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The influence of community factors on the engagement of residents in place promotion. Empirical evidence from an Italian heritage site.

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Abstract

The engagement of community residents in place promotion is increasingly recognised as desirable for ensuring effective and reliable communication with tourists. The study investigated the effects of community factors on residents' engagement in the promotion of an Italian heritage site. Community commitment, environmental attitudes and perceptions of the effectiveness of existing place marketing communications were found to be decisive in influencing residents' engagement in the promotion of the Amalfi Coast. The paper helps to shed light on collaboration in place promotion, thus enriching the debate on the ambassadorship role of residents and suggesting useful insights for policy makers/DMOs.

Key words: residents' engagement; place promotion; community factors; community commitment; World Heritage Site; Amalfi Coast.

Introduction

The participation of community residents in supporting tourism initiatives is widely acknowledged as important, especially in world heritage sites (WHS) (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Su & Wall, 2014; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Ahmad, & Barghi, 2017; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, & Barghi, 2017). The engagement of residents can be described as a higher form of civic participation in decision and policy making processes (OECD, 2001). Residents' engagement has generally been associated with the development of social capital, the positive contribution to inhabitants' quality of life, and an improvement in guest-host relationships (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Tosun, 2006), thus making heritage sites more attractive (Nicholas, Thapa, & Ko, 2009; Jaafar, Noor, & Rasoolimanesh, 2015).

The emphasis on residents' engagement in tourism initiatives resonates with recent destination marketing and place branding studies, in which a participatory view is increasingly regarded as desirable (Kavaratzis, 2012; Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012; Martin & Capelli, 2016). Residents are destination brand ambassadors (Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013), due to their ability to share their extensive knowledge about the place and to promote its culture and local traditions. This behaviour may in fact contribute to the enhancement of the site, which residents inhabit and cherish as part of their living environment (Su & Wall, 2014). Destination management organisations (DMOs), community leaders and city managers are thus increasingly appreciating and encouraging the "bottom-up" participation of residents (Zouganeli, Trihas, Antonaki, & Kladou, 2012), who may contribute by

suggesting new communication content and channels, such as place storytelling, reviews, viral videos, blogs (Lichrou, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2012; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012), or co-creating place brands (Hudson, Cárdenas, Meng, & Thal, 2016) to use for place promotion.

Although several authors have studied residents' involvement in place branding from various perspectives (Andersson & Ekman, 2009; Choo, Park, & Petrick, 2011; Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013), the factors that influence the willingness of community residents to participate effectively in concrete initiatives remain unclear, especially in terms of promotional activities. Some studies have however demonstrated that attachment to the community (Jaafar *et al*., 2015), the commitment in doing something "good" for the community (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013), and eco-centric attitudes (especially in heritage sites - Nicholas *et al.*, 2009; Jimura, 2011) can be powerful and decisive sources in prompting residents to participate effectively. We thus argue that the analysis of these community-related factors - to which little or no attention has been paid in previous studies in place communication and branding - can help to shed light on the complex mechanisms that regulate if and how residents engage in place promotional activities.

The proposed conceptual model therefore aims to analyse the impact of these relatively unexplored community factors on the engagement of residents in place promotion. The model was tested on a sample of residents of the Amalfi Coast, one of Italy's most popular heritage sites, in which community factors historically play a decisive role.

The study enriches the theoretical debate on the participation of residents in tourism promotion by substantiating the roles of community commitment and eco-centric attitudes

on the willingness of residents to engage in promotional initiatives. Equally interesting is the "supplemental" role that residents can play in place promotion when they perceive the ineffectiveness of the actions undertaken by local institutions in communicating their place. The study thus helps to contribute to the flourishing literature on the role of residents as place brand ambassadors by suggesting new research avenues for the analysis of the mechanisms that facilitate residents' engagement in place promotion.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. In the conceptual background section, we first set out our argument on residents' engagement in place promotion, and then specify the research model and the associated hypotheses. Next, we discuss the methodological choices and describe the analytical procedures used to survey a sample of Amalfi Coast residents. We then provide the main research findings and discuss the implications of our results, thus providing insights for a collaborative place promotion approach and future research directions.

Conceptual background and hypothesis development

Residents' engagement in place promotion

The concept of engagement has recently emerged in both the academic literature and practitioner discussions in a number of social science disciplines, although with some variations in definitions. In the development/planning and tourism governance debate, engagement has been defined as a type of civic involvement by residents who actively participate in decision and policy making processes (OECD, 2001).

Several studies have reported that residents' involvement has positive effects on tourism management (Tosun, 2006; Paskaleva-Shapira, 2007; Presenza, Del Chiappa, & Sheehan, 2013), especially in the sustainable management of heritage sites (Nicholas *et al*., 2009; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Ahmad, & Barghi, 2017). The success of tourism destinations has long been associated with a strong community involvement (Getz, 1984), as the participation of residents can both increase the effectiveness and efficiency of tourism plans, the development of social capital in the host community, and improve the guest-host relationships (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Gursoy *et al*., 2002; Tosun, 2006).

The call for a collaborative approach in the recent place marketing and branding literature (Fyall *et al*., 2012; Kavaratzis, 2012; Braun *et al*., 2013; Hudson *et al*., 2016) suggests that greater attention should be devoted to residents' engagement in promotional activities. In fact, residents' involvement in the destination branding process has key benefits for place promotion (Holcomb, 1999; Pike & Scott, 2009; Choo *et al*., 2011), also as a countermeasure to avoid possible drawbacks due to the opposition of residents whose interests diverge from those of policy makers/DMOs (Braun *et al*., 2013). These studies are generally underpinned by a service-dominant logic for place promotion (Warnaby, 2009), in which key community stakeholders such as residents, private firms and local tourism associations contribute to the co-creation of value for a specific territory (Hamilton & Alexander, 2013; Petrova & Hristov, 2016). This perspective stresses the role of stakeholder engagement in place marketing communication initiatives (Houghton & Stevens, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2012) for successfully translating the uniqueness of the place by creating a distinctive identity (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013; Pike & Page,

2014). Marketing communications aim, in fact, to promote place image (Fan, 2006), and communities of residents can play an active role in programs that add value to the place.

In the context of destination branding, residents' engagement in place promotion can be linked to the idea of "residents' destination brand ambassador behaviour" (Schroeder, 1996; Chen & Dwyer, 2010; Braun *et al*., 2013). According to this strand of research, residents act as ambassadors of the destination brand, thus being considered as an authentic, effective and trustworthy means for communicating the distinctive character of the place (Konečnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012; Braun *et al*., 2013; Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013). Several authors, in fact, suggest that residents act as evangelists, by promoting the destination through word of mouth processes (Simpson & Siguaw, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2012). At a deeper level, however, engagement in place promotion encompasses a sense of initiative and involvement, indicating individual and voluntary participation in place communication activities and in supporting institutionalised place communication marketing efforts. Thus, it goes beyond the residents' mere spontaneous intention of word of mouth, which has been widely investigated in the destination branding literature in recent years (Choo *et al*., 2011; Kemp, Childers, & Williams, 2012; Braun *et al*, 2013; Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017).

Residents' engagement in place promotion is a specific type of brand ambassadorship behaviour. It thus refers to the residents' personal usage and creation of brand-related promotional materials (Kavaratzis, 2012; Konečnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012) and their participation in planned promotional content, events and activities (Andersson & Ekman, 2009; Klijn *et al*., 2012; Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013).

Residents' engagement can, in fact, be instigated by local policy makers (e.g. city managers and DMOs), for example, by organising contests offering rewards (e.g. "the best slogan

for") and inspiring the "disclosure" of local narratives about the place (Lichrou *et al.*, 2010). Promotional initiatives can include voluntary, active and direct participation in operative issues, such as creating content and channels of communication, but also participation that can affect the whole communication strategy, including decision making on place-specific communication resources (e.g. the place brand – Hudson *et al.*, 2016).

Through the engagement in promotional activities, residents are able to act as communication catalysts for destination branding (Andersson & Ekman, 2009), often induced by altruistic motivations, such as social values and civic pride (Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013). This suggests that community-related factors, scarcely considered in previous studies on residents' engagement in place branding, can play a significant role in prompting participation in place promotional activities.

Community factors influencing residents' engagement in place promotion

Some studies have investigated the effects of various community factors, such as community commitment on tourism support (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011), community attachment on residents' perceptions (Gursoy *et al.*, 2002; Vargas-Sánchez, Plaza-Mejía, & Porras-Bueno, 2009; Jaafar *et al.*, 2015), and residents' environmental attitudes on participation in promoting heritage management (Nicholas *et al.*, 2009; Jimura, 2011). All of them seem to be important factors in prompting effective participation of residents in place promotion. However, there is still a marked paucity of research on how these various community factors influence concurrently residents' willingness to contribute to the promotion of their place, especially in heritage destinations in which these dimensions are crucial in determining residents' support.

Researchers generally concur that community commitment is a central construct in explaining the strength of social ties to the community, and comprises both affective and conative dimensions (Grzeskowiak, Sirgy, & Widgery, 2003; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011)[1]. Community commitment refers to the propensity of residents to develop and maintain strong links between community members and the collective-oriented values shared by them (Glynn, 1986), thus exercising control over the activities that affect community life (Timothy, 1999). Community commitment thus represents the highest level of having a "sense of place", related to the actual behaviour of residents that undertake concrete activities for the place (Shamai, 1991). It usually implies an investment in human resources, such as talent, time, or money, in place-oriented activities. Committed residents are thus ready to participate in different sorts of activities regarding their place (Canter, 1977; Shamai, 1991).

Community commitment therefore can be measured through the individual's proactive attitude to maintaining a relationship with her/his own local area and other people living in it. This means that evaluating commitment implies investigating how residents share community values and play an active role in service activities (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002) such as charity work and donations, as well as in sharing ideas and suggestions for the development of the community.

Rehmet and Dinnie (2013) hypothesised that if the residents show a positive commitment towards their place, they are likely to show related brand ambassador behaviour. Thus, we

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[1] These dimensions, however, have been usually operationalised in a very simply way, thus associating a high level of commitment to residents' willingness to enjoy staying in their community and their reluctance to move away from the area (Grzeskowiak *et al*., 2003).

can argue that community commitment can be a primary source of influence to engagement in place promotion. We therefore propose that:

H1: Community commitment positively affects residents' engagement in place promotion.

Community attachment has been often used as a synonym for place attachment, defined as "the bonding that occurs between individuals and their meaningful environments" (Scannell & Gifford, 2010, p.1). Unlike commitment, it implies an individualistic perspective, concerned with an individual's social participation and integration into community life, and an emotional link to a specific community (Low & Altman, 1992; Kyle & Chick, 2007). It is in fact generally acknowledged that community attachment both represents the meaning a particular community has to an individual (i.e. place identity – Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983), and how a place can serve to provide the conditions to support an individual's goals or desired activities (i.e. place dependence - Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ramkissoon, Smit, & Weiler, 2013). From a resident's perspective, the attachment can be measured through the importance assigned to the preservation of local traditions and culture (Nicholas *et al.*, 2009; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Again unlike community commitment, it does not imply an investment (of time, money, etc.) in specific community-related activities.

In the field of tourism and destination branding, several studies have suggested that residents with higher levels of place attachment are more likely to engage in community efforts and in positive brand-related behaviour (Brown, Perkins, & Brown, 2003; Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013), "by capitalising on an individual's willingness to protect important and

meaningful places" (Ramkissoon *et al.*, 2013, p. 553). Chen and Dwyer (2010), for example, demonstrated that a strong sense of attachment to a place is a key concept in determining residents' support to place brand development. Therefore, it is argued that community attachment may be an important factor influencing residents' willingness to actively promote their place, so that:

H2: Community attachment positively influences residents' engagement in place promotion.

Although the place attachment construct has been widely exploited in tourism and destination marketing studies, investigations have revealed mixed results. While some studies have shown that community attachment exerts both a direct (Lee, 2013) and mediated positive effect (Nicholas *et al*., 2009; Jaafar *et al*., 2015) on supporting the behaviour of residents in relation to tourism, others have revealed only partial effects or no effects at all. For example, McCool and Martin (1994) were not able to reveal any connection between community attachment and perceptions of the impacts of tourism activities. In addition, in their seminal study on residents' attitudes towards tourism development, Gursoy *et al*. (2002) did not find any relationship between community attachment and perceived costs and benefits of tourism-related activities, considered as mediators of tourism support. They suggest that other factors might be mediating between the community attachment and perceptions related to tourism activities. In a recent study on a World Heritage Site in Malaysia, Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Kock, and Ahmad (2017) also

showed a non-significant effect on the positive perceptions of residents regarding place attachment.

These inconsistent findings emphasise the need to identify other factors that mediate the influence of community attachment on residents' attitudes towards engaging in place promotion, namely the above-mentioned community commitment. This resonates with the findings reported in Hur, Ahn, and Kim (2011), in which community commitment acts as a mediator between affection for brand community and behavioural intentions (brand loyalty and word of mouth). Similarly, our hypothesis is that community attachment can be mediated by residents' inclination to perform a number of activities in support of their community, e.g. volunteering, civic participation and other activities regarding place development. Thus, community commitment could play an important role in mediating the effect of community attachment on residents' engagement in promoting the place in which they live. Therefore, we propose that:

H3: Community commitment mediates the influence of community attachment on residents' engagement in place promotion.

As potential co-owners of a place brand, residents feel a sense of respect for the place and for protecting the environment (Zenker & Seigis, 2012). It is argued, in fact, that a community-based approach to tourism development is a prerequisite to sustainable management (Sebele, 2010), and the development of sustainable tourism is difficult without the support of the community residents (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003; Lee, 2013). Nicholas *et al.* (2009) found that a strong environmental sensitivity among residents was associated

with more positive attitudes towards the community, and ultimately affected the support for sustainable tourism development in a WHS. This leads us to hypothesise that residents' ecocentric attitudes towards the community can influence their intention to engage in place promotion, which should ensure in turn the right allocation of resources for protecting the environment. The hypothesised relationships may be also indirect because community commitment can act as a mediator. This means that ecocentric attitudes can have a concrete impact on engagement in place promotion only if residents are willing to exercise control over the activities that affect community life.

Consequently, it is hypothesised that:

H4: Environmental attitudes positively influence residents' engagement in place promotion.

H5: Community commitment mediates the influence of environmental attitudes on residents' engagement in place promotion.

Residents' initiatives in promoting their community are usually integrated with marketing communication programmes managed by local institutions and destination marketing organisations. Both deliberate and user-generated communication initiatives may help to raise the appeal of the site, its landscape and its socio-cultural features, together with the services and facilities provided (Pike & Page, 2014).

Place promotion is addressed to both visitors and community residents. Nonetheless, studies have generally analysed the effects of promotion on the number of visitors and on

tourists' perceptions (Pratt, McCabe, Cortes-Jimenez, & Blake, 2010; Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013), without considering how local residents view local stakeholders' integrated efforts to promote the community (Baker, 2009).

Some studies suggest that public trust in government institutions can play a crucial role in affecting residents' attitudes and support for tourism related initiatives, such as brand ambassadorship behaviour (Nunkoo, 2015). Public trust ultimately depends on the perception of effectiveness (evaluation of the performance) in relation to the expectations of citizens (Nunkoo & Smith, 2013). This means that when residents witness what they believe to be poor performance, they are likely to develop distrust towards public institutions, and this distrust may reduce their willingness to engage in civic activities. On the other hand, Dowding and John (2008) explain that residents can institute voluntary civic actions to solve community problems when there is a shared perception that the local policy makers are ineffective (i.e. when there is no perceived gap between expectations and actual performance). If this is applied to the context of place promotion, in a low-trust context such as Italy, we therefore hypothesise that the engagement of residents may be influenced by their willingness to "substitute" local institutions that appear to be ineffective in promoting the community. It is thus hypothesised that:

H6: The perceived effectiveness of place marketing communications negatively influences residents' engagement in place promotion.

A theoretical model of hypothesised relationships among the research variables is shown in Figure 1.

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Methodology

Study context: The Amalfi Coast heritage site

The proposed research model was tested in a heritage site on the Amalfi Coast of Italy, in which community factors seem to play an important role for specific topographical, historical and cultural reasons. UNESCO included the Amalfi Coast site on its WHS list in 1997, in the "Cultural Landscape" category (see Figure 2). The coast is described as "an outstanding example of a Mediterranean landscape, with exceptional cultural and natural scenic values resulting from its dramatic topography and historical evolution" (UNESCO, 1997). It is "an area of great physical beauty and natural diversity", and may be considered as an "open-air museum", intensively settled by human communities since the early Middle Ages. There are a number of towns such as Amalfi and Ravello with architectural and artistic works of great significance.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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We considered it particularly appropriate to choose this heritage site as it encompasses the spirit of local community residents and their versatility "in adapting their use of the land to the diverse nature of the terrain, which ranges from terraced vineyards and orchards on the lower slopes to wide upland pastures" (UNESCO, 1997).

Measures

A quantitative research design with a structured questionnaire was used to test the above-described conceptual model. The questionnaire items were mostly adapted from related studies, namely: "residents' engagement in place promotion" – EPP (Jaafar *et al*., 2015; with two additional items created on the basis of the literature review); "community commitment" – CC (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002), "community attachment" – CA (Nicholas *et al*., 2009; Jimura, 2011), "environmental attitudes toward community" – EAC (Nicholas *et al*., 2009); "perception of the effectiveness of place marketing communication activities carried out by the local policy makers" – EPMC (5 new items)[2]. The constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being "Strongly disagree"; 2 "Disagree"; 3 "Neither agree or disagree"; 4 "Agree"; and 5 "Strongly agree", with the exception of the EPMC, which used a 10-point scale[3]. The questionnaire also collected conventional socio-demographic information (age, gender, city of residence, education level).

Of the initial 28 items of the above-mentioned scales, 21 were kept after the pilot study on a subsample (80 residents living on the Amalfi Coast). The rationale to keep (or exclude)

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[2] In all newly created scales, items were subjected to a pre-test in a pilot study. Internal consistency was assessed by Cronbach's alpha, and the coefficients uniformly exceeded the recommended cutoff level of .70 (Nunnally, 1994), as shown in Table 1.
[3] To avoid response bias (in particular response set, typical of Likert scales) we preferred to include at the middle of the questionnaire a Cantril scale ranging from 1 to 10.

items was factor loading. The threshold used for factor loading cutoffs was 0.6, generally reputed as good (MacCallum, Widaman, Zhang, & Hong, 1999) to justify performing a factor analysis.

Sample and respondents' profile

The heritage site covers an area of 11,231 hectares and 15 municipalities in the province of Salerno: Amalfi, Atrani, Cetara, Conca dei Marini, Corbara, Furore, Maiori, Minori, Positano, Praiano, Ravello, Sant'Egidio del Monte Albino, Scala, Tramonti and Vietri sul Mare. The total number of residents is 51,753 (ISTAT, 2014).

Due to the difficulty in reaching the dispersed population of the Amalfi Coast, we opted for a random stratified sampling method with the help of local-level stakeholders (associations, educational institutions and policy makers). We thus divided the coast (and municipalities) into two "traditional" areas: the inland (hilly) area (including Conca dei Marini, Corbara, Furore, Ravello, Sant'Egidio del Monte Albino, Scala and Tramonti), and the coastal (seaside) area (comprising Amalfi, Atrani, Cetara, Maiori, Minori, Praiano, Positano and Vietri sul Mare). We distributed a total of 381 (margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%) questionnaires in the two areas (respectively, 156 and 225). We received 116 completed surveys in the inner area (response rate 74.36%), and 173 from the coastal zone (76.89% response rate). This was basically in line with the assigned quota for each area. To minimise response bias, participants were asked why they were not willing to participate. Those whose reason was a lack of time (the main reason declared) were then asked to return the questionnaire later.

The research was conducted between March and June 2015. Overall, 289 questionnaires

were returned, of which 41 were eliminated because they were incomplete (it did not influence the assigned quota for each sub-area). The remaining 248 valid responses (a final response rate of 65%) were representative of both the coastal and inland areas of this WHS. The final sample exceeds the minimum threshold size of 200 identified by Kline (2011). Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) recommend a rough respondent-to-item ratio of 10:1 and mention various other factors (e.g. multivariate normality, model complexity, average error variance of the indicators, etc.) that need to be considered when determining the sample size. Taking all of these factors into account, our sample size can be deemed appropriate.

Results

All eligible respondents were aged between 15 and 83 with an average of 35 (37.9% aged between 15-29; 36.3% between 30-45; 20.2% aged 46-65 and 5.6% over 65 years old); 53% were men. Approximately half (46.4%) of the respondents had completed high school, and over one third (38.7%) worked in tourism-related activities.

The analyses were performed on a covariance matrix using Mplus. As our data contained both continuous and ordinal variables, we used a weighted least square estimator (WLSMV in Mplus) suitable for analysing continuous, ordinal and categorical variables simultaneously. WLSMV is a robust estimator that does not assume a normal distribution of the data (Asparouhov & Muthen, 2007).

The goodness of fit of the models was assessed using the chi-square statistic, the comparative fit index (CFI) (Bentler, 1992) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Steiger & Lind, 1980). An acceptable model fit is indicated by an RMSEA value of less than .07 and a CFI value greater than .92 (Hair *et al*., 2010). CFIs > 0.95 and RMSEAs < 0.05 represent an excellent fit (Brown & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999; DiStefano & Hess, 2005).

First, we analysed the factorial structure underlying the items used to measure the constructs of interest, which confirmed the unidimensionality of the scales. Therefore, we performed confirmatory factor analysis to test whether the hypothesised general measurement model fit the data from our sample. The model was composed of five latent constructs measured by 21 dependent variables.

The measurement model showed a good fit (χ^2 (N = 248) = 320.591, df = 179, p < .001; RMSEA = .056; CFI = .959). All of the unstandardized factor loadings were significantly different from zero (p < .001), with the standardised factor loadings ranging from .625 to .947 (Table 1).
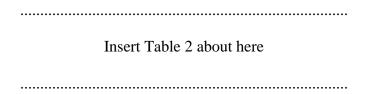
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In addition, we evaluated the reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the scales by means of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Except *Community attachment,* all of the scales were above the corresponding cutoff point for Cronbach's alpha and AVE values, thus suggesting that the general measurement model has good internal consistency. To assess discriminant validity we computed the square root of the AVE values and compared them with the correlations among constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Apart from *Community attachment*, the AVE square roots were larger than the correlations between the constructs, suggesting that the general measurement model has good discriminant validity (see Table 2).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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As the measurement model fit the data well, we specified the casual paths amongst the constructs to assess the theoretical model.

The model has three exogenous latent factors (CA, EAC, EPMC) and two endogenous latent factors (CC, EPP). The structural model fit the data well: χ^2 (N = 248, df = 180) = 315.566, RMSEA = .055, CFI = .961. The structural coefficients were all significant at $p <$ .05, except for two (CA on EPP and EAC on CC) (see Table 3 and Fig. 3).

Path coefficients were calculated for each causal link of the model, as well as their corresponding t values (see Tab. 3).

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Of particular relevance are the effects exerted by *Community Attachment* and *Community Commitment* on *Engagement in Place Promotion*. We hypothesised that CC exerts a fundamental role in mediating the relationship between CA and EPP. The total effect exerted by CA on EPP was .423; however, this effect was almost entirely an indirect effect passing through CC (.313), whereas the direct effect of CA on EPP was not significant (γ = .110) (Fig. 3). Thus, the relationship between CA and EPP was fully mediated by CC. The effects of the mediator (CC) has been tested via Delta method (MacKinnon, 2008), as shown in Table 3. This mediation effect has also been confirmed via Sobel test, which showed a value of 2.09 (p = .03) greater than the cutoff of 1.96 (Kline, 2011). CA exerted a strong positive effect on CC (γ = .806), which in turn had a positive effect on EPP (β = .388) (Fig. 3).

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Conversely, *Environmental Attitudes towards Community* only had a direct influence on EPP (.310), with a negligible indirect effect (.030). Finally, the *Efficiency of Place Marketing Communication* had a negative effect on EPP ($\gamma = -.165$).

Discussion

The present study assessed the impact of community factors on residents' intentions to show a particular type of residents' ambassador behaviour, specifically their active engagement in place promotion. The results of the structural model confirmed four of the hypotheses (H1, H3, H4, H6) based on the conceptual model, while the assumptions related to the direct influence of CA on EPP (H2), and the relation between EAC and CC (H5) were not statistically significant (Table 2).

With regard to the impact of "community commitment" (H1), the findings suggest that respondents who share the values of their community and play an active role in place service activities tend to be more engaged in the promotion of the Amalfi Coast. This means that when residents develop strong social ties to the community, they are more likely to hold a positive attitude towards communication initiatives aimed at supporting tourism. Similarly to Eshuis and Edwards (2013) and Andersson and Ekman (2009), the study highlights that if residents feel connected to their community, by being involved in community development, they are also likely to consider participation in promotion as a natural consequence of their "place (brand) co-ownership".

The findings also reveal the full mediating effect of community commitment, which is decisive in explaining the effects of residents' attachment on the engagement in place promotion (H3). The Amalfi Coast residents' attachment to the community influences their willingness to actively participate in place activities (H3), which in turn affects their engagement in place communication initiatives (H1). This is even more interesting because the direct influence of commitment attachment on the engagement in place promotion (H2) is not statistically significant. These findings are, however, consistent with other studies that have reported non-significant direct effects of community attachment on residents' perceptions (Gursoy *et al*., 2002; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Kock, & Ahmad, 2017). In addition, our results revealed that the mediation of community commitment is fundamental in explaining the effect of attachment in stimulating residents to effectively engage in place promotion. It is thus imperative to further investigate the impact of the community commitment on the engagement of residents in promotion activities and on other brand ambassador behaviours.

Furthermore, residents who are more eco-friendly assume a more active role in the promotion of the Amalfi Coast (H4). From this perspective, residents with more positive attitudes towards the conservation of local community resources and the environmental protection of their territory are more proactive in supporting community development and place communication processes. In other words, the study confirms that ecocentric attitudes can play a role in stimulating the active participation of residents, thus further suggesting that engagement in promotion can be seen by residents as a means to make their environmental attitudes concrete in some way. This is particularly stimulating from the perspective of residents' support to sustainable tourism practices (Lee, 2013). The link

between EAC and EPP is detected regardless of the mediating effect of community commitment, which is not statistically significant (H5). This adds interesting material for debate as other studies have found that environmental attitudes have only an indirect effect on the sustainable management practices of tourist destinations (Nicholas *et al*., 2009).

Finally, our empirical results show a relationship between EPMC and EPP (H6), indicating that residents who perceive local policy makers' planned communications as ineffective are more likely to participate in the promotion of the WHS. It seems that when residents perceive deficiencies in the communication activities of local institutions/DMOs, they feel a greater responsibility to contribute to voluntary civic actions aimed at supporting place communication. This evidence contrasts with previous studies that suggest that a low level of trust and the perception of inefficiency in local authorities can restrain the willingness of residents to participate in place-related promotional activities (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Nunkoo, 2015). The results however open up new avenues of research that could stimulate researchers to reconsider contextual differences in the mechanisms that regulate engagement in place brand development.

Implications, limitations and future research

Although several studies have highlighted the importance of involving community members, specifically local residents, in the tourism planning process (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Harrill, 2004; Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013), few studies have examined residents' engagement in communication initiatives, with a considerable lack of focus on the community factors that influence the residents' intention to contribute to place

communication activities. In particular, although residents have been recognised as an important asset of places for promoting a local image both individually, and collectively as a community, there have been few empirical investigations (Klijn *et al*., 2012; Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009). In this sense, the study sheds further light on the community-related mechanisms that can stimulate the engagement in place promotion, which represent an "active" type of ambassadorship behaviour of residents that goes further than "traditional" word of mouth.

In managerial terms, the study provides a number of recommendations to help local policy makers of the Amalfi Coast site to achieve effective community participation in place promotion and its associated benefits. In line with Andersson and Ekman (2009), we can suggest that when residents are given concrete tasks, they become more engaged and interested in working together with other community members. Thus, concrete activities for place promotion, meetings and events, access to information and promotional material could be important incentives for raising residents' commitment within an organised ambassador network (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Local authorities of the Amalfi Coast may thus play a major role in strengthening the links between residents and the community, for instance through civic centres/spaces and other forms of aggregation aimed at consolidating shared community values, entrenching social ties and stimulating residents' involvement in service activities. These insights resonate also with Hamilton and Alexander (2013, p. 171), who advocate a challenge to the strong centralist tradition and a re-organisation of local governments to support the implementation of "a comprehensive strategy of social integration and participation".

On these lines, policy makers in the Amalfi Coast are the most appropriate coordinators of the network, and they thus have the overall responsibility for moderating communication within the ambassador network (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). The coordinator takes an active role in circulating information and encouraging interaction between the members and promoting the place. Public authorities could also implement a system of incentives aimed at rewarding the most active residents for participation in place promotion, thus ensuring their ongoing collaboration which can thereby result in their concrete support in institutionalised place marketing efforts.

Considering the significant influence of environmental attitudes on residents' engagement, local managers can also adapt their communication programmes to properly emphasise the importance of living in a natural and "protected" environment (Zouganeli *et al*., 2012), which is central for the Amalfi Coast site. Equally important is the continuous monitoring of residents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards policy makers' planned communications. Although our findings highlight that residents who perceive planned communications as ineffective are more likely to become engaged, such a "reactive" type of participation might have negative effects on the integration of place communication and consistency of place identity. To avoid excessive fragmentation and reap synergistic effects from integrated communications, community leaders and city managers may consider specific marketing communication initiatives to stimulate a "cohesive" type of resident participation in promoting the heritage site. This could also increase trust in political institutions (Hamilton & Alexander, 2013), which currently seems to be quite low in the Amalfi Coast context.

The use of a sample from a single UNESCO heritage site does not allow the results of the present survey to be generalised, as all the respondents have the same cultural background. Another limitation is the relatively small sample that could reduce the ability to evaluate the complexity of residents' behaviour. An extension of this study to other WHS or non-WHS sites in other cultural and geographical contexts is needed to compare the difference in residents' attitudes and the effects of different community factors on engagement in place promotion. Future empirical studies could also deepen the role of community commitment, as it appears crucial to explaining how residents' attachment to the community can be turned into concrete intentions to participate in community activities. This is particularly relevant for heritage sites in which the engagement of residents can help managers and planners to guarantee a real sense of *heritage proximity* (Uriely, Israeli, & Reichel, 2002), thus raising residents' awareness of the value of their area.

More generally, a better understanding of the inner workings of participatory models of place promotion and of the "wider" ambassadorship role of residents is required, due to the current paucity of research on these issues. This study constitutes an initial contribution in this direction. Engaging residents seems crucial to local policy makers attempting to create sustainable approaches to tourism, in which civic participation contributes to the development of both the sociality of community residents and the attractiveness of the place for incoming tourists.

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Table 1. Summary results for the measurement model

Constructs/items	Labels	Indicator loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	Mean value	St. dev.
Community commitment							
I feel that it is important to serve as a volunteer in my community	CC1	.698	.861	.906	.619	3.89	.823
It is important to me to form close ties with others in my community	CC2	.800				4.03	.801
I am very concerned about the welfare of my community	CC3	.820				4.18	.762
I believe it is important to take an active role in the civic affairs of the community in which I live	CC4	.867				4.01	.898
I believe it is important to attend town hall or city council meetings and voice one's concerns about issues affecting the community	CC5	.625				3.71	1.088
I believe that it is important to give one's time to community activities	CC6	.878				3.96	.799
Community attachment							
It is important to continue the traditions of the Amalfi Coast's community	CA1	.654	.595	.720	.462	4.51	.692
I have no emotional attachment to the Amalfi Coast community*	CA2	.715				2.03	1.164
What happens in the Amalfi Coast is important to me	CA3	.668				3.86	.998
Environmental attitudes (towards community)							
The diversity of nature in our community must be valued and protected	EAC1	.886	.764	.856	.748	4.60	.629
Community environment must be protected now and in the future	EA2C	.843				4.57	.735
Effectiveness of place marketing communications							
Information about the cultural heritage of Amalfi Coast community	EPMC1	.936	.951	.950	.793	5.04	2.765
Welcome services/activities for tourists	EPMC2	.947				5.13	2.866
Events, shows and exhibitions in Amalfi Coast	EPMC3	.865				5.45	2.718
Messages and content (magazines, documentaries, websites, etc.) about the heritage site	EPMC4	.841				5.30	2.798
Advertising campaigns of Amalfi Coast	EPMC5	.857				4.84	2.732
Residents' engagement in place promotion							
I am willing to engage in promotional initiatives of the Amalfi Coast	EPP1	.802	.828	.869	.574	3.79	.890
I would like to promote the Amalfi Coast by using posters, banner, leaflets, and other communication tools	EPP2	.633				3.75	.943
I would like to give a substantial contribution for the promotion of the heritage, environmental, historical sites within the Amalfi Coast (e.g. co-creating a place brand)	EPP3	.820				4.05	.841
I would like to be engaged in contests established by local policy makers (e.g. "create a slogan, a logo or a melody") for the promotion of the Amalfi Coast	EPP4	.826				3.80	.969
I would like to be engaged in creating content to promote the Amalfi Coast through different media (TV, radio, newspapers, blogs, social media, etc.)	EPP5	.685				3.93	.932

* Reverse coded.

Table 2. Discriminant validity

	CA	CC	EAC	EPMC	EPP
CA	*0.679*				
CC	0.835	*0.786*			
EAC	0.658	0.624	*0.864*		
EPMC	0.197	0.204	0.105	*0.890*	
EPP	0.603	0.644	0.608	-0.033	*0.757*

Table 3. Results of hypothesis testing (path coefficients of direct and indirect effects)

	Effects	**Path Coefficients**				
		Standardized solutions	Std. Error	t values	Two-Tailed p value	Supported
H1	CC → EPP	.388	.168	2.310	.021*	YES
H2	CA → EPP	.110	.221	0.500	.617	NO
H3	CA → CC → EPP	.313	.136	2.298	.022*	YES
H4	EAC → EPP	.310	.097	3.180	.001**	YES
H5	EAC → CC → EPP	.030	.052	0.576	.565	NO
H6	EPMC → EPP	-.165	.061	-2.695	.007**	YES

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$