





# AUTHENTICITY OF ARCHITECTURE, PLACE ATTACHMENT, IDENTITY AND SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN WORLD HERITAGE CITIES

## Abstract

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*Purpose* - This study analyses the relationships between perceived architectural authenticity, localised identity, place attachment and support for sustainable tourism at a World Heritage Site. *Methodology/Design/Approach* - A quantitative methodology is developed through questionnaires applied to residents in the Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. 509 valid responses were obtained and the analysis used structural equation models (PLS-SEM).

*Findings* - The results show that perceived architectural authenticity significantly influences the residents' place attachment and localised identity. These, in turn, impact their support for the creation of sustainable tourism initiatives at heritage sites. Specifically, architectural authenticity enhances the residents' connection to their community and cultural identity, fostering a supportive attitude toward the sustainable tourism practices that preserve cultural heritage.

*Originality of the research* - The findings suggest that architectural authenticity is relevant when it comes to strengthening the community ties and cultural identity among the residents of World Heritage Sites. A model is presented where architectural authenticity is analyzed and variables are integrated that analyze how it influences support for sustainable tourism. This model, unlike similar models, offers updated data after the pandemic.

**Keywords** Architectural authenticity, localised identity, place attachment, support for sustainable tourism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Authenticity has been analysed according to different areas of knowledge. Heidegger (1967) analysed this concept using philosophy, providing an ontological-epistemological discussion on the differences between “the true” and “the not true”, “the real” and “the not real” and, finally, “the sincere” and “the insincere”. Later, Baudrillard (1970) and MacCannell (1973) presented the concept of authenticity from a sociological approach, delving into the degree of authenticity granted to cultural representations that are politicised or theatricalised and, therefore, are “false.” Handler (1986) proposes, from an anthropology approach, that authenticity refers to the way of preserving the values, norms and beliefs spread as authentic and that are part of the community. Deci and Ryan (2000), from the field of psychology, indicate that it is a process where people give meaning to their own self-concepts of authenticity based on the different daily experiences they carry out. Gilmore and Pine (2007), from the consumerism approach, consider authenticity to be an essential aspect in the strategic differentiation of companies. In the field of tourism, the increase in quantitative research on authenticity shows the continuous attempts of scholars to develop a reliable conceptual framework, research paradigms, and methodological strategies that are effective for assessing authenticity across various tourism contexts (Zhou et al., 2023).

These discussions about authenticity have been common in the literature since the American anthropologist MacCannell (1976) published the document ‘The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class’. Since then, the influence of the tourism industry, the ease of travel and the increasing diversity of the destinations visited have intensified the need to discuss how tourism affects cultural authenticity. In this sense, Cohen (1988) highlights that different elements must be considered, such as the interaction between visitors and tourists, the consumption of tourist products (gastronomy, souvenirs) and cultural representations (dances, events). From the residents' perspective, perceived authenticity is linked to the sense of belonging to the local communities (Zhu, 2012) and heritage conservation (Farrelly et al., 2019). The residents' sense of belonging is related to their living environment, and depends on different experiences, socioeconomic backgrounds, and different purposes (Tuan, 1974). Likewise, the living conditions within a community can significantly differ among its residents (Yi et al., 2024). In this way, people from diverse cultural origins exhibit distinct differences in their attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours in relation to the world (Tuan, 1977). Therefore, people perceive, experience, and comprehend the environment based on their personal engagement with it (Shahrin & Hussin, 2023).

Perceptions of authenticity are accumulated through personal experiences, which guide individuals towards a subjective acknowledgment and embracing of authenticity (Tuan, 1974). In these experiences, architectural and environmental elements, attachment to the place and the identities of individuals in a community coexist (Tuan, 1974; 1977). In this context, cultural heritage locations possess diverse cultural traits that play a role in shaping the cultural identities and behaviours of local inhabitants towards their own culture (Yi et al., 2024). Furthermore, as individuals become aware of the unique identities shaped by the cultural and environmental characteristics of a place, they may face an increase in their attachment to the place, thereby increasing their participation in place activities, in addition to conservation and the improvement of local heritage (Tuan, 1974).

Architectural elements, as a material resource, are part of the cultural heritage of a destination and their characteristics are diverse, reflecting a type of authenticity that encompasses the perception of heritage sites and the different buildings they contain, from the point of view of construction, design, community integration, sustainability, and personal significance (Yi et al., 2024). This cultural heritage includes cultural assets, architectural ensembles, and other non-tangible elements (Tan et al., 2018). In this sense, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines cultural heritage as the legacy of cultural goods and manifestations that have been transmitted from generation to generation, that people and communities maintain in the present and for the benefit of future generations (Santa & Tiatco, 2019). The architecture of these heritage places is necessary to understand reality through the evaluation of authenticity (Tuan, 1977). From this perspective, it can be stated that cultural heritage sites present a diversity of cultural attributes that have the potential to influence the configuration of cultural identities and behavioural dynamics among the local inhabitants with respect to their own culture (Tuan, 1990). Additionally, this recognition by individuals of their distinctive identities, forged by the environmental and cultural particularities of a certain place, could increase their level of connection with said space, encouraging their active participation in actions aimed at the conservation and enrichment of the space itself (Tuan, 1990).

In this context, many studies have analysed the authenticity of cultural tourist destinations from a tourist perspective (Dominguez-Quintero et al., 2020). However, the importance of this analysis from the perspective of local communities has also been highlighted (Yi et al., 2024). Zhu's (2012) study presented the perception of authenticity by local residents, exploring how the authenticity of cultural heritage and traditions is experienced and maintained by those who are directly involved in their practice and transmission. The results highlight the importance of understanding authenticity from the perspective of residents and its impact on the conservation of cultural heritage and local identity. Likewise, place attachment, described by Bowlby (1969) as the emotional bond or connection individuals form with their surroundings, is conceptually relevant to the authenticity of residents (Kyle et al., 2004). In this way, an individual who resides in a specific area for an extended period will cultivate feelings of affection and belonging towards that region, integrating it as a part of their identity (Hay, 1998).

In this way, the present research aims to analyse the relationships between perceived architectural authenticity, localised identity, place attachment and support for sustainable tourism at World Heritage site. Thus, it seeks to continue contributing to the literature on authenticity as perceived by residents and support for sustainable tourism at heritage sites, since some authors indicated that studies on this topic focus on specific destinations. Therefore, the need arises to expand these studies, considering the cultural aspects of other tourist destinations with historical-cultural heritage resources (Wang et al., 2023a). The study by Yi et al. (2024) highlighted that on the one hand, there is a limited understanding of how residents perceive the architectural authenticity of cultural heritage and, on the other hand, the influence of local identity as a significant outcome of authenticity from the perspective of residents at heritage sites has been minimally explored. Although place attachment has commonly been examined as a precursor to perceived authenticity, it has recently been proposed that the physical and/or social characteristics of a place may underpin place attachment and social connections (Zhou et al., 2015), therefore research should be expanded where authenticity is taken into account as an antecedent of attachment to a place (Guerra et al., 2022), since in most cases they have been carried out from the tourist's approach and not the resident's (Yi et al., 2017). Earlier studies have identified the influence of cultural authenticity on place attachment (Uslu et al., 2023) but there is insufficient detail on the influence of architectural authenticity. Finally, this research focuses on a broader age sample than previous studies (Yi et al., 2024), belonging to a destination located in a developing country (Dominican Republic), thus contributing to the study of these countries since most studies on the perceptions of residents have been carried out in developed countries (Hateftabar & Chapuis, 2020). This research follows a quantitative approach, using structural equation models based on Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyse the proposed relationships. Data collection was carried out through simple random sampling in the Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo, using a questionnaire validated through a pre-test and reviewed by international tourism experts.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1. Perceived authenticity, place attachment and localised identity

The influence of place attachment on authenticity perception draws upon Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, suggesting that attachment is a relatively stable personality characteristic, indicating an individual's propensity to place trust in significant others based on past experiences (Yi et al., 2023). However, place attachment requires the interaction of individuals with the place (Hosany et al., 2017) and, in this sense, perceived authenticity has also been suggested to be an antecedent of place attachment in heritage sites (Yi et al., 2023). In addition, architectural heritage can be relevant in the development of place

identity, which occurs as individuals establish cognitive links between themselves and the place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

H1: The architectural authenticity perceived by residents influences their attachment to the place.

Localised identity, based on social identity theory, includes an individual's feeling of connection to a specific group (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2017). In this sense, Gu and Ryan (2008) indicated that localised identity formation is the result of continuous interactions between people and their environment. Within the context of cultural heritage settings, localised identity reflects the ways in which the identities of local inhabitants become culturally and socially intertwined with the heritage sites they inhabit (Zhou et al., 2015). Consequently, the way residents perceive the authenticity of the tangible and intangible elements of heritage sites indicates a heritage that is passed down from generation to generation, cultivated by the local communities themselves who preserve and enhance their collective cultural traits (Yi et al., 2017). Therefore, the authenticity represented by heritage sites is relevant to help local inhabitants forge their identities and express their cultural legacy (Santa & Tiatco, 2019). Recently, the architectural and cultural authenticity perceived by Chinese residents was proven to influence the localised identity in cultural cities (Yi et al., 2024). In this regard, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The architectural authenticity perceived by residents influences their localised identity.

## 1.2. Support for sustainable tourism at heritage sites

Studies often use two aspects to assess place attachment: place identity, which refers to a symbolic or emotional connection to the location, and place dependence, related to the practical utility of the place for leisure activities (Eusébio et al., 2018). Other studies conceptualise place attachment according to other aspects, such as the bond with nature and the social bond and affection with the place (Strzelecka et al., 2017). Given this, for this study, the conceptualisation of place attachment was based on theories of place identity. Thus, it has been suggested that residents with a high level of attachment tend to be more likely to view tourism development positively, compared to those who feel less connected (Stylidis, 2018). That is, the stronger the affinity that residents have with the place, the more likely they will be to have a positive attitude towards tourism development in their community and, consequently, to support for sustainable tourism at heritage sites (Manner-Beldeon et al., 2024). Place attachment is one of the most prominent non-economic variables used to explain why community residents support or oppose sustainable tourism development and, for this reason, it should be included in community tourism development plans (Hateftabar & Chapuis, 2020). Furthermore, a high attachment to an urban place has been related to a positive perception towards tourism development and the preservation of cultural heritage (Ng & Feng, 2020). In this context, the following hypothesis is proposed:

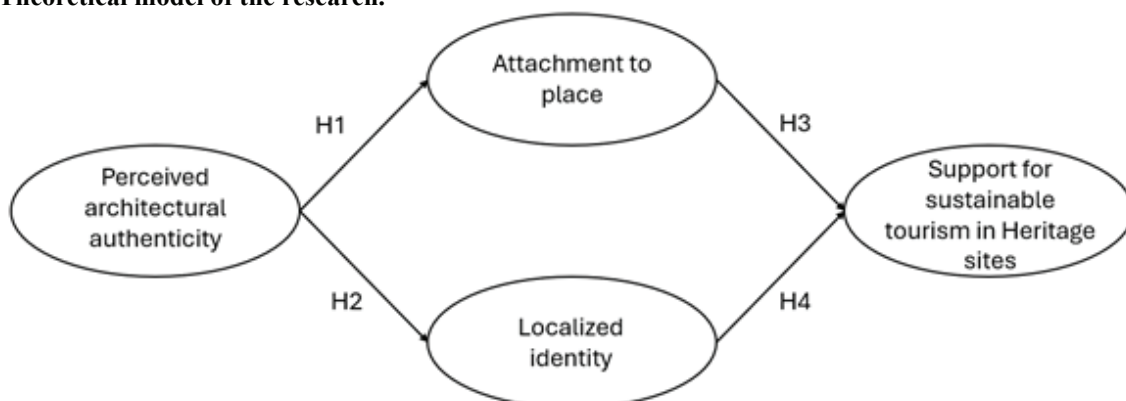
H3: Residents' place attachment influences their support for sustainable tourism at heritage sites.

The emotional bond that residents form with their community is fundamental in their perception of the impacts of tourism and their subsequent support for sustainable tourism initiatives (Zakaria et al., 2024). Furthermore, the residents' inclination to support sustainable cultural heritage tourism is determined by a complex interaction of personal values, cultural values, awareness of consequences, attribution of responsibility, and subjective norms (Megeirhi et al., 2020). This highlights that multifaceted psychological factors influence the residents' support for sustainable tourism (Stylidis, 2018). Also, it has been highlighted that the correlation between the residents' strong attachment to a city, the positive perception of tourism and identification with intangible cultural heritage underlines the importance of the residents' emotional connections with their community in influencing in its support of sustainable tourism, particularly in the context of cultural heritage (Ng & Feng, 2020). In this way, the identity located in the communities of historical and cultural centres has a fundamental relevance to the residents' perceptions and attitudes towards heritage tourism (Wang & Zhang, 2021). Likewise, the preservation and promotion of local identity through heritage sites contributes to the residents' sense of belonging and pride in their heritage, encouraging support for sustainable tourism initiatives that showcase and conserve cultural heritage (Gursoy et al., 2019). In this context, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Residents' localised identity influences their support for sustainable tourism at heritage sites.

Figure 1 shows the theoretical model of the research.

Figure 1: **Theoretical model of the research.**



Source: self-made.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Questionnaire design and common method bias

The study utilised a quantitative research method to investigate the proposed model, creating a questionnaire based on the constructs identified in the previous literature. The items measuring perceived architectural authenticity, specifically three, were sourced from the work of Yi et al. (2017). The five items of community attachment were extracted from Hateftabar and Chapuis (2020). For localised identity, the four items from the study by Fei (2012) and Yi et al. were used. (2024), adapting them to the context of Dominican heritage. The six items of the construct support for sustainable tourism at heritage sites were adapted from Hateftabar and Chapuis (2020) and Guerra et al. (2022). To measure each item, a five-point Likert scale was used. Control variables, including demographic factors, were incorporated to guarantee the validity of the findings. Once the first draft was designed and before applying the pre-test, two international academics in the field of tourism evaluated the instrument.

In the development of the research, it has been relevant to guarantee methodological validity, which can be affected by biases such as excessively positive self-reports and conformity with social expectations in questionnaire responses. In this context, and to mitigate common methods bias (CMB), some strategies have been implemented. First, the anonymity of the respondents was ensured during the application of the questionnaire, informing them that all responses are valid (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Secondly, and following the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2012), procedural solutions have been implemented, including using simple and familiar terms, and avoiding syntactic complexity. This was verified in the previous pre-test applied to the 15 community residents. These procedural strategies and the questionnaire pre-test serve as effective means to minimise biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Once the questionnaires were tabulated in Excel, Harman's single-factor test was applied using SPSS software version 29.0.2. This test indicates that the single factor must present a percentage of variance less than 50%, obtaining in our study a lower percentage (36.088%), which suggests an insignificant threat of the CMB in the validity and reliability of the research results.

### 2.2. Context of the study, participants, and data collection procedure

The data was collected in the colonial area of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1990, and where the first cathedral in America and other important heritage and cultural areas are located. The survey data was collected using the simple random sampling method. Two researchers visited the colonial area requesting collaboration from community residents, randomly and voluntarily, to complete the survey. A pre-test was carried out during the first week of February 2024, involving 15 residents, which served to eliminate redundant items. Subsequently, the data collection was conducted from the second week of February 2024 to the first week of March 2024. This initiative yielded 509 valid surveys, all of which were kept for data analysis. The minimum required sample size was determined with the aid of G\*Power software (Faul et al., 2009). Based on the model proposed, an assumed mean magnitude effect size of 0.15, a desired power level of 0.95, and the alpha level of 0.05, the calculated minimum sample size was found to be 129 respondents. With a total sample size of 509, it was considered sufficient to apply the structural equation-based methodology (Kline, 2023).

### 2.3. Data analysis stages

The evaluation of the data was structured around three clearly differentiated phases. In the first of these, an analysis of the sociodemographic variables (Table 1) and the asymmetry and kurtosis of the data (Table 2) was carried out in order to determine the nature of the data. In this sense, through the degree of asymmetry and kurtosis, accompanied by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test ( $p < 0.05$  for all cases), the non-normality of the data was revealed, with non-parametric tests being applicable (Wang et al., 2023b). After the above, the analysis of the measurement model was addressed in order to verify the degree of validity both at the individual level and at the construct or internal consistency level to subsequently move on to the third phase, the analysis of the structural model, focusing on the explanatory power of the model, the predictive relevance of the model, the effect size and the statistical inference of structural relationships through bootstrapping. This was done using an eminently non-parametric technique, going in line with the non-parametric nature of the data. Phases two and three were carried out through PLS-SEM, selected for its suitability for use in exploratory research (Hair et al., 2019). This approach seeks to maximise the explanation of the variance of the dependent variables and to evaluate the robustness of the model through the psychometric properties of the measurement and structural models, more specifically, through the SmartPLS software, which is standard practice in PLS-SEM analysis (Sarstedt et al., 2021).

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Descriptive analysis

Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the demographic profile of the participants in this study, revealing a female predominance with 52.5% women versus 47.5% men. A deeper analysis of the age distribution shows that the most represented group is the 30-39 age group, which comprises 27.7% of the sample. This suggests that the population studied is relatively young, with a

significant share of people in the productive stage of their lives. Regarding the educational level, most respondents (52.4%) have completed secondary education, indicating a medium level of academic training, while 35.7% have university studies, highlighting the presence of a considerable portion of the population with a higher educational level. The family environment is also analysed, revealing that most participants (64.4%) live in households composed of 2 to 4 people, which is indicative of a typical medium-sized family structure. Furthermore, 50.8% of respondents live in their own homes, while 49.2% live in rented or borrowed homes, reflecting an almost equal distribution in terms of homeownership.

In terms of employment, 44.6% of respondents work in the private sector, followed by 25.7% who work in the public sector. A notable aspect is that 54.6% of the participants are employed in companies located in the Colonial Zone that benefit from tourism, which underlines the importance of tourism as an economic driver in the region. On the other hand, 18% of the sample is unemployed, which could indicate employment challenges in the area studied. Based on these data, a prototype of the typical participant in this study can be outlined: a woman between 30 and 39 years old, with a secondary education, who lives in a medium-sized household (2 to 4 people), in her own home, and who works in a private company linked to tourism in the Colonial Zone. This profile highlights the importance of tourism in the local economy and the prevalence of moderate-sized households, as well as an educational level that mostly does not exceed secondary school, which may have implications in terms of professional and economic development opportunities for residents of this area.

Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of the sample

Gender (n=503) Male: 47.5% Female: 52.5%	Age (n=509) 18-29: 17.1% 30-39: 27.7% 40-49: 15.1% 50-59: 17.1% 60 or more: 23%	Educational level (n=504) Without studies: 1.2% Primary: 10.7% Secondary: 52.4% University: 35.7%
Number of people living with you (n=486) I live alone: 15% From 2 to 4 people: 64.4% 5 or more people: 20.6%	Type of housing (n=500) Own: 50.8% Rented or loaned: 49.2%	Type of employment (n=505) Unemployed: 18% Private employee: 44.6% Public employee: 25.7% Unpaid family worker: 11.7%
Work in companies in the colonial zone that benefit from tourism (n=509)		Yes: 54.6% No: 45.4%

Source: self-made.

### 3.2. Evaluation of the measurement model

The evaluation of the measurement model involved an evaluation at the indicator level, an analysis of internal consistency, and the determination of convergent and discriminant validity. For the analysis at the indicator level, the factor loadings were used, while to measure the level of internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha, Rho\_A and Rho\_C were used. For convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used (Sarstedt et al., 2021). The results presented (Table 2) show that the factor loadings were above 0.60 (Barclay et al., 1995). An item on place attachment (PL5) had previously been eliminated, since its factor loading was less than 0.4 (Rezaei et al., 2021). Furthermore, the reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha, rho\_A and rho\_C) exceeded the minimum acceptable value of 0.70, and the AVE values exceeded the recommended limit of 0.50 (Sarstedt et al., 2021), indicating adequate internal consistency and satisfactory convergent validity for the constructs.

Table 2: Construct reliability and convergent validity

Construct/Item	Asymmetry	Kurtosis	External loads	t statistics (p values)
<b>Perceived architectural authenticity</b> - Cronbach's alpha = 0.743; Rho_A = 0.747; Rho_C = 0.854; AVE= 0.663				
PA1 - I perceive that one or more buildings on this site are original	-2.009	4.880	0.831	31.315 (0.000)
PA2 - The interior design and decoration of local buildings seem original to me	-1.316	1.964	0.861	46.898 (0.000)
PA3 - I perceive the atmosphere or surroundings of local buildings as original	-1.576	2.297	0.746	21.502 (0.000)
<b>Place attachment</b> - Cronbach's alpha = 0.838; Rho_A = 0.885; Rho_C= 0.892; AVE= 0.677				
PL1 - I can't imagine living in a different city	-0.479	-1.052	0.691	23.033 (0.000)
PL2 - I have had so many experiences here that I have become very attached to this city	-1.549	2.243	0.891	72.690 (0.000)

Construct/Item	Asymmetry	Kurtosis	External loads	t statistics (p values)
PL3 - I know this city so well that I can easily recognise any photograph of it	-1.031	0.107	0.787	28.373 (0.000)
PL4 - I strongly identify with Santo Domingo	-1.978	3.226	0.905	109.781 (0.000)
<b>Localised identity</b> - Cronbach's alpha = 0.898; Rho_A = 0.912; Rho_C = 0.929; AVE= 0.766				
LI1 - I identify with the traditional customs and habits that my parents helped me develop	-0.843	0.243	0.906	101.880 (0.000)
LI2 - I identify with the traditional work skills that my parents helped me master	-0.938	0.722	0.885	60.695 (0.000)
LI3 - I identify with the traditional code of conduct that my parents allowed me to follow	-0.953	0.631	0.899	75.223 (0.000)
LI4 - Despite some resistance, I identify with the social environment in which I grew up	-1.131	1.164	0.808	39.300 (0.000)
<b>Support for sustainable tourism in heritage sites</b> - Cronbach's alpha = 0.888; Rho_A = 0.903; Rho_C = 0.915; AVE= 0.644				
ST1 - The positive benefits of historical and cultural tourism outweigh the negative impacts	-1.168	1.137	0.717	18.550 (0.000)
ST2 - I strongly support the sustainable development of heritage and cultural tourism in Santo Domingo	-1.583	2.381	0.831	42.659 (0.000)
ST3 - Tourism must be promoted as one of the key contributors of the economy of the colonial zone of Santo Domingo	-2.211	4.945	0.866	42.982 (0.000)
ST4 - I believe that cooperation and unity should be promoted in the planning of heritage and cultural tourism	-1.876	3.965	0.867	52.470 (0.000)
ST5 - I believe that local participation should be promoted in the planning and development of heritage and cultural tourism in Santo Domingo	-1.851	4.425	0.803	21.219 (0.000)
ST6 - I think cultural exchanges between residents and visitors should be promoted	-2.354	6.596	0.717	14.322 (0.000)

Source: self-made.

To evaluate the discriminant validity of the measurement model, this study used two methodologies: the Fornell and Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015). Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion examines whether the square roots of the AVE values for each construct are greater than the correlations between that construct and any other. In this case, the AVE values of all constructs exceeded their highest correlation values with other constructs, satisfying the criterion. Furthermore, the HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001), further affirming the discriminant validity of the constructs. These findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: **Discriminant validity**

	LI	PA	PL	ST
LI	<b>0.875</b>	0.657	0.606	0.634
PA	0.545	<b>0.814</b>	0.632	0.749
PL	0.539	0.514	<b>0.823</b>	0.642
ST	0.581	0.621	0.576	<b>0.802</b>

Source: self-made. LI = localised identity; PA= Authenticity; PL=Attachment to the community; ST= Support for sustainable tourism in heritage sites. The values in black on the diagonal are the square root of the AVE. Below Fornell-Larcker and above HTMT<sub>0.90</sub>.

### 3.2.1. Structural model evaluation

Following the establishment of the reliability and validity of the model's constructs in the initial phase (as depicted in Tables 2 and 3), the next step was to evaluate the structural model and test the hypotheses. However, before this, the R<sup>2</sup> and Q<sup>2</sup> values (Table 4) were calculated to signify the percentage of variance explained and the effect size (f<sup>2</sup>). R<sup>2</sup> values, which can range from 0 to 1, with figures closer to 1 indicating a stronger predictive capacity of the model. The R<sup>2</sup> values were weak and significant (0.297 and 0.264) and moderate and significant (0.438), indicating that the model has outstanding fit. Additionally, the model's

predictive relevance was gauged using Stone-Geisser’s  $Q^2$  (Sarstedt et al., 2021), with all resultant values exceeding zero, indicating the model’s predictive relevance.

Table 4: Evaluation of the structural model,  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$

Constructs	$R^2$	$Q^2$
LI	0.297	0.292
PL	0.264	0.259
ST	0.434	0.331

Source: self-made. LI = Localised identity; PL=Attachment to the community; ST= Support for sustainable tourism in heritage sites.

Subsequently, the hypotheses were tested. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was less than 3.3 in this research, so there were no collinearity issues (Hair et al., 2019). The 95% confidence interval (CI) for the 5% significance level was assessed through a bootstrapping procedure involving 5,000 resamples. Table 5 displays the principal outcomes of the model, indicating that each of the proposed hypotheses received support and significantly impacted the respective constructs. Thus, perceived architectural authenticity influences their place attachment ( $\beta=0.514$ , [0.440;0.584]) and localised identity ( $\beta=0.545$ , [0.457;0.622]). Both place attachment ( $\beta =0.370$ , [0.246;0.488]) and localised identity ( $\beta=0.381$ , [0.241;0.504]) have influenced the support for sustainable tourism in heritage sites. All hypotheses have been supported.

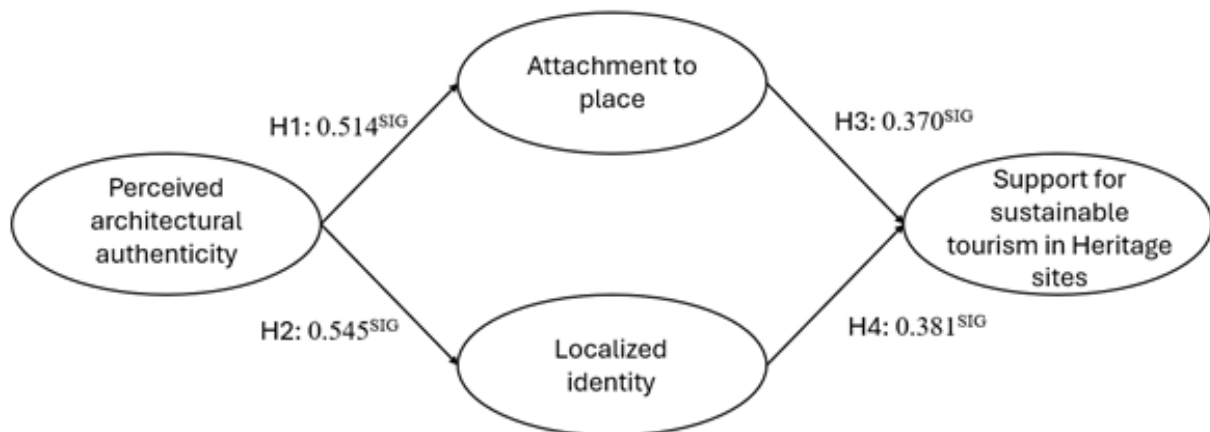
Table 5: Hypothesis contrast

Hypothesis	b	$f^2$	VIF	95% IC		Results
				2.5%	97,5%	
H <sub>1</sub> = Perceived architectural authenticity → Place attachment	0.514 <sup>SIG</sup>	0.358	1.000	0.440	0.584	Supported
H <sub>2</sub> = Perceived architectural authenticity → Localised identity	0.545 <sup>SIG</sup>	0.422	1.000	0.457	0.622	Supported
H <sub>3</sub> = Place attachment → Support for sustainable tourism in heritage site	0.370 <sup>SIG</sup>	0.172	1.409	0.246	0.488	Supported
H <sub>4</sub> = Localised identity → Support for sustainable tourism in heritage site	0.381 <sup>SIG</sup>	0.182	1.409	0.241	0.504	Supported

Source: self-made.

Figure 2 shows the result of the final model.

Figure 2: Structural model results



Source: self-made.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The proposed conceptual model has been evaluated based on the viewpoints of local residents living in a World Heritage Site, specifically the colonial area of Santo Domingo. This study focused on perceived architectural authenticity, community attachment, localised identity, and support for sustainable tourism at heritage sites. The results confirm that architectural authenticity perceived by local residents positively influences their localised identity and community attachment, which increases the support for sustainable tourism in heritage sites.

The results of this research strengthen the research on authenticity from the perceptions of local residents. As a result of the first hypothesis raised, it was known that the architectural authenticity perceived by local residents positively influences their attachment to the community. Similar results have been obtained recently but from a cultural authenticity approach (Uslu et al., 2023). In other recent studies, architectural authenticity has been analysed (Yi et al., 2024) but its influence on attachment to the community had not yet been evaluated. Therefore, this study brings a new dimension to the understanding of how perceived authenticity impacts community attachment, expanding the framework beyond mere cultural authenticity to include specific architectural aspects. The inclusion of architectural authenticity as an influential factor in community attachment highlights the need to preserve and value architectural heritage in an effort to strengthen community cohesion and sense of belonging (Wu et al., 2019). This finding may be relevant, above all, in contexts where architecture constitutes an integral part of the cultural identity and historical legacy of a community, such as World Heritage Sites or with unique architectural-cultural aspects. The influence of architectural authenticity on community attachment suggests that urban and tourism development policies and strategies should consider this type of authenticity as a fundamental component to foster the greater attachment and participation of local residents in conservation and the promotion of their heritage (Gao & Jones, 2021).

Also, it was obtained that perceived architectural authenticity positively influences localised identity. Previous studies have analysed this relationship in tourists (Ramkissoon, 2022). However, recently, there has been an interest in analysing this relationship in local residents (Yi et al., 2024). The results show that perceived architectural authenticity, such as the originality of buildings and historic architecture, significantly impacts the identity of local residents. Therefore, cultural heritage resources, both tangible and intangible, help formulate the identity of individuals (Ramkissoon, 2023). This study shows these results in the context of a World Heritage Site for the first time and suggests that living in a World Heritage Site may evolve the localised identity of local residents, as had previously been proposed with cultural heritage sites (Tuan, 1977; Yi et al., 2024).

This work also suggests that community attachment positively influences the support for tourism at heritage sites. These results are similar to those offered by other authors (Hetaftabar & Chapuis, 2020), suggesting that residents, with a greater attachment to the community, tend to support the development of heritage and cultural tourism more. However, in this research, the analysis of attachment to the community and its influence on supporting sustainable tourism is carried out from a focus on architectural authenticity and identity located in the residents of a World Heritage Site. In this sense, residents with greater attachment to their community could support tourism that benefits the community and preserve its heritage (Mariam et al., 2024) which can guide the development of more sustainable and respectful tourism, ensuring that tourism contributes to the conservation of its heritage (Gannon et al., 2021). Likewise, high community attachment and high support for sustainable cultural and heritage tourism could facilitate the transmission of local culture, traditions, and history to tourists, improving their experience and satisfaction (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). High community attachment and strong support for sustainable tourism development could encourage residents to have a stronger voice in tourism planning and management (Ramkissoon, 2023), which could ensure that the tourism development is aligned with the expectations and needs of the community, promoting an inclusive and participatory approach.

Also, localised identity positively influences the support for tourism at heritage sites. These results suggest that resident identification with the local culture can foster support for the development of sustainable cultural and heritage tourism. Recent studies (Yi et al., 2024) have suggested that localised identity positively influences heritage conservation, therefore, this study also indicates that such identification with the local culture can support the development of tourism in World Heritage Sites. Furthermore, this study suggests that residents can support tourism development if they identify with the culture of their community. In turn, this cultural identity and support for tourism can increase the residents' participation in tourism, since the residents' identity determines their behaviour (Stryker & Burker, 2000). Taking into account that the residents' support for tourism development is defined as attitudinal and behavioural (Gursoy et al., 2010), their identity will possibly influence their support for tourism development (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2016) and their participation in tourism, which in turn could promote heritage conservation from the community (Gannon et al., 2021).

Finally, research such as Hamid et al. (2021), Valverde-Roda et al. (2022), Alzghoul et al. (2024) and Uslu et al. (2024) has analysed revisit intentions, perceived value, pro-environmental behaviour and the role of authenticity in heritage destinations from the tourist perspective. In contrast, this study focusing on residents provides a complementary view, highlighting how residents' perceived architectural authenticity influences their localised identity, place attachment and support for sustainable tourism. This comparison underlines the importance of considering both residents' and tourists' perceptions in cultural heritage management, as both groups contribute significantly to the conservation and promotion of sustainable tourism at these sites.

## **CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE LINES OF RESEARCH**

### **Conclusions**

The study has demonstrated the significant influence of perceived architectural authenticity, community attachment and localised identity related to the support for sustainable tourism in World Heritage Sites, specifically in the colonial area of Santo Domingo. The analysis of the perception of architectural authenticity and how it influences community attachment and localised identity provides a new perspective on the importance of authenticity in the field of tourism. Thus, the importance of preserving architectural heritage is highlighted for its historical and aesthetic value, as well as being a means to promote



community cohesion and cultural identification. Furthermore, it is confirmed that a strong sense of belonging, and a well-rooted cultural identity can boost the local support for tourism development, suggesting that sustainable and heritage-friendly tourism can be an effective tool for heritage and cultural conservation.

### **Theoretical implications**

This study reinforces the existing literature on authenticity, identity, community attachment, and heritage tourism from the perspective of local residents, using the Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo, a World Heritage site, as a case study. The analysed and validated conceptual model not only corroborates the relationships previously established in the literature, but also introduces new knowledge in the field of architectural authenticity and support for sustainable cultural heritage tourism.

First, this research enriches the study of architectural authenticity by demonstrating its positive influence on community attachment and localized identity of residents. This work extends the discussion beyond cultural authenticity, offering a more holistic understanding of how architectural elements contribute to community cohesion and sense of belonging. These findings underscore the importance of preserving architectural heritage not only for its historical value, but also for its ability to strengthen community cohesion and cultural identity among local residents. Secondly, by validating the positive influence of perceived architectural authenticity on localized identity, this study opens new lines of research to explore how the built environment and its perception impact the conceptualization of personal and collective identity in world heritage contexts. This approach suggests that architectural authenticity can be a fundamental pillar in the formulation of enriched local identities rooted in tangible cultural heritage.

Thirdly, the analysis of community attachment and its influence on support for tourism at heritage sites offers updated insights into how residents' perceptions and emotions towards their surroundings can be translated into attitudes and behaviours supporting tourism. This implies that tourism development strategies should consider and foster residents' emotional and cultural connection with their heritage to promote more sustainable and respectful tourism. Finally, the confirmation that localized identity positively influences support for sustainable heritage and cultural tourism shows the relevance of fostering a strong identification with local culture among residents. This could indicate that heritage tourism should focus, in addition to attracting visitors, on involving local residents in the creation and promotion of tourism experiences that authentically reflect their culture and values. In this way, a more inclusive and participatory dialogue in tourism planning and management could be facilitated, ensuring that tourism initiatives are aligned with the expectations and needs of the local community.

### **Practical implications**

The study suggests the need to implement integrated strategies that seek to preserve the historical and aesthetic value of heritage, while promoting community cohesion and cultural identification. In this sense, for the success of any heritage tourism strategy, collaboration between heritage managers, tourism authorities and the local community is essential. Through cooperation, the implementation of projects that respect the architectural and cultural authenticity of the place, improve community well-being and offer authentic and enriching tourist experiences can be facilitated.

Firstly, heritage and tourism management authorities must highlight the preservation of architectural authenticity in their policies and practices. This involves the implementation of measures that protect and promote the unique architectural characteristics of the colonial area of Santo Domingo, ensuring that renovations or new developments are carried out in a way that respects and reflects the historical authenticity of the place. The preservation of architectural authenticity safeguards the historical legacy and serves as a pillar for the development of a sense of belonging and cultural identity among local residents.

Secondly, it is suggested to develop programs and activities that reinforce attachment to the community and the localised identity of residents. This could include local history and culture workshops, festivals celebrating native traditions, and educational programs for schools to engage young generations with the value of their cultural heritage. Fostering this attachment and identity enriches the experience of residents and creates local cultural ambassadors who can drive support for heritage and cultural tourism (Yi et al., 2024).

Thirdly, and in order to increase the support for sustainable tourism in heritage sites, local authorities must actively involve residents in the planning and development of tourism projects. This could be developed through the creation of platforms for dialogue and citizen participation where residents can express their ideas, concerns, and expectations regarding tourism and its impact on the community, thus ensuring the greater sustainability of tourism.

Fourth, promoting the active participation of residents in tourism can be facilitated by creating incentives for the development of local tourism enterprises and training programs in hospitality, tourism management and heritage conservation. These initiatives can empower residents to become direct participants in heritage tourism, benefiting economically while contributing to the preservation and promotion of their cultural heritage.

In terms of practical implications specific to Santo Domingo, a key policy could be the implementation of a tax incentive program for property owners who maintain or restore their properties in accordance with historical authenticity guidelines. In addition, public-private partnerships could be established to finance rehabilitation projects that respect architectural authenticity. However, a potential obstacle is property owners' resistance due to the costs associated with historical restoration. To overcome this challenge, the local government could offer subsidies or low-interest loans, as well as free technical advice, to support property owners in these efforts.

Another initiative could be the creation of cultural routes that integrate visits to restored emblematic buildings, with local guides trained in the history and culture of the Colonial Zone. This would not only generate additional income for the community, but would also strengthen cultural identity and local pride. However, the lack of adequate infrastructure or professional training could limit the effectiveness of these routes. To mitigate this risk, investments in improving tourism infrastructure and training programmes for local guides would be essential.

### Limitations and future lines of research

This research presents several limitations and proposes new lines of research that could address these limitations. First, the data obtained come from residents of a World Heritage site in the Dominican Republic, which may limit the validity and generalizability of the results to other geographic and cultural contexts. While the findings are relevant to the Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo, it would be necessary to verify the applicability of these results in other areas with similar characteristics. Therefore, it is suggested that comparative studies be carried out in different World Heritage destinations, both in developing and developed countries, which would allow assessing whether the relationships identified in this study hold in diverse contexts or whether there are significant differences.

Second, the sample of this study focused on residents of the community at large, without segmenting participants based on their role within the local environment. However, future research could delve deeper into the analysis of the perceptions of different local stakeholders, such as merchants, heritage managers, tour guides, and other key actors in local tourism. This approach would allow us to understand how each group perceives architectural authenticity, community attachment, localized identity, and support for sustainable tourism, and how these perceptions might vary across different stakeholders, providing a more complete view of the local dynamics around heritage tourism.

Furthermore, a multi-group analysis based on socio-demographic variables could reveal significant differences in residents' perceptions and attitudes based on factors such as age, educational level, length of residence in the area, and type of employment. This would help to identify subgroups within the community that might have different needs or perspectives, which would be essential for designing more inclusive tourism management policies and strategies tailored to the specific realities of each segment of the population.

Another important limitation of this study lies in the cross-sectional nature of the data collected, which implies that residents' perceptions were captured at a single point in time. This does not allow for observing how these perceptions may evolve over time in response to changes in the environment, such as tourism developments, alterations in the urban landscape, or heritage conservation policies. To address this limitation, longitudinal studies are suggested that can assess how residents' perceptions change over time, thus allowing for a more dynamic and complete understanding of the relationships studied. Longitudinal studies could also identify early signals of change in residents' attitudes, which would be crucial for implementing timely interventions that maintain or enhance support for sustainable tourism and heritage conservation.

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