

Livability and resident attitudes towards tourism

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ABSTRACT

While the tourism literature has tangentially investigated concepts related to tourism's impact on the livability of communities through studies on topics such as overtourism, there has yet to be a direct measure of residents' perceptions towards the livability of tourism destinations and how these perceptions of livability influence resident support for tourism. Using Livability Theory and a Conservation of Resources theoretical framework, our research samples residents from the nature-based tourism gateway community of Brevard in Transylvania County, North Carolina, to validate the Livability Scale and demonstrate its predictive validity over resident support for tourism. The hierarchical regression analyses comparing the new Livability Scale's predictive validity over resident support for tourism found the Livability Scale significantly outperformed standard resident attitude towards tourism models by 25 percentage points. For managers, the strong negative influence of livability on resident support for tourism suggests they need a good pulse on what residents deem essential about their community and must work extra hard to ensure tourism does not infringe on these vital resources. The combination of Livability Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory provides overtourism researchers with a new theoretical explanation as to why residents are increasingly engaging in anti-tourism protests around the world.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 August 2025
Accepted 16 March 2026

KEYWORDS

Brevard North Carolina; conservation of resources theory; livability; quality of life; resident attitudes towards tourism; sustainable tourism

EDITOR

Xavier Font

Introduction

The tourism literature is full of buzzwords such as touristification (Sequera & Nofre, 2018), overtourism (Cheung & Li, 2019), carrying capacity (McCool & Lime, 2001), and crowding (Popp, 2012) that all speak to the power of tourism to substantially change communities, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse (Tourtellot, 2000). While all these concepts relate to sustainability, the rubber really meets the road in

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terms of how tourism affects the ability of residents to live within their community. This concept is encapsulated in livability. Livability focuses on the basic needs and wants of people regarding shelter, food, economic opportunities, and social engagement (Ruth & Franklin, 2014, p. 18). Livability is the extent to which a community satisfies residents “by meeting their economic, social, and cultural needs” (National Research Council, 2002, p. 24). Livability is often used interchangeably with quality of life, a major topic within the tourism literature (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Ridderstaat et al., 2016; Uysal et al., 2016); however, according to Livability Theory, livability takes a step back and focuses on the basic needs of residents using a Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs framework (Veenhoven, 2024). Livability turns the attention to the environmental and social conditions of a community and whether or not the community is capable of producing life satisfaction (Veenhoven, 2015). Therefore, livability is conceptualized as an important building block and precursor to the commonly researched topics of quality of life, subjective well-being, and life satisfaction. As Veenhoven (2015, p. 1) writes, “a good society is first of all a livable society, and the livability of a society manifests in the life satisfaction of its members.”

While many tourism studies have focused on tangentially related concepts such as resident quality of life (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Ridderstaat et al., 2016), resident empowerment (Boley et al., 2014), and the positive and negative impacts of tourism across the triple bottom line (Andereck et al., 2005), there has yet to be a measure of residents’ perceptions of how tourism affects the perceived livability of their community. With livability being a precursor to quality of life (Veenhoven, 2015) and livability being what is essentially under attack from overtourism causing resident protests over tourism in destinations like Barcelona (Paredes-Rodriguez & Spriering, 2020) and Venice (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019), it seems prudent to develop a scale to measure resident perceptions of tourism’s impacts on their livability and see if livability is able to explain a unique amount of variance in resident support for tourism when included along with standard constructs often used to explain resident support for tourism such as the perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism, economically benefit from tourism and psychological, social, and political empowerment from tourism, and other predominant theories such as Weber’s Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality and Social Exchange Theory.

This paper seeks to do just that by building on the work of Vincent Nijs and the Visit Flanders Team, who included questions pertaining to resident livability in their large-scale resident surveys across the Flanders region of Belgium, but did not test the scale’s construct or predictive validity (Toerisme Vlaanderen, 2024). This study takes their original unpublished scale, adds new items to it, translates old items into English, and applies the scale for the first time in the academic literature to assess the Livability Scale’s reliability and validity and ability to explain resident support for tourism in the mountain gateway community of Brevard, located in Transylvania County, North Carolina, USA. The main research question of focus is, “do resident perceptions of tourism’s impact on their livability influence their support for tourism?” and if the newly developed measure of livability is able to explain more variance in support for tourism than the standard constructs of resident perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism, economically benefit from tourism and psychological, social, and political empowerment from tourism used within many seminal resident attitude models based

on Social Exchange Theory and Weber's Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality (e.g., Andereck et al., 2005; Boley et al., 2014; Perdue et al., 1990).

The study area, Brevard, NC, was chosen for the study as Brevard, NC is a gateway community to the Pisgah National Forest (NF) and has experienced many of the common pressures associated with rural areas with increased levels of visitation since the pandemic (Perren et al., 2025). Livability's influence over resident support for tourism is theoretically grounded in both Livability Theory (Veenhoven 2015) as well as the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Livability Theory is a theory from Ruut Veenhoven that explains happiness stems from the fit of the "institutional arrangements" associated with one's living conditions stemming from "economic development, political democracy, and good governance" (Veehoven, 2014, p. 3645–3646). The Conservation of Resources Theory (CRT) is a theory of motivation in the psychology literature that explains people's stress as a function of threats to resources they deem valuable. While the theory has been frequently used in other hospitality and tourism contexts, including the stress hospitality workers face from their jobs (Lee & Ok, 2014; Zhou et al., 2018), the theory is surprisingly underused to explain why residents support or oppose tourism in their community even though residents face many stressors from tourism (Boley, 2025). Thus, this study embraces a combined Livability Theory and Conservation of Resources mindset to explain why the stress residents face from tourism's impact on the livability of their communities wells up to influence their support or opposition to tourism development. The study continues with a review of the resident attitude literature, Livability Theory, and the Conservation of Resources Theory, followed by a presentation of the methods used to develop the Livability Scale and test its influence on resident support for tourism within the gateway community of Brevard, NC.

Literature review

Overtourism and livability

The study of resident attitudes toward tourism is one of the oldest and most important areas of tourism research (Nunkoo et al., 2013), as residents are the ultimate stakeholders of tourism development in their communities. It is the resident who experiences the day-to-day externalities (positive or negative) of tourism, and it is the resident who has the power to revolt against tourism and formally lobby for anti-tourism legislation or informally harass tourists and undermine the quality of the tourism experience within the destination. Thus, resident sentiment research has become one of the most ubiquitous areas of tourism research within the literature (Boley et al., 2018).

An early perspective on resident responses to tourism development was Doxey's Irridex (Doxey, 1975), which explained why residents' initial euphoria with tourism and the newfound economic benefits often fade into apathy, annoyance, and even antagonism as tourism grows, following Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle. The early resident attitude literature did not call this overtourism, but in fact, both Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle and Doxey's Irridex acknowledge limits to growth and imply that as the scale of tourism reaches a critical threshold, something akin to overtourism occurs, causing the quality of the tourism experience for tourists to decline

and residents to respond negatively. This negative response by residents to overtourism was originally explained by Social Exchange Theory as residents perceiving the costs of tourism to outweigh the benefits, leading them to oppose tourism where costs exceed benefits and support tourism where benefits exceed costs (Ap, 1992; Perdue et al., 1990). However, Social Exchange Theory has been criticized as an overly simplistic view of tourism's impacts on communities (McGehee & Andereck, 2004), and something more foundational may underlie residents' negative reactions to overtourism, such as tourism's infringement on residents' ability to live within their communities.

While overtourism is a "new term for an old problem," referring to the overcrowding of tourism destinations (Dodds & Butler, 2019, p. 1), the concept is relatively new, emerging only in the late 2010s (Ali, 2016; Dickinson, 2018). Two common definitions of overtourism are the UNWTO's definition which defines overtourism as when a large share "of a local population feels that local ways of life or quality of life are diminished as a result of tourism, leading to forms of resistance or protest directed at tourism, tourists, policymakers or economic stakeholders" (UNWTO, 2018, cited in Gössling et al., 2020) and the European Parliament's definition which explains overtourism as tourism that "exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological and or political capacity thresholds" (TRAN., 2018, cited in Mihalic, 2020).

Tourism's infringement on these "physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and or political capacity thresholds" mentioned in overtourism's definition speaks to Livability Theory's core premise that environmental and social conditions affect happiness (Veenhoven 2015). Livability Theory diverges from other trait-based or comparison-based theories of happiness by theorizing that differences in happiness do not solely come from gaps between what people want and have (e.g., comparison-based theories of happiness) or some genetic predisposition to happiness (e.g., trait-based theories), but because of the diverse environmental and social conditions stemming from good or bad development and governance practices around the world (Veenhoven, 2014, p. 3646). Thus, when Veenhoven 2015 speaks to "institution arrangements" driving livability, he exposes a clear connection between how tourism destinations are governed and the livability of these communities.

While similar to other constructs such as quality of life and subjective well-being, Lindberg et al., (2022 p. 347) acknowledge that livability is distinct from these constructs because it speaks to how one's external living conditions align with one's inner abilities to achieve "fulfilment and ultimately, happiness." Livability is focused on external environmental and social living conditions arising from qualities beyond the individual and that speak to their chances of success (Veenhoven 2015). Livability is similar to the public health research concept of preconditions, such as access to adequate nutrition and professional care, that are seldom mixed up with the actual health of the individual (Veenhoven 2015 p. 3). In an overtourism example, the pre-conditions associated with livability would be the ability of residents to afford rent and feel comfortable in their own skin, with these pre-conditions directly influencing their subjective well-being and quality of life. In other words, the quality of life of residents or their satisfaction with life depends on their community's ability to meet their basic needs.

This relates to overtourism's tendency to evoke a "psychological reaction of residents to tourist pressure, in which place-person interrelationships are affected and damaged, triggering different types of emotional and behavioural responses" (Gössling et al., 2020

p. 3). At the core of overtourism is the notion that the scale and type of tourism are at levels that threaten the resources vital to residents' livability. A clear example of this is all of the anti-tourism activism associated with short-term rentals across European cities like Barcelona (Garay et al., 2020; Milano et al., 2019, 2024). These threats to resources can result in residents exhibiting fight-or-flight responses (Gössling et al., 2020). Resident flight responses are often characterized by a tendency to modify their behaviour patterns to avoid areas where tourists congregate or even being entirely displaced from neighbourhoods through touristic gentrification (Gant, 2016; Robertson et al., 2022). However, some residents dig in and decide to fight against over-tourism, as the threats to their way of life are so severe that they see no other option. Such perspectives were shared in the well-publicized 2024 and 2025 summer tourism protests in Barcelona, Spain (Rainsford, 2025) and elsewhere in Europe as post-covid tourism surges (Rouquette, 2024). This fight response can be seen in Gössling et al. (2020) revision of Doxey's (1975) original Irridex, which adds two new emotional responses. Rather than Doxey's Irridex ending in antagonism, residents' antagonism can now escalate into fear, and occasionally, acts of aggression where residents display aggressive behaviors towards tourists, ranging from verbal to physical and overt to covert (Gössling et al., 2020).

These types of "psychological reactions" by residents have been explained through theories such as social exchange theory (Gutiérrez-Taño et al., 2019), stimulus overload theory, and attribution theory (González-Reverté, 2022; Gössling et al., 2020) and modelled using novel game-based analyses based on game theory (Yuval, 2022). While all of these socio-psychological theories touch on the stress residents face from overtourism and who residents blame for these impacts, the theories do not explain why residents are demonstrating a stress response from overtourism. This paper theoretically grounds these tourism stressors in two novel theories that have yet to be applied to overtourism, Livability Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory. Livability Theory, which has been previously mentioned, explains that resident life satisfaction and support for tourism stem from how tourism impacts residents' ability to meet their basic needs. Conservation of Resources Theory pairs well with Livability to theoretically explain responses to stress stem from vital resources being threatened.

Conservation of Resources Theory

The Conservation of Resources Theory is a theory of motivation from the psychology literature that explains why humans experience stress (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Jordan et al. (2015, 2019, 2021) body of work on residents' perceived tourism-related stress reveals many of the negative outcomes of tourism-related stress, but their work does not explain the mechanisms behind why stress emerges. The Conservation of Resources Theory provides a new theory to the resident attitude literature built upon the tenet that "people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that what is threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources" (Hobfoll 1989 p. 516). It is when these resources are threatened that people experience stress. This stress within the Conservation of Resources Theory is defined as "a reaction to the environment in which there is (a) the threat of a net loss of resources, (b) the net loss of resources, or (c) a lack of resource gain following the investment of resources" and can be attributed to real or perceived loss since both lead to stress (Hobfoll 1989, p. 516).

Boley (2025) writes about how this resource-based view of stress has value in explaining resident attitudes toward tourism, stating that under certain situations of overtourism, tourism can deplete resources needed for residents to survive, and that the depletion of these resources can negatively impact residents' identities and purpose "causing stress and strong reactions such as opposing tourism or enacting anti-tourism legislation." Thus, the Conservation of Resources Theory can help shed light on how overtourism threatens residents' livability and, thus, why they respond negatively to tourism within their community, even though tourism can bring many economic, environmental, and social benefits.

The Conservation of Resources Theory explains stress through the concept of resources. Resources within the theory are loosely defined as "anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals" and that "can hold value to the extent that they are perceived to help one achieve his or her goals" (Halbesleben et al. 2014, p. 1338 & 1340). At the theory's core is the notion of the primacy of resource loss and loss salience, which are evident in other theories, such as prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). The idea behind the primacy of resource loss and loss salience is "that it is psychologically more harmful for individuals to lose resources than it is helpful for them to gain the resources that they lost" (Halbesleben et al. 2014, p. 1335).

Applied to tourism destinations, the Conservation of Resources Theory can explain why communities may become defensive and more likely to take anti-tourist actions when they perceive tourism as infringing on the availability of resources they deem valuable, important, and ultimately necessary for their survival. The theory also helps explain why some tourism destinations seem resilient to tourism impacts while others seem especially vulnerable. In regards to resilient destinations, Halbesleben et al. (2014, p. 1344) speak of "resource caravans" where there are patterns of valuable resources that occur together, making some individuals or, in this case, destinations better able to handle the impacts of tourism than other communities that already have low or depleted resources. In this case, Hobfoll (1989 519) speaks of "loss spirals" where "resources are not distributed equally, and those people who lack resources are most vulnerable to additional losses." Some tourism destinations fall into this category because they are endowed with fewer resources, or previous extractive industries have left them with limited economic options, making them especially vulnerable to the impacts of tourism (Kreag, 2001).

Livability's influence on support for tourism

Using a combined Livability Theory and Conservation of Resources theoretical perspective, it is clear that tourism's impact on perceptions of livability can lead to community support or opposition to tourism development (Boley, 2025). Those communities that tend to benefit from tourism and see resource "gain spirals" where their resource base is strengthened through tourism see tourism as a beneficial industry increasing the livability of their community, and thus, they would be more prone to support tourism (Halbesleben et al., 2014). On the other hand, communities that feel their resources are threatened by tourism and that tourism has eroded their basic needs would be less likely to support tourism as they perceive tourism is a threat to resources they hold valuable. Thus, we put forth the following hypothesis.

H1: Resident perceptions of tourism's negative impact on the livability of their community will have a negative and significant influence on their support for tourism.

To test the livability scale's predictive validity and determine whether it is valuable to include this scale in future models of resident attitudes toward tourism, resident perceptions of tourism's impact on livability will be tested against four other common frameworks used to measure resident attitudes toward tourism (+/—Impacts of Tourism, Personal Economic Benefits, Psychological, Social, and Political Empowerment) and the theoretical frameworks of Social Exchange Theory and Weber's Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality.

The first is a Social Exchange Theory perspective, in which residents' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism are used as predictors of their attitudes towards tourism, as the theory holds that people respond favourably to exchanges where the benefits outweigh the costs (Ap, 1992). Perdue et al. (1990) and Ap (1992) were the first to operationalize this Social Exchange Theory mindset within the resident attitude literature, and many others have followed by including a measure of resident perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism finding the resident perceptions of the positive impacts of tourism have a positive and significant influence over their support for tourism and that resident perceptions of the negative impacts of tourism have a significant and negative influence of their support for tourism (Jurowski et al., 1997; McGehee & Andereck, 2004). For the livability scale to be of practical importance to academics and practitioners, it must be able to explain a unique amount of variance beyond the cost-benefit analysis framework used in these previous studies grounded in Social Exchange Theory. With the new Livability Scale being grounded in the Conservation of Resources Theory Hobfoll 1989, which taps into the core resources residents hold valuable and need to live, we hypothesize the following:

H2: Resident perceptions of tourism's impact on the livability of their community is a better predictor of resident support for tourism than resident perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism in general.

Another core construct within the resident sentiment towards tourism literature is resident perceptions of economically benefiting from tourism (Boley et al., 2018). The influence of resident perceptions of the economic benefits of tourism on their support for tourism is grounded in the formal rationality portion of Weber's Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality, which speaks to humans being motivated by economic gain (Jagd, 2002; Kalberg, 1980). For the Livability Scale to be of practical importance to academics and practitioners, it must be able to explain a unique amount of variance beyond the personal economic benefits of tourism used in these previous studies. While the economic benefits of tourism are certainly one the primary benefits of tourism (Madrigal, 1993), the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll 1989) suggests that if these economic benefits do not help build the tangible and intangible economic and non-economic resources residents value and need to live, then they will not support tourism. Thus, we hypothesize that the newly proposed Livability Scale will be a better predictor of resident support for tourism than the

economic benefits of tourism because it taps into these core resources residents value and need to live in their community. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward for testing.

H3: Resident perceptions of tourism's impact on the livability of their community is a better predictor of resident support for tourism than resident perceptions of their economic benefits from tourism.

A more recent addition to the resident attitude literature are the measures of psychological, social, and political empowerment developed by Boley and McGehee (2014) within the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale. Boley et al. (2014) conceptualize empowerment's influence over resident attitudes towards tourism using the substantive rational portion of Weber's Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality, where people are motivated by more than pure economic gains, such as their values, morals, and quality of life (Jagd, 2002; Kalberg, 1980). Psychological empowerment, in a positive sense, describes tourism's tendency to raise resident pride and self-esteem from a tourism industry that highlights a destination's special culture and natural resources (Scheyvens, 1999). Social empowerment focuses on tourism's impacts on how the community functions. Social empowerment describes the equilibrium of the community, and tourism's impact on the cohesion among residents (Scheyvens, 1999). Lastly, political empowerment is concerned with residents' access to tourism decision-making and includes items measuring if residents perceive they have agency over tourism and if their voice matters (Scheyvens, 1999). For the Livability Scale to be of practical importance to academics and practitioners, it must be able to explain a unique amount of variance beyond the amount of variance explained through resident empowerment through tourism. With the Livability Scale tapping into the tourism threats to core resources residents hold dear and needed to live within their community, we posit that resident perceptions of tourism's impacts on the livability of their community will be a better predictor of resident support for tourism than resident perceptions of economic, psychological, social, and political empowerment from tourism. With this in mind, the following hypothesis is put forward for testing.

H4: Resident perceptions of tourism's impact on the livability of their community is a better predictor of resident support for tourism than resident perceptions of economic, psychological, social, and political empowerment from tourism.

Methods

Study area

To assess the reliability and validity of the newly proposed Livability Scale and determine whether it explains a unique amount of variance relative to similar constructs in the resident attitude literature, residents of the gateway towns of Brevard and Transylvania County were surveyed. Brevard is the county seat of Transylvania County, which is called "The Land of Waterfalls" (Explore, 2021) because Transylvania County has the highest concentration of waterfalls in the U.S. Transylvania County is the gateway to the Pisgah National Forest as well as has the Dupont State Forest and

Gorges State Park located within its boundaries. Transylvania County was chosen because it reflects the conditions in many gateway communities that rely heavily on tourism and have experienced growth in tourism since the pandemic, as seen in the recent *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* publication by Perren et al. (2025). This manuscript uses the same data set from Perren et al. (2025), but switches the focus from the relationship between the management of the protected area and residents' attitudes towards tourism using Spillover Theory as a theoretical perspective to an unpublished portion of the dataset that focuses on the resident perceptions of tourism's impact on the livability of Transylvania County using a combined Livability Theory and Conservation of Resources theoretical framework.

Data collection method

Data was collected¹ by going door-to-door surveying residents of Transylvania County using Boley et al. (2014) census-guided systematic random sampling protocol. This protocol is considered the gold standard for surveying residents, as it enables researchers to reach a more representative sample by going door-to-door, unlike mail or email surveys, which typically have low response rates. Census-guided systematic random sampling also ensures rural and urban areas of the county are proportionally sampled based upon the population structure within the county's census tracts because the method allocates surveys by the percent of the population living in each census tract (Boley & McGehee, 2014). Using this method, surveys were delivered to residents by a research team consisting of the lead scientist in charge of the grant, as well as a team of two survey assistants and a graduate student assigned to lead the project. The survey protocol involved the survey team explaining the study and asking residents if they would be willing to participate. If willing, the survey was left with the resident so that the resident could complete the survey on their own time. Surveys were retrieved the following day from their doorsteps, giving residents approximately 20–24 h to complete the survey. The first distribution of surveys occurred in mid-May 2023, and the second occurred a couple of weeks later in June 2023. In total, 1,003 doors were knocked on, with 381 households not answering. Of the 622 individuals contacted, 25 were ineligible (e.g., not residents; under 18 years old), 97 declined to participate, and 500 were willing to participate in the survey. This approach provided an initial response rate of 84% (500/597). However, only 402 questionnaires were successfully completed, yielding a completion rate of 80% and an overall response rate of approximately 67%.

Survey measures

The livability questions were adapted from a previously unvalidated measure of tourism's impact on livability used in the Visit Flanders' Resident Attitudes Towards Tourism Study, conducted within the Art Cities of Flanders between 2017 and 2021 (Toerisme Vlaanderen, 2024). The original previously unvalidated livability scale consisted of five negatively worded items in Flemish focused on residents' comfort being limited by tourism, the viability of the community being reduced, the community no longer feeling their own, tourists being a nuisance, and the pressures of tourism having a

Table 1. Principle components analysis of half the sample of Transylvania County residents.

	N	Mean ^a	STD	Factor loading	Eigenvalue & variance explained	Cronbach alpha
Livability Scale					5.1 / 73%	0.94
In some areas of my community, I feel uncomfortable because of tourists.	193	2.48	1.30	.83		
Because of tourism, I feel our community is no longer ours.	192	2.63	1.36	.90		
The pressure of tourism has a negative impact on my daily life.	194	2.23	1.15	.86		
Tourists are a nuisance in my community.	193	2.40	1.14	.89		
Tourism is pricing out locals in my community.	195	3.46	1.31	.76		
Because of tourism, we are losing the authentic character of our community.	195	2.96	1.35	.86		
Because of tourism, it is increasingly difficult to have quality outdoor experiences in my community (e.g., fishing, hiking, hunting, riding).	196	2.86	1.35	.87		

^aLivability questions asked on a 1–5 Likert Scale with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 5 representing “Strongly Agree”.

negative impact on daily life (Toerisme Vlaanderen, 2024). These items were developed from speaking with Flemish DMOs and reconfiguring questions from previous studies (Nijs, 2023). With permission from Vincint Nijs and the Visit Flanders Team, their original items were adapted and supplemented with two new questions regarding residents’ ability to afford living in the community and the impact of tourism on outdoor recreation experiences. These additional questions were phrased in a negative tone to be consistent with the previous Visit Flanders questions and to avoid reverse polarity bias, which results when positive and negatively worded items are mixed within the same scale causing negative impacts on unidimensionality, model fit, factor loadings, and average variance explained as discussed by Boley et al. (2021). The translated livability scale, including all its items, is presented in Table 1. Resident perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism, as well as the empowerment scale, were adapted from Boley et al. (2014) use of them by asking residents to rate the destinations performance on these common tourism impacts and types of empowerment. There were asked on a Likert Scale from 1 to 5 with 1 representing “Poor” and 5 representing “Excellent” so that an Importance Performance Analysis could be conduct on the impacts of tourism, which is not included in this paper as this paper’s focus is on residents’ perceptions of tourism’s impact on the liability of their community.

Results

Sample demographics

Of the 402 Transylvania County residents completing the survey, 90% were white, which closely matches the U.S. Census finding that the county’s racial composition was very homogeneous at 90.1% in 2022 (USA FACTS, 2025). Respondents tended to be on the older side (62), reflecting Transylvania County’s aging demographic compared to the rest of the state. The average household income of residents surveyed was between US\$50,000 and US\$74,99 with 14% of respondents reporting that their income was directly derived from tourism. For a full demographic table, please see Perren et al. (2025).

Principal components analysis

While items comprising the Livability Scale have been used in practice by the Visit Flanders research team across multiple data collections (Toerisme Vlaanderen, 2024), the scale's reliability and validity have not been previously assessed within the academic literature. Hence, Hinkin's (1995) advice to split your sample and conduct a separate Principal Components Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis was embraced. According to Hinkin (1995, p. 980), conducting this type of split-half reliability test provides a more rigorous assessment of reliability and validity because it reduces "potential difficulties caused by common source/common method variance" (Hinkin, 1995, p. 980). This approach is also a recommended step in the item purification process recommended by Churchill (1979).

The PCA conducted on a random set of 201 Transylvania County sample respondents showed the Livability Scale to be reliable and valid, with only one Eigenvalue of 1.0 and all items having factor loadings over 0.7. Additionally, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.94, indicating a high degree of internal consistency. Based on these initial indications of reliability and validity, the Livability Scale was subjected to a Confirmatory Factor Analysis using the other half of the sample.

Confirmatory factor analysis

Following an initial test of reliability and validity, Churchill (1979) and Hinkin (1995) recommend conducting a confirmatory factor analysis to test the scale's construct validity. Construct validity ensures that the scale is measuring what it is intended to measure and consists of the sub-validity dimensions of content, validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and nomological validity (Hair et al., 2010). Content validity assesses how well the items reflect the construct at face value. This approach is somewhat subjective, but by reading the items that address how tourism negatively affects life in their community, one can see how the items measure individual perceptions of tourism's impacts on the livability of their community. Convergent validity assesses how well the items hold together to measure the construct of interest. Good convergent validity is assessed through (1) factor loadings being above 0.70; (2) construct reliability being above 0.70, similar to Cronbach Alpha; and (3) the Average Variance Explained being above 0.50 to indicate that the items explain more variance in the construct than is unexplained. As seen in Table 2, the livability items all have factor loadings above 0.70, the AVE is 0.69, and the CR is 0.91, all above the important thresholds to demonstrate convergent validity.

Discriminant validity investigates whether the new scale is empirically distinct from other related constructs included in this study (Hair et al. 2010 p. 688) suggest a rigorous test of discriminant validity is to tweak Fornell and Lacker's (1981) test by comparing the squared correlations between constructs to their AVEs. Essentially, for a scale to be considered statistically unique from another construct, it should explain more variance on its own than it shares with other constructs (Hair et al. 2010). Before running the hierarchical regressions on the full data set, both the convergent and discriminant validity of all of the scales within the model were assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis within the

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis on the second half of the Livability Scale.

	N	Mean ^a	STD	R	AVE	CR
Livability Scale					0.69	0.91
In some areas of my community, I feel uncomfortable because of tourists.	195	2.81	1.32	.70		
Because of tourism, I feel our community is no longer ours.	195	2.39	1.15	.90		
The pressure of tourism has a negative impact on my daily life.	195	2.65	1.20	.82		
Tourists are a nuisance in my community.	195	3.63	1.33	.85		
Tourism is pricing out locals in my community.	194	3.18	1.27	.77		
Because of tourism, we are losing the authentic character of our community.	193	3.23	1.31	.90		
Because of tourism, it is increasingly difficult to have quality outdoor experiences in my community (e.g., fishing, hiking, hunting, riding).	195	2.81	1.32	.84		

^aLivability questions asked on a 1–5 Likert Scale with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 5 representing “Strongly Agree”.

**CFI* = 0.952; *RMSEA*.140.

IBM SPSS software AMOs. All scales meet the criteria of having factor loadings above 0.5 with AVEs greater than 50% and Construct Reliability metrics above 0.70 (Table 3). In regard to discriminant validity, the squared correlations between constructs were lower than each scale’s AVE, except for the relationship between Social Empowerment and the Positive Impacts of Tourism, where the squared correlation of 0.68 was equal to the AVE of the Positive Impacts of Tourism. However, the AVE of Social Empowerment was substantially higher than the squared correlation (0.76 vs. 0.68), indicating that the two constructs are unique under Hair et al.’s (2010) criteria, despite their high correlation (Table 4).

Hierarchical regression analyses comparing the predictive validity of common resident attitude measures on resident support for tourism

A series of nine regression analyses were run within IBM’s SPSS statistical software to test the four hypotheses and to see if the Livability Scale was able to predict resident support for tourism and explain new variance when included within the prevailing resident attitudes towards tourism model original put forth by Perdue et al. (1990) and later built upon by McGehee and Andereck (2004) and Boley et al. (2014). Model 1, directly testing how perceptions of tourism’s impact on community livability (livability, hereon) influence resident support for tourism, provides support for hypothesis 1 that livability has a significant and negative influence on resident views of tourism ($\beta = -0.721$, $p = 0.001$). Hypothesis 2 posits that livability is a better predictor of resident support for tourism than the Social Exchange Theory constructs of positive and negative impacts of tourism. Results of model 2 show that resident perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism generally have a significant influence over resident support for tourism, as the previous tourism literature suggests. However, model 3 shows livability ($\beta = -0.627$, $p = 0.001$) to be a better predictor of resident support for tourism than either residents’ perceptions of the positive ($\beta = 0.282$, $p = 0.001$) or the negative impacts of tourism ($\beta = 0.050$, $p = 0.318$) and increases the variance explained by 27 percentage points when included in the model supporting hypothesis 2.

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis on the full data set (n = 346–391).

	N	Mean	STD	R	AVE	CR		
Livability Scale ^a								
In some areas of my community, I feel uncomfortable because of tourists.	388	2.56	1.28	0.75	0.69	0.90		
Because of tourism, I feel our community is no longer ours.	387	2.72	1.34	0.90				
The pressure of tourism has a negative impact on my daily life.	389	2.31	1.15	0.84				
Tourists are a nuisance in my community.	388	2.53	1.17	0.86				
Tourism is pricing out locals in my community.	389	3.54	1.32	0.74				
Because of tourism, we are losing the authentic character of our community.	388	3.07	1.31	0.87	0.76	0.92		
Because of tourism, it is increasingly difficult to have quality outdoor experiences in my community (e.g., fishing, hiking, hunting, riding).	391	3.04	1.34	0.85				
Psychological Empowerment Scale ^b								
Tourism creating reasons for you to feel proud to be a Transylvania Co. resident.	359	2.96	1.19	0.85				
Tourism making you feel special because people travel to see your county's unique features.	356	3.06	1.21	0.88				
Tourism encouraging you to tell others about what Transylvania Co. has to offer.	358	3.00	1.18	0.89	0.76	0.87		
Tourism reminding you that you have a unique culture to share with visitors.	357	3.06	1.22	0.87				
Tourism making you want to work to keep Transylvania Co. special.	351	2.96	1.20	0.86				
Social Empowerment Scale ^b								
Tourism making you feel more connected to your community.	353	2.50	1.15	0.91				
Tourism fostering a sense of community spirit within yourself.	355	2.52	1.20	0.89	0.85	0.94		
Tourism providing ways for you to get involved in your community.	355	2.55	1.23	0.82				
Political Empowerment Scale ^b								
Tourism providing you with a voice in tourism development decisions.	354	2.06	1.10	0.93				
Being provided with access to the decision-making process in tourism.	352	2.04	1.07	0.95				
Tourism providing you with an outlet to share your concerns about tourism development in Transylvania County.	350	2.13	1.08	0.89	0.68	0.92		
Positive Impacts Scale ^b								
Tourism providing incentives for protection and conservation of natural resources.	353	2.67	1.27	0.83				
Tourism increasing your quality of life.	351	2.36	1.20	0.83				
Tourism providing more public infrastructure development.	346	2.55	1.20	0.82				
Tourism improving the local economy.	348	3.06	1.28	0.80	0.69	0.89		
Tourism providing more shopping, restaurants, and entertainment options.	351	2.89	1.26	0.78				
Tourism preserving the cultural identity and restoration of historical buildings.	347	2.63	1.20	0.83				
Tourism increasing the number of recreation opportunities.	347	2.85	1.24	0.86				
Tourism providing new park development.	344	2.62	1.23	0.84				
Negative Impacts Scale ^{b,c}								
Tourism limiting its impact on litter. (-)	350	3.58	1.23	0.68				
Tourism limiting its impact on the cost of living in Transylvania Co. (-)	350	4.01	1.18	0.89				
Tourism limiting its impact on overcrowding in Transylvania Co. (-)	350	3.95	1.15	0.93				
Tourism limiting its impact on traffic in Transylvania Co. (-)	352	3.96	1.11	0.88				

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

	N	Mean	STD	R	AVE	CR
Tourism limiting its impact on crime in Transylvania Co. (-)	348	3.42	1.17	0.72		
Economic Benefits Scale ^a					0.78	0.90
Tourism in Transylvania Co. helps me pay my bills	389	2.35	1.30	0.93		
Part of my income is tied to tourism in Transylvania Co.	389	2.20	1.29	0.92		
I would economically benefit from more tourism in Transylvania Co.	390	2.33	1.25	0.86		
My family's economic future depends upon tourism in Transylvania Co.	389	2.04	1.11	0.82		
Support for Tourism Scale ^a					0.86	0.96
In general, the positive benefits of tourism outweigh negative impacts in Transylvania Co.	386	3.61	1.18	0.87		
Tourism should be actively encouraged in Transylvania Co.	388	3.66	1.13	0.94		
I support tourism and want to see it remain important to Transylvania Co.	385	3.72	1.12	0.94		
Transylvania Co. should remain a tourist destination.	387	3.72	1.15	0.93		
Transylvania Co. should support the promotion of tourism.	386	3.61	1.19	0.95		

Model Fit: CFI = 0.938; RMSEA = 0.058.

^aMeasured on a Likert Scale with 1= Strongly Disagree and 5= Strongly Agree.

^bMeasured on a Likert Scale regarding performance with 1= Poor and 5= Excellent.

^cReverse coded.

Table 4. Correlations and squared correlations between constructs within the model.

	LIV	PSY	SOC	POL	POS_I	Neg_I	EB	ST
Livability (LIV)	0.69	0.31	0.31	0.22	0.31	0.27	0.05	0.58
Psychological Empowerment (PSY)	−0.56	0.76	0.73	0.39	0.60	0.35	0.04	0.34
Social Empowerment (SOC)	−0.54	0.85	0.76	0.60	0.68	0.44	0.07	0.30
Political Empowerment (POL)	−0.47	0.63	0.78	0.85	0.59	0.42	0.06	0.21
Positive Impacts (POS_I)	−0.56	0.77	0.83	0.77	0.68	0.54	0.09	0.35
Negative Impacts (Neg_I)	0.52	−0.59	−0.67	−0.65	−0.74	0.69	0.06	0.21
Economic Benefits (EB)	−0.23	0.19	0.27	0.25	0.30	−0.24	0.78	0.15
Support for Tourism (ST)	−0.76	0.59	0.55	0.46	0.59	−0.46	0.39	0.86

Note: Diagonal values are AVE values. Values below the diagonal are correlation estimates among constructs and values above the diagonal are squared correlations.

Hypothesis 3 examines the predictive validity of the new Livability Scale in comparison to residents' perceptions of the economic benefits of tourism. Model 4 shows resident perceptions of the economic benefits to be a significant and positive predictor of resident support for tourism, but model 5 shows livability to be a stronger predictor ($\beta = -0.669, p=0.001$) compared to resident perceptions of economically benefiting from tourism ($\beta=0.240, p=0.001$) and to explain 43 percentage points of more variance when included in the model supporting hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 4 focuses on the new Livability Scale's predictive validity compared to Boley et al. (2014) Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale, with the sub-dimensions of Psychological, Social, and Political Empowerment. Model 7 shows livability to be a better predictor of resident support for tourism ($\beta = -0.604, p=0.001$) than psychological empowerment ($\beta=0.234, p=0.001$, social empowerment ($\beta = 0.007, p=0.910$), and political empowerment ($\beta = 0.034, p=0.490$) and increasing the variance explained by 25 percentage points when included in tandem with the RETS scales providing support for hypothesis 4.

While no hypothesis was developed to test the relationship of livability within the context of all the variables, a comprehensive "kitchen sink" model was developed to see how livability performed against all of the other constructs. Results of model 9 show livability to be the best predictor of all of the constructs ($\beta = -0.573, p=0.001$) and explain an additional 21 percentage points of the variance when included with many of the other common constructs used to explain resident support for tourism (Table 5).

Discussion and conclusions

While many tourism studies have focused on concepts tangentially related to livability such as resident quality of life (Uysal et al. 2016), resident empowerment (Boley et al., 2014), and the positive and negative impacts of tourism across the triple bottom line (Andereck et al., 2005), there has yet to be a measure of residents' perceptions of how tourism affects the perceived livability of their community. With Livability Theory presenting livability as a precursor to quality of life (Veenhoven 2015), and livability being what is essentially perceived to be under attack from overtourism causing resident protests over tourism in destinations like Barcelona (Paredes-Rodriguez & Spriering, 2020) and Venice (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019), this study sought to develop

Table 5. Hierarchical regression analyses comparing the predictive validity of common resident attitude Measures on resident support for tourism.

Construct	Livability			Positive and negative impacts			Economic benefits			Empowerment			Combined kitchen sink model		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13	M14	M15
Livability	-0.721***														
Positive Impacts of Tourism		0.495***	-0.627***		-0.669***		-0.604***								
Negative Impacts of Tourism		-0.118	0.282***												
Economic Benefits of Tourism			0.050												
Psychological Empowerment				0.381***	0.240***	0.443***	0.234***								
Social Empowerment						0.071	0.007								
Political Empowerment						0.139*	0.034								
R ²	0.520	0.344	0.611	0.145	0.574	0.355	0.605								
ΔR ² with Livability			0.267		0.429		0.250								

Note: N = 402, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

and test the reliability, validity, explanatory power of a Livability Scale to gauge resident perceptions of tourism impacts on the livability of their community. Results of the split-half Principal Components Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis demonstrate the scale's reliability and validity, and the series of regression analyses consistently show the Livability Scale to outperform standard resident attitude constructs that are used within Social Exchange Theory and Weber's Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality frameworks within a rural nature-based tourism context. For example, including the Livability Scale in addition to the Social Exchange constructs of Resident Perceptions of the Positive and Negative Impacts increased the variance explained by 27 percentage points, and applying the Livability Scale in conjunction with Boley et al. (2014) Resident Empowerment Through Tourism Scale using the substantive rationality piece of Weber's Theory explained an additional 25% of the variance than if the RETS was applied alone within the rural nature-based tourism destination Brevard, North Carolina.

These large jumps in variance explained are theorized to come from the livability measure tapping into something that Social Exchange Theory and Weber's Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality do not directly address. That is the stress residents face as tourism threatens vital resources that are essential to their ability to function and live productive lives. We put forth (Veenhoven 2015 Livability Theory and Hobfoll 1989) Conservation of Resources Theory as a combined theoretical explanation for why tourism's negative impacts on a community's livability have such a strong negative relationship with resident support for tourism. The Conservation of Resources Theory is based upon the tenet that "people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that what is threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources" (Hobfoll 1989 p. 516), and when they experience these threats they respond by "fighting" as suggested by Gössling et al. (2020) new take on Doxey's Irridex that speaks to how residents' antagonism can well up into fear, and occasionally, acts of aggression where residents display aggressive behaviours towards tourists. These findings that livability has a unique influence over resident support for tourism from tapping into the stress associated with overtourism have many implications for practitioners and academics alike.

Managerial implications

For those involved in destination marketing and management, these results suggest staying attuned to what residents need from their community and ensuring tourism does not infringe on the vital resources they need to lead productive lives. Rather than making assumptions about what resources residents need and value, managers can learn from the recent work of Boley et al. (2025) and directly ask residents what is important to them and how well the community is currently performing in these resource areas to identify community priorities using a modified Importance Performance Analysis. Another option would be to incorporate Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS), where residents identify important resources on a map, which are then digitized, providing a graphical representation of the community resources they value and desire to protect (Brown & Weber, 2013). Once core resources valued by community members are identified, managers could embrace

some of the old outdoor recreation concepts of Limits of Acceptable Change (Stankey et al., 1984) and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (Clark & Stankey, 1979) to identify areas the community feels can be “hardened” and open to tourism development and other areas that should be managed as resident only areas or “wilderness” so to speak and not promoted or improved for tourism. These approaches also resonate with MacCannell’s (1976) “front stage” and “backstage” phenomenon, where certain sites are made public and put on display for tourists, while other areas are hidden from the tourist gaze, allowing residents to live lives unimpeded by tourism. Destination marketing organizations cannot do this alone and need assistance from federal and state partners, as they often manage many of the primary tourist attractions in gateway communities. The U.S. EXPLORE Act of 2025 directs federal recreation agencies to pilot test systems that direct tourists away from busy recreation sites and towards nearby, less busy substitutes in real time (U.S. Explore Act, 2024). The EXPLORE Act states that these pilot tests should be conducted in coordination with communities. Such coordination offers an opportunity for federal and state land managers to apply the concept of livability when working with communities to identify which substitute sites might be suggested to tourists.

Ultimately, ensuring the livability of tourism destinations is a challenge. This challenge arises from the public nature of tourism, which allows tourists to move freely through a community and challenges a community’s ability to effectively protect key resources. Private businesses can erect gates and adjust prices to reduce demand, but communities within tourism destinations are on public display, making it extremely difficult to limit access to important residential resources. Destinations can demarket certain areas to help with this (Beeton & Benfield, 2002), but few formal policy levers exist to shield these important resources from tourists. While challenging, our research on livability suggests that identifying these resources that are valuable and needed by residents and applying a Conservation of Resources mindset to tourism development should aid in fostering resident support rather than just listening and retroactively responding to market forces.

Academic implications

For academics interested in resident attitudes toward tourism and overtourism, this study provides two main contributions. First, a new theoretical perspective is presented to theoretically ground resident reactions to overtourism. Rather than relying on the cost-benefit logic of Social Exchange Theory or the different rationalities of Weber’s Formal and Substantive Rationality, this paper proposes Livability Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory as a combined explanation of residents’ support or opposition to tourism. The Conservation of Resources Theory takes a step back to investigate stress and how it wells up from threats to resources (Hobfoll 1989), and Livability Theory (Veenhoven 2015) ties this stress stemming from these core resources being vital to residents’ ability to live productive lives in the community. Furthermore, this combined theoretical perspective stemming from Livability Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory speaks to how other prominent resident attitude theories explain resident attitudes towards tourism, such as Social Exchange Theory and Weber’s Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality. Regarding

Social Exchange Theory, the stress residents feel and internalize from threats to resources they perceive as vital to life will likely influence how they conduct their cost-benefit analyses of the positive and negative impacts of tourism. The stress from threats to resources needed to live will also likely colour residents' formal and substantive rationalities. In this sense, the combined theoretical perspective pulling from Livability Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory provides an important theoretical precursor to many of the core theories guiding the resident attitude literature.

A second contribution of the study is the newly developed and validated Livability Scale that measures residents' perceptions of tourism's impact on the livability of their communities. In addition to testing the reliability and validity of the Livability Scale, this study demonstrates the utility of the Livability Scale by comparing its predictive validity against other important predictors of resident attitudes towards tourism, including resident perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism, their perceptions of the personal economic benefits of tourism, and perceptions of being psychologically, socially, and politically empowered by tourism. As the regression results show, the Livability Scale outperforms them all within the local context of Transylvania County, NC, and helps explain new variance in residents' support or opposition to tourism. In this context, tourism's impact on the livability of the community was modest with means in the 2.5 to 3.0 range indicating tourism has a slight negative impact on the livability of the community. Communities with different configurations (e.g. urban vs. rural, high seasonality vs. low seasonality) are likely to feel the livability pressures from tourism differently and have different priorities depending on their local context and their lived experience with tourism.

The new Livability Scale and the combined theoretical perspective from Livability Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory present resident attitude researchers with many new lines of research. For example, researchers can investigate if the relationship between livability and support for tourism is mediated by other common constructs within the resident attitude literature. It would also be interesting to examine moderators of this relationship between livability and support for tourism, such as length of residency and type of employment, to see whether certain patterns amplify or attenuate the effect of livability on support for tourism. Resident attitude researchers can also pull from the Conservation of Resources Theory to look for communities that seem to be resilient and able to harness the power of tourism for community gains through the concept of "resource caravans" that allow communities to leverage tourism to make them better off. It would also be interesting to better understand communities prone to "resource spirals" where threats to some resources cascade into other community problems. Another extension would be to examine how resident perceptions of livability influence short- and long-term resident displacement from overtourism (Frochot & Favier, 2025).

Limitations and areas for future research

While this study adds to the resident attitude literature through a new construct and a new theory, important limitations exist. First, this relationship between livability

and resident support for tourism was tested in only one locale within a North American gateway community context. It would be beneficial to test the scale's cross-cultural validity multiple times and to assess whether its predictive validity holds across other contexts worldwide. It is likely that livability is context specific. While livability was found to be the best predictor of resident support for tourism in Brevard, NC, characteristics of different communities and their tourism governance systems may lead to other constructs playing a greater role in explaining resident support for tourism. For example, communities earlier in their development along the Tourism Area Life Cycle curve may be purely in the "euphoria" zone of Doxey's Irridex, and thus, have a different configuration of social-psychological constructs driving resident support or opposition (Butler, 1980; Doxey, 1975). Relatedly, Brevard, located in Transylvania County, is a gateway community to a National Forest. It would be of interest to see whether the relationship between livability and support for tourism holds for gateway communities surrounding state and national parks, as well as those surrounding private parks such as Disney World in Orlando. Another limitation is that the questionnaire did not have room to include other constructs that could be similar to livability such as residents' perceptions of quality of life and life satisfaction. Future research could test the Livability Scale's discriminant validity against these constructs to further validate the scales uniqueness and value to the resident attitude literature. Lastly, the influence of livability on resident support for tourism was only investigated using quantitative methods. While a strong relationship was found between livability and resident support for tourism, qualitative methods would help better understand this relationship in a local context and identify which resources residents value and perceive as threatened by tourism.

Note

1. Approved by the university's Institutional Review Board under Project 00005601.

Author contributions

CRedit: **B. Bynum Boley**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Chase Perren**: Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – review & editing; **Philip S. Chitaunga**: Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Eric M. White**: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing; **Gary T. Green**: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Writing – review & editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Research funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service Project Number AWD00013642; Award ID FP00024092

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