

## The Mediating Role of Tourism Support Between Community Participation and Community-Centered Economy: The Case of Bergama Multi-layered Cultural Landscape Area

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### Abstract

Bergama is a district in the north of Izmir and home to many cultural heritage sites. The ancient ruins, historical buildings, and natural beauties of Bergama constitute the rich multi-layered cultural landscape of the region. It has great potential for tourism with its cultural heritage sites. By revealing these values, tourism activities increase interest in the region and revitalize the local economy. Developing tourism activities in Bergama has caused local people to be involved in tourism. From an economic perspective, tourism activities in Bergama provide an important impetus to the local economy. In Bergama Multi-layered Cultural Landscape Area, community participation and economic development come to the forefront with the effects of tourism. While tourism is developing, the support of local people is important for destinations. This study aims to examine the mediating role of Bergama's local people's support for tourism between their participation in tourism

management and a community-centered economy. Within the scope of this study, a questionnaire was administered to 385 local people living in Bergama, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The study population, conducted quantitatively, consists of 107.133 people living in the Bergama district. The data collected through the survey were analyzed, and a structural model was established. The results show that economic income from tourism is an important factor that increases the willingness of local people to participate in tourism management, and that support for tourism is a mediating variable between community-centered economy and community participation variables.

**Keywords:** Community Participation, Support to Tourism, Community Centered Economy, Bergama.

**JEL Codes:** Z32

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## Introduction

Bergama District, located within the borders of Izmir Province, is a multicultural and layered settlement with many tangible and intangible elements and the common heritage of humanity, starting from the Hellenistic period, experiencing the Roman, Byzantine, Karasi, Ottoman and Republican Periods, respectively, and intertwining all these periods (Bayazit and Binan, 2023:306). Bergama harbors different beliefs, such as Paganism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, as well as the artifacts of these beliefs. Owing to these features, Bergama was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014 as a "Multi-layered Cultural Landscape Area". It fulfills five criteria for inclusion in the heritage list. The Multi-layered Cultural Landscape Area consists of nine components. These are; Multi-layered City, Kybele Rock Sanctuary and seven Tumuli (Bergama Alan Başkanlığı, 2023).

The success of tourism movements in destinations depends on local people's support for tourism and participation in tourism policy making. The local people form the basis of political, social, and economic structures. Destination management, which includes local community involvement, is essential for the success of tourism in destinations and for balancing the welfare of the community with economic benefits for local people (UNWTO, 1999:4). The influence of tourism has garnered a growing interest from researchers. This is primarily because the perceptions and attitudes of local people towards tourism impacts serve as crucial planning and policy tools for the successful development, marketing, and operation of existing and future tourism programs and projects. For tourism to thrive in a destination area, its negative impacts must be minimized and welcomed by the host population (Ap, 1992:665). This type of research examines the participation and support of local people in tourism and provides important data for tourism management and policymaking. This investigation aimed to gauge the influence of tourism income on the involvement of local residents in Bergama and the community-oriented economy as well as the extent of social engagement fostered by the support provided to tourism. A model was used to clarify the relationships between these variables.

In the context of this model, the first hypothesis of the research is to reveal whether community-centered economies have a positive effect on community participation. Accordingly, it is thought that community-centered economic power will be further strengthened with the participation of local people in the process, both as managers and supporters. Because it does not seem possible for regional tourism to develop and strengthen without local people.

The second hypothesis of the research is on the effects of community-centered economies on tourism support. The support of community-centered eco-

nomies by both the state and the local people is very important in terms of contribution to the country's economy. In addition, it is expected that regional community-centered economic forces will positively affect tourism support because the only way to create a sustainable tourism economy is to continue on the path with the support of all stakeholders.

The third hypothesis of the study is whether the support given to tourism will positively affect community participation. It is not difficult to predict that the support of tourism by well-educated and informed local people in cooperation with state administrators will have a positive impact on participation. However, the important point here is the level of education and awareness of the local people on the subject. Therefore, this hypothesis was added to the study in order to reveal the results of this level.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis of the study is whether the support given to tourism has a mediating effect on the relationship between the community-centered economy and community participation. In this context, it is predicted that adding the support given to tourism as a mediator to the relationship between the economy in which the community is involved and participation will increase the relationship. Because the economy created without the support given to tourism by both the local people and the state administrators may have less positive effects on participation than expected. Therefore, the support given to the tourism variable has a key role in this study.

## Conceptual Model

Tourism policy makers and planners have been carrying out various efforts to involve local people in tourism management. The most important reason for these efforts is that local people are directly affected by tourism and that they are the main source of the hospitality atmosphere in tourism that takes place in the destination (Simmons, 1994:98). Studies on the subject indicate that tourism development is negatively affected in destinations where local people resist tourism and are prejudiced against it (Choi and Murray, 2010:576). The future of tourism in destinations depends on evidence-based, inclusive, and local community engagement. Local people at destinations need to support tourism to create successful and sustainable tourism strategies. Despite this, the participation of local people in tourism planning in destinations is minimal and short-lived (McKenna and Hanrahan, 2024:1).

Tourism in rural areas can be an important tool that can compensate for income losses and support local economies during economic downturns. The tourism sector can mitigate the negative effects of economic fluctuations by providing alternative employment and income opportunities for the local population. In this context, the importance of tourism

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in rural development plays a critical role in ensuring economic diversification and sustainability of communities (Dičevska and Simončeska, 2012: 280). The generation of tourism revenue is not limited to direct payments from tourists to the local communities. There are also indirect effects, such as spending from the tourism sector on other non-tourism sectors. Approximately 50-90% of the impact of tourism is due to indirect effects. This means that the income multiplier can vary between 2 and 10 (Suriya 2010:4). Local community support and participation in tourism are crucial for the development of tourism at destinations (Garaca et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2019). In the context of tourism planning, community participation involves all stakeholders (local government officials, local citizens, architects, developers, businesspeople, and planners) in the decision-making process in a shared manner (Haywood, 1988:106). Participation is not only about ensuring a more efficient and equitable distribution of material resources but also about sharing knowledge and transforming the learning process in ways that contribute to individuals' personal development (Okazaki, 2008:511).

Social Exchange Theory is one of the most frequently used theories for understanding local people's perceptions and attitudes towards tourism. The theory is based on the assumption that local people evaluate the impacts of tourism and will support tourism development if they believe that the positive impacts outweigh the negative ones (Núñez-Tabales et al., 2024:23). Social exchange theory provides an important theoretical framework for understanding the change of individuals and groups in order to analyse the interactions between tourists and local people. According to this theory, individuals undergo change processes in line with the costs and benefits brought by mutual interactions. In the context of tourism, social exchange theory is used to explain the attitudes of local people towards tourism and their tendency to support tourism. Research in this context focuses on understanding the perspective of local people, who are the biggest stakeholders of tourism, towards tourism and their supportive behaviours towards tourism (Jurowski et al. 1997; Andereck et al. 2005). When local people believe that tourism contributes positively to their well-being, they support the development of tourism in the tourism destination and have a positive attitude towards tourists. However, local people who think that tourism harms the region or poses a problem, have a negative attitude towards tourism development and show resistance to tourism (Abdollahzadeh and Sharifzadeh, 2014). Approaches based on Social Exchange Theory suggest that local people are likely to engage with the tourism industry as long as they receive or expect to receive benefits that are greater than the costs they incur (Stylidis, 2018). However, in cases of negative impacts of tourism activities, i.e. when the costs incurred exceed the benefits, negative perceptions

will emerge and support for tourism will decrease. This theory, based on cost-benefit analysis, forms the basis of many studies in the tourism literature (Yuan et al., 2019; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Local people's participation in tourism management can shape their attitudes towards tourism development (Cao et al., 2021). This theory may not be able to examine local people's economic benefits from tourism, community participation, and support for tourism. Lee (2013) extends this theory and builds a new model. In the model, variables such as perceived impact and cost, social impact, and social participation were examined in terms of local people's support for tourism. This study was based on this model. This study examines the effect of support for tourism and a community-centered economy on social participation among the variables in the model.

### Research Hypotheses

Choi and Murray (2010) surveyed the local population of New Braunfels, Texas, and concluded that the local population considers income from tourism a vital economic activity. The research revealed that support for tourism is related to social participation, and economic development is related to support for tourism. Okazaki (2008) applied both qualitative and quantitative methods in his study on Coron Island, Palawan, the Philippines. The model established in this research indicates that local people who do not participate in tourism planning and management and who cannot earn income from tourism are against tourism development. When local people benefit economically from tourism activities at the destination, they may show hospitality, courtesy, and friendship towards tourists (Ap, 1992:685). Support for tourism development is related to tourism's perceived positive effects. This is negatively related to the negative impacts of local people (Ap, 1992:684). Janusz et al. (2017) found that local people who are close to tourism areas and are positively affected economically support tourism development. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2015) and Stylidis et al. (2014) found that local people earning income from tourism or working in tourism enterprises have also changed their support for tourism. Studies suggest that people who work in the tourism sector or have someone in their family who works in the tourism sector will be more supportive of tourism. Nugroho and Numata (2022) conducted a quantitative study of local people living in settlements adjacent to Gunung Cimerai National Park in Indonesia. They collected 934 usable questionnaires and concluded that perceived economic benefits and community involvement had the greatest impact on local people's support for tourism development.

Based on the above arguments, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 were derived from the literature.

**H1:** Community-centered economies have a positi-

ve impact on community participation.

**H2:** Community-centered economies have a positive impact on tourism support.

**H3:** Support for tourism positively affects community participation.

**H4:** Support for tourism has a mediating effect on the relationship between a community-centered economy and community participation.

## Research Methodology

For the research model, the 5-item community-centered economy scale and the 6-item community participation scale were adapted from Dragin et al. (2023), and the 5-item scale of support in tourism was adapted from Núñez-Tabales et al. (2024). Responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The research questionnaire consists of two parts. The first section includes demographic variables such as gender, age, education level, marital status, occupation, and income, while the second section includes questions on the community-centered economy, support for tourism, and community participation scale. Convenience sampling is applied in this research, in which every member of the universe has a chance to enter the sample (Spiegel, 1995:223). A total of 385 questionnaires were obtained, with a 95% confidence interval. The population of this study comprised local residents aged 18 years and above living in the İzmir Bergama region. The total population size was 107,133 individuals. The survey was conducted in July and August 2024, utilizing both face-to-face interviews and online links. The face-to-face interview rate was 82%. Online interviews were conducted with references from these individuals. This was necessary to reach a 95% confidence interval number.

## Methods Used in Data Analysis

In the context of this research, reliability, correlation, validity analyses, fit indices, path analysis, and effect levels were examined. Data were analyzed using the Smart PLS 4 program with a 95% confidence interval.

## Ethical Considerations

Permission (02.07.2024 - E-45778635-050.99-152142) was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Istanbul Beykent University to conduct this study.

## Findings

When the demographic characteristics of the participants are examined, it is seen that 44.1% are female and 55.9% are male. These close rates are important in terms of homogeneity. 66.9% of the participants are married and 33.1% are single. According to the

se rates, it can be said that the married participants are more sensitive about the tourism sector and the economy of the country. 16.7% of the participants have a primary school, 51.1% have a high school, 29.3% have a university and 2.9% have a postgraduate education. According to these rates, it is seen that the participation of individuals with high school and above education is at a high level. This shows that their education and awareness on the subject are at a certain level. Finally, 9.1% of the participants are between the ages of 18-24, 21.9% are between the ages of 25-34, 36.7% are between the ages of 35-44, 23.1% are between the ages of 45-54 and 9.2% are 55 and above. It is seen that the majority of the individuals who contributed to the study are middle-aged and above. This may indicate that the local people living in that region may have more knowledge of the issues in the tourism field of the region.

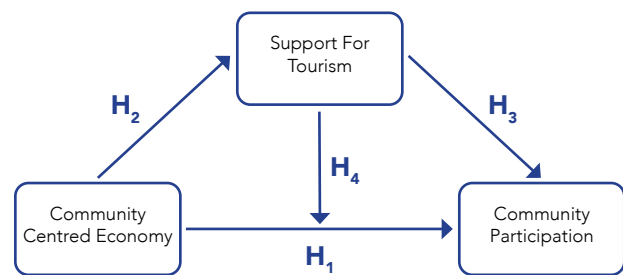


Figure 1. Research Model

Considering the correlation analysis of the conceptual model, it is possible to conclude that there is a high level of relationship between all variables ( $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, when we looked at the reliability analysis of the variables used in the research, Cronbach's alpha, rho\_A, and CR values were above 0.7. When these values are 0.7 and above, it means that they are considered acceptable. Depending on the convergent validity of the conceptual model, it is necessary for the AVE value to be greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2016). The results of the analysis showed that the AVE values were also greater than 0.5.

Table 1. Reliability and Correlation Analysis Results of the Conceptual Model

Variables	1	2	3
Community Centered Economy	1	0.68	0.66
Community Participation	0.68	1	0.69
Support for Tourism	0.66	0.69	1
$\alpha$	0.82	0.85	0.80
rho_A	0.82	0.85	0.80

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CR	0.82	0.85	0.80
AVE	0.58	0.57	0.56

To ensure discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion has emerged as an important analysis. At this point, the cross-loading of the indicator can be evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Considering the cross-loading, the factor loading values on the assigned construct should be higher than all values of the other constructs, provided that the cut-off value of the factor loading is greater than 0.7 (Coşar et al., 2020:6). Accordingly, it is possible to claim that the conceptual model has significant value for the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Results of the Conceptual Model According to Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	1	2	3
Community Centered Economy	0.76		
Community Participation	0.68	0.75	
Support for Tourism	0.66	0.69	0.75

Considering the fit indices of the conceptual model, the Square Root of Standardized Error Squared (SRMR), Squared Euclidean Distance (d\_ULS), Geodesic Distance (d\_G), and Normed Fit Index (NFI) values came to the fore. For the model to have a significant fit, the SRMR value should be less than 0.10. In this model, the SRMR value is 0.06. The NFI value close to one means that the model has a good

fit (Yılmaz & Kınaş, 2020: 446-447). The fit indices of the conceptual model showed that the NFI value was 0.83.

Table 3. Summary of Fit Indices of the Conceptual Model

Variables	Realized Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.06	0.06
d_ULS	0.62	0.62
d_G	0.21	0.21
Chi-square	461.50	461.50
NFI	0.83	0.83

Path analysis is a statistical method that allows the examination of relationships between variables in a single equation. Testing the model with data can determine whether the pattern between the variables is supported by the data. Factor loadings and power coefficients between the variables were calculated from the analysis. Path diagrams and analysis findings are visualized through the model, providing a clear representation of the relationships between variables (Schumacher & Lomax, 2004: 202-204). Mediation and interaction occur when there is a causal sequentiality of three or more variables, allowing for effective revelation of the cause-and-effect relationship between multiple variables. Path analysis also includes the calculation of factors and regression analyses, making it a comprehensive tool for examining complex relationships between variables. In this context, when the factor (>500) and regression (>200) values of the model are analyzed, it is possible to say that high and significant values occur (Kozak, 2014:156).

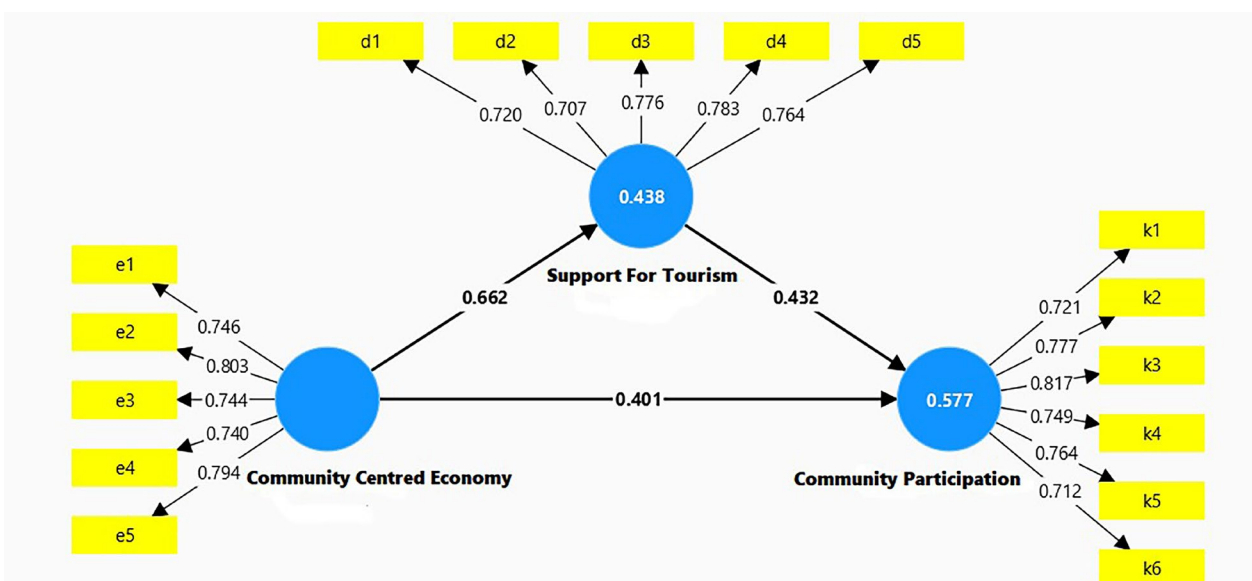


Figure 2. Path Analysis of the Conceptual Model

Regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ), t-statistic values, explained variance values ( $R^2$ ), and significance values ( $p$ ) calculated based on path analysis are shown in Table 4. When the effect of community-centered economy on community participation is examined ( $\beta$ : 0.40;  $t$ : 7.05;  $p$ : 0.00), it is possible to say that there is a significant and positive effect. The impact of community-centered economies on support for tourism ( $\beta$  = 0.66;  $t$  = 16.76;  $p$  = 0.00) demonstrates a significant and positive influence. In addition, analysis of the effect of support for tourism on community participation ( $\beta$  = 0.43;  $t$  = 6.90;  $p$  = 0.00) revealed a significant and positive relationship. The mediation effect, one

of the primary hypotheses of the study, indicates that support for tourism serves as a mediating factor in the connection between community-centered economies and community participation ( $\beta$  = 0.28,  $t$  = 6.22,  $p$  = 0.00). In addition, the  $R^2$  value for the effect of the community-centered economy on community participation was determined to be 0.57. This revealed the power of the independent variable on the dependent variable at a rate of 57%. Likewise, it is also seen that the power of community-centered economy on support for tourism is explained with a rate of 43%.

Table 4. Model Pathways and Effect Levels

Direct Impact	$\beta$	S.S.	t	p	$R^2$
CCE $\rightarrow$ CP	0.40	0.05	7.05	0.00	0.57
CCE $\rightarrow$ SFT	0.66	0.03	16.76	0.00	0.43
SFT $\rightarrow$ CP	0.43	0.06	6.90	0.00	
Indirect Impact					
CCE $\rightarrow$ SFT $\rightarrow$ CP	0.28	0.04	6.22	0.00	

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this study is to examine the mediating role of Bergama's local people's support for tourism between their participation in tourism management and a community-centered economy. Furthermore, this study sought to determine the extent of support for the tourism industry. According to data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2022), 337,855 people visited the Asclepion, Acropolis, and Basilica ruins in Bergama in 2022, and 27,888 people visited the museum. Cultural heritage sites constitute touristic assets in Bergama. The success of tourism in destinations increases with the support and participation of the local people in tourism. The participation of local people in tourism planning and decision-making is time-consuming. For the participation of local people, it is very important not only to initiate the participation process, but also to ensure the continuity of the process. Therefore, tourism, language, and hospitality training should be provided, conflicts of interest that may arise should be prevented, and employment opportunities in tourism should be developed for the continuation of the process.

This study presents important findings on the protection of Bergama's cultural heritage and the economic and social impact of tourism. This has implications for academia, local governments, and policymakers. The contribution of tourism to the local economy and promotion of community participation have important implications for the development of sustainable tourism policies. The perceived benefits of tourism are considerable, and the economic dimension is a key factor prompting local

residents to endorse and actively participate in the industry. Tourism management relies significantly on local involvement, making it a crucial consideration for the development and success of the sector. Numerous locations employ techniques, such as education and capacity development, openness, accountability, and collaboration, to involve native inhabitants in the tourism sector. Community-based tourism and destination management organizations dedicated to local residents play a significant role in this process. The importance of local people's participation in tourism is that it provides benefits such as the protection of cultural and natural heritage, economic benefits, fair distribution, and community participation. The results of this study confirm that tourism income depends on the participation and support of local people in tourism management. An increase in tourism income will increase the support and participation of local people in tourism. Local people with a high level of support for tourism will also increase their degree of participation. Therefore, the participation of local people is significantly related to the community-centered economy, and support for tourism plays a strong mediating role in this relationship.

Cultural tourism in cultural areas plays a critical role in diversifying cultural tourism and extending it to 12 months. In addition to its economic contributions, cultural tourism provides social and environmental benefits that enhance the living standards and well-being of local communities. Moreover, cultural tourism promotes social inclusion and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage. Therefore,

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cultural tourism strategies should be prioritized in the long-term tourism planning of destinations. For future research, different variables can be added to the model, and it would also be appropriate to replicate this study in other UNESCO World Heritage List destinations or destinations with archaeological sites in order to conduct a comparative analysis.

The first suggestion to be put forward about this study is to make the participation of local people in tourism permanent. Local people should be made aware of the issue and tourism employment opportunities should be developed to continue the process. This participation is essential because it brings benefits such as cultural and natural heritage protection, economic benefits, fair distribution, and community participation. Another suggestion is to create community-centered economic awareness. In this context, it is important to ensure the participation of local people both in terms of management and support. Thus, a tourism economy in which local people also contribute can be carried out sustainably and a high increase in tourism revenues can occur. The last suggestion is related to social and environmental benefits that increase the living standards and welfare of local communities in addition to economic contributions. Accordingly, the people who participate in tourism in managerial and support positions are included in the process in long-term planning and contribute to the protection of cultural heritage. Local people who become aware of these processes can consciously realize both their living standards and their contributions to the country's economy. Therefore, the involvement of local people in tourism-related processes can strengthen both the living standards in the region and the country's tourism economy.

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