages. Research should also explore the varying effects of tourism across different spatial contexts, such as urban versus rural areas, to better understand how geographic and socio-economic factors influence the relationship between tourism and well-being. Expanding the scope to include other stakeholders, like tourists and local businesses, would enrich the analysis by providing a holistic view of tourism's complex impacts, helping to develop more inclusive and sustainable tourism strategies.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, R.C. and J.-Y.P.; methodology, J.-Y.P. and R.C.; validation, R.C., J.-Y.P. and J.B.; formal analysis, J.-Y.P.; investigation, R.C. and J.B.; resources, R.C.; data curation, J.B. and J.-Y.P.; writing—original draft preparation, R.C.; writing—review and editing, R.C. and J.-Y.P.; supervision, R.C.; project administration, R.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Unicafam Research Committee (ETG2015-1-002) in March 2015.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author(s).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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