

INFLUENCE OF PLACE PERSONALITY OVER RESIDENTS WELCOMING TOURIST THROUGH SELF-CONGRUITY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

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ABSTRACT

This model targets to specify the welcoming attitudes of residents towards tourists through place personality, place attachment and self-congruity amidst Covid-19 Pandemic. A whole range of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to the variables. Following the First Level Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), the validity and reliability of the variables were evaluated. Then CFA, Structural Equation Modeling was performed with the remaining variables. Results show that the sincerity (21%) and excitement (32%) affect the residents' welcoming attitude through self-congruity and place attachment; and the competence (21%) directly affects the welcoming attitude. While place attachment (11%) directly affects the welcoming attitudes, self-congruity (53%) indirectly affects the welcoming attitudes. Also, self-congruity affects the welcoming attitude through place attachment. Another significant result is the strong effect (45%) of self-congruity on place attachment. Some studies revealed locals adopted a negative attitude towards tourists during the pandemic while others indicated locals adopted positive attitudes towards tourists. Within this context this study, as addressing this controversial issue contribute to the development of more sustainable plans and policies by destination management organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

With COVID-19 Pandemic, the economic fragility of the tourism industry increased, and uncertainties disturbed the societal structure and the sector (Bieber, 2022). Despite the particularly significant economic influences of

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the pandemic on tourism, its negative effects on social psychology are also noteworthy. In this regard, pandemic reminded people the idea of mortality. Therefore, pandemic caused societies to become more attached to their own cultural values and traditional worldviews, and thus to adopt a negative attitude towards foreigners. In this context, along with the pandemic, the nationalist tendencies of world nations (Elias et al., 2021), xenophobia (Kock et al., 2019), discrimination towards tourists (Sharma et al., 2022) increased significantly. For example, this discrimination and tension, which first emerged against the Chinese at the beginning of the outbreak, have later turned into a generalized discontent towards foreigners (Sybilla & Cavataro, 2020). A Singaporean youngster was attacked in London due to COVID-19 (BBC, 2020). The applications of many students from Hong Kong who wanted to go to Italy with Bologna were rejected for the same reason (Wassler & Talarico, 2021). In sub-Saharan African countries, western tourists were asked to leave the country if they were carriers (Simoncelli, 2020). These statements indicate that some societies have a negative attitude towards foreigners in sub-Saharan African countries.

One of the sectors where the mentioned violence and discrimination are experienced the furthest is the tourism sector (Wassler & Talarico, 2021). On the other hand, there are various interest groups in tourism. One of these interest groups are the locals. The locals' attitudes towards tourism and tourists are of vital importance for sustainable development of tourism (Khonom et al., 2019). However, global crises such as COVID-19 pandemic have always brought uncertainty, risk and major changes for human beings. Risk, uncertainty and changes have deeply affected human behavior. In times of crisis, people avoid uncertainty, do not take risks, and adopt more protective behaviors. People simplify their decision-making processes with an aim to reduce uncertainty (Leach et al., 2021). In this context, locals do not want to interact with strangers such as tourists in order not to be infected. For this reason, locals differentiate themselves from strangers such as tourists, visitors, and they can treat them inimically. On the other hand, there are also communities that developed hospitable attitudes towards tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Thailand, the most popular destination for Chinese tourists, opened its borders 18 months after the COVID-19 outbreak. Even though Thailand did not close its borders, it did not impose a travel ban and even adopted a hospitable attitude towards tourists; China imposed travel restrictions and quarantines for the duration the epidemic. Thai government warmly welcomed Chinese tourists due to the economic benefits of tourism (BBC, 2021). As a result, while some studies

(Kock et al., 2019; Sybilla & Cavataro, 2020; Simoncelli, 2020; Elias et al., 2021; Wassler & Talarico, 2021) revealed that the locals adopted a negative attitude towards tourists during the pandemic; others (Joo et al., 2021; Woosnam et al., 2021; Patwary et al., 2022; Erul et al., 2022) revealed that locals adopted positive attitudes towards tourists. At this point, the results obtained with this study and addressing this controversial issue contribute to the development of more sustainable plans and policies by destination management organizations. In addition, the fact that there have been scarce studies (Armutlu et al., 2021; Erul et al., 2022) that evaluate the attitudes of residents towards tourism in Turkey during the pandemic indicates the importance of this study.

As of 15 May 2021, Turkey has abolished the requirement of showing a negative Covid-19 test results for tourists from many countries. Even in this period, Foreign Affairs Minister's statement, "*We will vaccinate everyone a tourist is likely to see*", drew reaction (BBC, 2021). Economist (2021) stated that tourists, exempted from restrictions to stimulate the tourism sector, enjoy the sea and empty streets. However, it is he stated that Turks who did the same were fined above the minimum wage. Also, closing down the country to residents, while rolling out the red carpet for tourists was not welcomed (Economist, 2021). Moreover, place attachment attitude, as a human and place-oriented concept, not only predicts the residents' welcoming attitudes (Woosnam et al. 2018), but also strengthens it (Patwary et al., 2022). Also, despite so many studies that address the place attachment and residents' welcoming attitudes (Woosnam et al. 2018; Chen & Dwyer 2017; Woosnam et al. 2018; Aleshinloye et al., 2020; Patwardhan, 2020; Ruttanavisanon & Agmapisarn. 2022), there isn't any study that deals with these two variables in tandem during the pandemic. Additionally, Pasquinelli et al. (2021) emphasized the significance of destination personality for the development of destinations in a sustainable manner. Even though the measurement of destination personality based on tourists' perspective is valuable for the destination marketing; the evaluation of the place personality, which is defined as the human qualities attributed to the place based on residents' perspective (Unurlu, 2022), is equally significant for the place for achieving a sustainable competitive edge. This study aiming to measure the residents' place personality attitudes during the pandemic will give the place an opportunity to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Also, although there are many studies measuring the impact of residents' welcoming attitudes on tourism support attitude (Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2009; Woosnam, 2012; Almeida García et al. 2016; Erul et al., 2020; Erul & Woosnam, 2022; Erul et al., 2023), the influence of

the residents' place personality attitudes on welcoming attitudes towards tourists during the pandemic has yet to be studied. These explanations indicate the significance of this study, aiming to measure the locals' welcoming tourists through place personality, place attachment and self-congruity and was carried out in Istanbul in November 2021.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Place Personality

Personality, which is a social indicator, is the unique, idiosyncratic, consistent, and unchanging characteristics of an individual that show how they are perceived by other people (Kirel & Ađlargođ, 2013). Although there are many approaches over the formation of personality, Kluckhohn and Murray (1964) stated that our personality is shaped by biological, cultural and sociological processes. Staw et al. (1986) revealed in his research that personality traits are effective in the way that an individual perceives the world. Tatlıhođlu (2014), on the other hand, defined personality as the behaviors that determine the way consumers interact with physical and social environments.

Aaker (1997) stated that a brand can have manwise qualities. Fournier (1998) stated that consumers tend to humanize brands. Satici (1998) revealed that the products purchased reflect the personality of the consumer. Belk (1988) and Malhotra (1988) stated that consumers express themselves, their idealized personalities, and different aspects of their personalities through brand personality. Cushman (1990) and Elliott (1997) argued that through symbolic meanings, the consumer compensates for the deficiencies in their own personality. All these statements show that consumers associate the products they prefer with symbolic meanings and perceive the products with these symbolic meanings as an extension of their own personality. This attitude causes consumers to approve, appreciate, and respect themselves more (Lau & Ian, 2007).

Brand personality is the attribution of human qualities (sincerity, excitement, competence, exclusivity, rigidity) to brands (Aaker, 1997). Place personality, on the other hand, is based upon Aaker's (1997) brand personality approach. According to the brand personality approach, the consumer expresses their self through the brands they prefer (Wang & Yang, 2008). In the place personality approach, local people express themselves through the place where they live, perceive the place as an extension of their own existence, and thus gain a social identity. In

summary, the human qualities attributed by the consumer to the brand are described as the brand personality (Prayag, 2007); the human qualities attributed to the destination based on tourists' perspective are described as the destination personality (Hankinson, 2004, Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Uşaklı & Baloğlu, 2011); the human qualities attributed to the countries are described as the country personality (d'Astous & Boujbel, 2007); and the human qualities attributed by the locals to the place are described as place personality (Unurlu, 2022). For example; studies revealed that Singapore has a cosmopolitan, young, modern; Asia has a reliable and comfortable (Henderson, 2000); Portugal has a traditional, modern and intellectual (Santos, 2004); Europe has a traditional and intellectual; Wales has an honest, hospitable, romantic and realistic; Spain has a family- friendly; Paris has a romantic personality and lastly London has an open-minded, extraordinary, vibrant and creative (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006).

Self-Congruity

Understanding the 'self' approach is essential for the comprehension of consumer behavior. Therefore, after the 1950s, the concept of 'self' began to be intensively investigated in marketing research. Studies conducted during these periods introduced the concept of symbolic consumption to interpret how people consume (Sop, 2017). The self, which is an important subject of sociology and psychology, is defined as the most basic features that distinguish a person from others. In a deeper perspective, it is the thought of the subject "I" about the object "me" (Sop, 2017). On the other hand, consumers express themselves through the symbolic values of the products they buy, and they perceive these products as an extension of their own selves (Fournier, 1998). The self-congruity theory is formed at this stage. In self-congruity theory, which is a multidimensional theory, (1) true self-congruity refers to the harmony between the image of the individual and the product; (2) ideal self-congruity means the harmony between the idealized image of the individual and the product image; (3) social self-congruity reference to the harmony between the individual's social image and the product image, and (4) the ideal social self-congruity refers to the harmony between the idealized social image of the individual and the image of the product (Uğur, 2017). Self-congruity and brand personality are symbolic benefits that complement each other (Branaghan & Hildebrand, 2011). Also, brand personality is more comprehensive than the self-congruity, the brand personality has been evaluated as an antecedent of the

self-congruity in many studies (Willems & Swinnen, 2011; Sop & Kozak, 2019).

H1: Place personality has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1a: Excitement has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1b: Sincerity has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1c: Competence has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1d: Sophistication has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1e: Ruggedness has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

Place Attachment

To talk about the existence of an object, first of all, time and space must exist. Place is defined as a specific location where various activities can be done (Karaçor, 2012). Arslan (2009) describes the place not only as a physical space, but also as a psychological and sociological interactive concept. Place attachment comes into existence as a result of the individual experiences in a certain place. Therefore, the individual may adopt the place (insiderness), and feel the sense of belonging to the place (rootedness). Also, it is possible for the individual to become alienated from a place (outsiderness), and to lose the interest to the place (placelessness). The sum of the emotions and thoughts which an individual has developed over time by interacting with their environment can be called place attachment (Güler, 2019). Research on place attachment reveals that people become more attached to place as they get older. Additionally, place attachment attitude formed during childhood is stronger than those formed in adulthood (Sobel, 1990).

Studies show that people's personality traits affect their attitude of attachment. As such, Ocak et al. (2017) indicated a significant relationship between personality and organizational attachment. Malär et al. (2011) and Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) stated that brand personality affects brand attachment. In regard to place personality, individuals attributing human qualities to the place living in will identify themselves via the place.

H2: Place personality has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2a: Excitement has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2b: Sincerity has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2c: Competence has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2d: Sophistication has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2e: Ruggedness has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

Hull (1992) puts forward a correlation between place attachment and self-image. Styvén et al. (2020), Sirgy & Su (2000), Ahn et al. (2013) and Liu et al. (2012) showed an important relation between the place attachment and self-congruity. Chen and Šegota (2016) and Chen et al. (2017) stated that self-congruity is mediator between place attachment and behavioural results. Kumar and Navak (2014) found that self-congruity affects destination attachment through destination satisfaction.

H3: Self-congruity has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

Residents Welcoming Tourists

Tourism is an environment-based economic activity (Briassoulis & van der Straaten, 2000). For this reason, locals-tourist interaction is inevitable. Locals' perspective on tourism and tourists determines the future of tourism in that region (Tsang et al., 2016). Therefore, it is vital to ensure support from the locals for the regional development of tourism. However, tourism can cause social, environmental, and economic deterioration in the region (Ko & Stewart, 2002). These deteriorations affect the locals at maximum. Thus, the locals can adopt a negative attitude towards tourists. In this context, gaining the support of locals is essential for a sustainable improvement of tourism (Dyer et al., 2007).

Ekinci et al. (2013) and Chen and Šegota (2015) stated individuals who show high self-congruity do not only adopt a more positive attitude

towards the place, but they also support the place more. Joo et al. (2020), on the other hand, revealed that the self-congruity attitude affects residents' welcoming attitudes. Tajfel & Turner (1986) also stated that individuals would be fair and respectful to people and groups that they see as consistent with their own selves.

H4: Self-congruity has a statistically significant impact on residents' welcoming attitude towards tourists.

Gursoy & Rutherford (2004) stated that locals with strong place attachment attitude show tendency to acquire much more positive perspective on the social and economic effects of tourism than those with weaker place attachment attitude. Styliadis et al. (2017) stated that place attachment positively affects the perception towards tourism. In their studies, Woosnam et al. (2018) and Patwardhan et al. (2020) revealed an important relation between place attachment and welcoming attitudes of residents. Aleshinloye et al. (2020) proved that residents welcoming attitudes is mediator variable between place attachment and social distance. All these statements show that there is a significant relationship between place attachment and residents welcoming tourists.

H5: Place attachment has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6: Place personality has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6a: Excitement has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6b: Sincerity has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6c: Competence has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6d: Sophistication has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6e: Ruggedness has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

METHOD

Survey Instrument and Construct Measurements

Aaker (1997) brand personality scale was used to measure locals' attitude towards place personality, and this attitude was measured with 42 items. The self-congruity scale was taken from the study of Sirgy et al. (1997), and this attitude was measured with 5 items. Place attachment scale was taken from Lewicka's (2010) study, and this attitude was measured with 12 items. The welcoming attitude of the locals was taken from the study of Woosnam (2012), and this attitude was measured with 4 items.

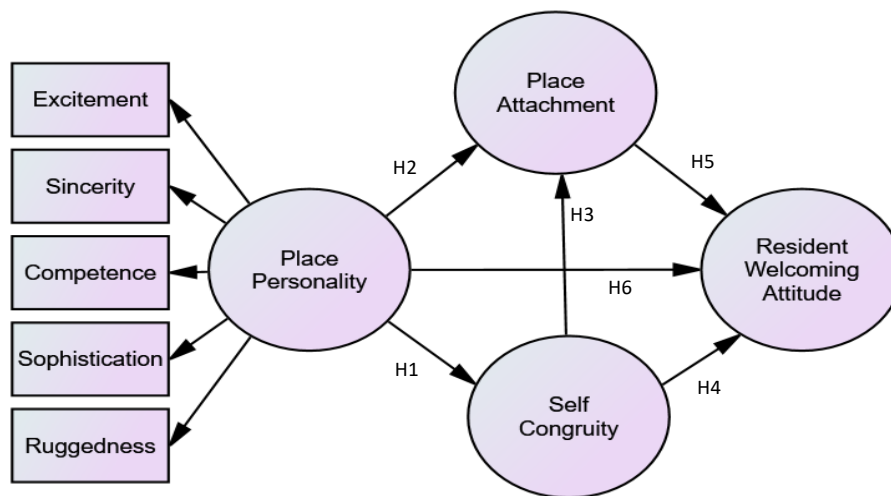


Figure 1. *Conceptual Model*

The conceptual model, being considered as related, is shown in Figure 1. There are four variables in total (place personality, self-congruity, place attachment, residents' welcoming attitudes) in the model developed to measure the residents' welcoming attitudes towards tourists during the COVID-19 epidemic. The questionnaire consists of two parts. There are 6 demographic questions in the first part and 63 attitude items in the second part. So as to measure attitude questions, A 5-point Likert Scale was utilized. In this measure, "1 represents strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree".

Data Collection

The population of the research is the locals living in Istanbul. The most significant rationale of conducting this study in İstanbul is the fact that İstanbul is the 9th most visited city in the world according to Global Destinations index (Mastercard, 2018). For this research conducted in 2021, the population of İstanbul in 2020 was taken as a basis. The population of İstanbul in 2020 is 15 462 452 (TUIK, 2021). As the sampling method,

convenience sampling method was used in which everyone who answered the questionnaire was included in the sampling (Altunışık et al., 2007). The data were collected in November 2021. Due to COVID-19, an e-survey was conducted. Students attending Edirne Social Sciences Vocational School distributed e-surveys prepared on Google forms over their social media accounts to local people living in İstanbul. In order to increase student's motivation, a small addition was made their grades. The surveys were answered only by local people living in İstanbul. A total of 858 analyzable data were obtained.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The model was analyzed by using SEM. 18 hypotheses were tested in total in this study. At this stage, a series of EFA (Explanatory Factor Analyzes) were conducted in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for every scale. In these analyses, Varimax rotation method was used in order to maximize the factor variance. Items with factor loading values below .50 and showing tendency to overlapping were removed from the analysis. Following the EFA, first level CFA was performed for unidimensional variables. Then, both first level CFA and second level CFA have been made for multidimensional variables in AMOS. Then, validity and reliability of the structures in the research model were evaluated. Following CFA, SEM was performed with the remaining variables. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the participants included in the study.

In the factor analysis carried out for the place personality scale, items with a less than 0.50 factor loading were excluded from the analysis. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that there were 3 components with an eigenvalue above 1. The contribution of these three factors to the total variance was determined as 66.334%. In the factor analysis carried out for resident welcoming tourist, there was no item with a less than 0.50 factor loading. There was 1 dimension with an eigenvalue above 1. The contribution of this dimension to the total variance was 71.775%. In the factor analysis carried out for the self-congruity, there was no item with a less than 0.50 factor loading. There was 1 dimension with an eigenvalue above 1, and the contribution of this dimension to the total variance was 71.309%. In the factor analysis for the place attachment scale, there was no item with a less than 0.50 factor loading. Also, it was determined that there was 1 dimension with an eigenvalue above 1 and the contribution of this dimension to the total variance was 60,309%.

Table 1. *Sample Profile*

		Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>	Female	433	50,5
	Male	425	49,5
	Total	858	100,0
<i>Age</i>	29 and below	315	36,5
	30-59	437	51,5
	60 and above	106	12,0
	Total	858	100,0
<i>Length of stay</i>	1-10 years	192	22,4
	11-20 years	370	43,1
	21-30 years	234	27,3
	31-40 years	45	5,2
	41-50 years	17	2,0
	Total	858	100,0
<i>Occupation</i>	Public sector	259	30,0
	Private sector	236	27,5
	Freelance	51	6,5
	Retired	162	18,5
	Nonworking	150	17,5
	Total	858	100,0
<i>Education</i>	Elementary education	67	7,8
	Secondary education	200	23,3
	High school	380	44,3
	University	211	24,6
	Total	858	100,0

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

In Table 2, the validity and reliability of the scales in the research model were evaluated. In the table, the standard coefficients of the expressions obtained as a result of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Cronbach's Alpha values are given. Internal consistency of the structures was tested with the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The Cronbach' Alpha values of the structures are above the threshold value (> 0.70). Also, according to the table, CR values are above 0.80, and AVE values are above 0.50. These results indicate the convergent validity of the structures (Hair et al., 2010). Fornell & Larcker (1981) stated that CR values (> 0.70) should be higher than AVE values (> 0.50) for the validity and reliability of the structures. All these statements point to the validity and reliability of the measurement. In order to evaluate discriminant validity, MSV and ASV

values of the scales were calculated. Hair et al. (2010) stated that MSV and ASV values of the scales should be greater than AVE values for the discriminant validity. According to Table 2, the MSV and ASV values of the scales are higher than the AVE values. This indicates that discriminant validity is achieved and the variables are apart from each other. In order to evaluate whether the multicollinearity problem exist, VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) scores were considered. The condition of the VIF scores equal to or greater than 10 indicate that there is a multicollinearity problem (Hair et al., 2010). According to Table 2, the VIF scores of the explanatory variables are less than 10. This shows that there is no multicollinearity problem in the analysis.

Table 2. *Reliability and Validity of the Model*

Constructs and Variable	Std. Coeff.	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	VIF	Cronbach Alpha
<i>Place Personality</i>							
<i>1. Excitement</i>							
Spirited	.883	.927	.586	.159	.139	1.336	.940
Cool	.875						
Exciting	.858						
Up-to-date	.724						
Unique	.723						
Imaginative	.709						
Young	.702						
Trendy	.698						
Contemporary	.681						
<i>2. Sincerity</i>							
Sincere	.875	.919	.612	.209	.107	1.362	.915
Honest	.820						
Original	.806						
Real	.787						
Family-oriented	.759						
Wholesome	.724						
Down-to-earth	.681						
Friendly	.668						
<i>3. Competence</i>							
Successful	.873	.900	.602	.072	.053	1.124	.931
Corporate	.859						
Reliable	.835						
Leader	.731						
Confident	.672						
Hard-working	.656						
<i>Self-Congruity</i>							
This place mirrors who I am	.897	.925	.711	.430	.129	1.988	.898
The personality of this place is congruent with how I see myself	.892						
The image of this place consistent with my identity	.854						

If this place were a person, we would have the same personality with that.	.832					
People who live this place have the same personality with me.	.732					
<i>Place Attachment</i>		.901	.604	.430	.207	2.058 .862
I miss it when I am not here	.861					
It is a part of myself	.817					
I am proud of this place	.776					
I don't like this place (-)	.752					
I leave this place with pleasure (-)	.733					
I would not like to move out from here	.716					
<i>Welcoming Attitude</i>		.909	.713	.108	.068	.855
I am proud to have visitors come to this place	.888					
I feel the community benefits from having visitors in this place	.863					
I appreciate visitors for the contribution they make to the local economy.	.814					
I treat visitors fair in this place.	.812					

Following the validity and reliability tests regarding the measurement, the conceptual model was tested with Structural Equation Modeling. In Table 3, fit indices of the tested model are given. According to the table, the model fits the data. In Table 4, the structural equations obtained as a result of SEM are given. According to the table, when the regression coefficients showing the relationships between the structures and the significance values of these coefficients are examined, that all paths are seen to be significant ($p < .000$).

Table 3. *Studies Fit Indices of the Model*

Chosen criterion	Good fit	Acceptable fit	Fit value of model	Reference
χ^2 (CMIN)	-	-	-	
χ^2/df (CMIN/df)	≤ 3	$\leq 4-5$.334	(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.89-0.85	.999	(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)
CFI	≥ 0.97	≥ 0.95	.989	(Hu & Bentler, 1999; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)
RMSEA	≤ 0.05	0.06-0.08	.060	(MacCallum et al., 1996; Hu & Bentler, 1999)
NFI	≥ 0.95	0.94-0.90	.999	(Kline, 2015; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)
RMR	≤ 0.05	0.06-0.08	.003	(Kline, 2015)

According to Table 4 and Figure 2, the excitement accounts for 40% of the variance in self-congruity, the sincerity explains 36% of the variance in self-congruity, and the competence explains 27% of the variance in self-congruity ($p < 0.000$). The excitement explains 38% of the variance in place

attachment, the sincerity explains 44% of the variance in place attachment, and the competence explains 12% of the variance in place attachment ($p<0.000$). The excitement explains 32% of the variance in residents' welcoming attitudes; The sincerity explains 21% of the variance in residents' welcoming attitudes; The competence explains 21% of the variance in residents' welcoming attitudes ($p<0.000$). While self-congruity a explains 45% of the variance in place attachment ($p<0.000$); place attachment explains 12% of the variance in residents' welcoming attitudes ($p<0.003$). One of the conclusions of the study is that self-congruity does not have a direct effect on residents' welcoming attitudes but has an indirect effect. Self-congruity influences residents welcoming attitudes via place attachment.

Table 4. *Structural Equations*

Structural Equations	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects	T Value	P Value	Supp.
Self -Congruity ← Excitement	.403	-	.403	14.741	***	Yes
Self -Congruity ← Sincerity	.359	-	.359	13.138	***	Yes
Self -Congruity ← Competence	.265	-	.265	9.705	***	Yes
Place Attachment ← Excitement	.200	.183	.382	7.452	***	Yes
Place Attachment ← Sincerity	.279	.163	.442	10.638	***	Yes
Place Attachment ← Competence	-	.120	.120	-	-	No
Welcoming ← Excitement	.278	.045	.323	8.209	***	Yes
Welcoming ← Sincerity	.157	.052	.209	4.503	***	Yes
Welcoming ← Competence	.200	.014	.214	6.360	***	Yes
Place Attachment ← Self-Congruity	.454	-	.454	15.228	***	Yes
Welcoming ← Place Attachment	.117	-	.117	3.013	.003	Yes
Welcoming ← Self-Congruity	-	.053	.53	-	-	No

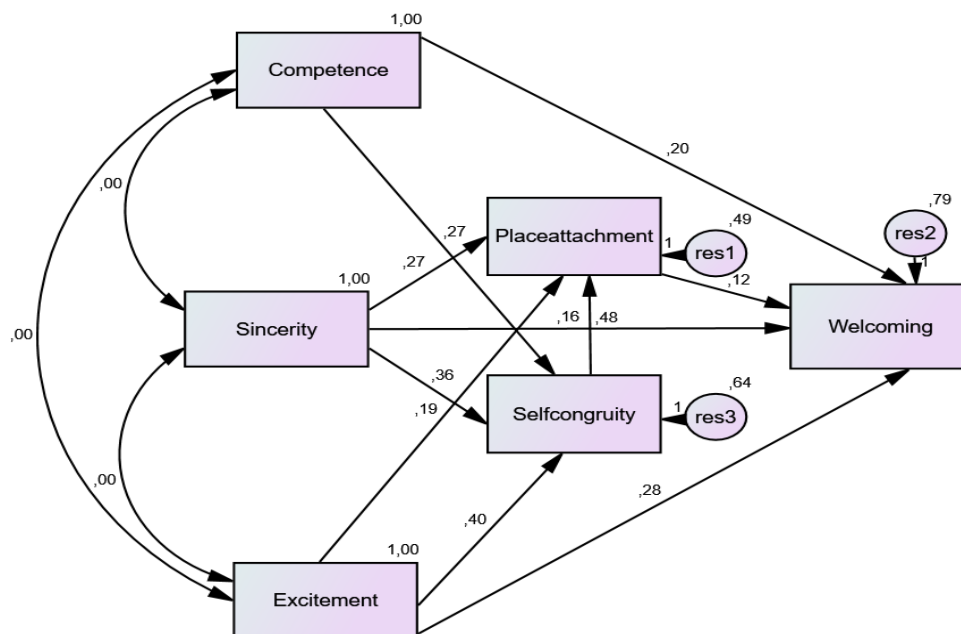


Figure 2. *Model Testing*

CONCLUSION

Discussion of the Findings

Results of this study, which aims to measure the welcoming attitudes of the locals towards tourists amidst COVID-19 pandemic via residents' place personality, self-congruity, and place attachment attitudes, are as follows:

Regarding the place personality, which is one of the predictive variables, locals' excitement, sincerity and competence attitudes towards place formed. Locals' place personality attitude did not form in the ruggedness and sophistication dimensions of the place personality. Locals perceive the place as bold, cool, exciting, modern, unique, creative, new, contemporary, and up-to-date in terms of the excitement dimension of the place personality. Locals describe the place as sincere, honest, authentic, realistic, family-oriented, reliable, candid, and friendly as to the sincerity dimension of the place personality. For the competence dimension of the place personality, locals described the place as successful, institutional, reliable, leader, confident, and hardworking. In this study, locals described Istanbul as exciting, friendly and competent. These results are within a parallelism with other studies in the literature (Şahin & Baloglu, 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Unurlu & Uca, 2017).

Locals' self-congruity attitudes, which have been formed, indicate that the locals' self-image and the place image match. In other words, there are some similarities between the place and the locals. The significant relationship between place personality and self-congruity shows that the locals' self-congruity attitude is shaped by their perception of the place. Excitement, sincerity and competence dimensions are effective in shaping of the self-congruity attitude of locals, respectively. Consequently, excitement dimension of place personality explains 40%, the sincerity explains 35%, and the competence explains 27% of self-congruity attitude. In terms of place personality, people describing the place as exciting, sincere, and competent contend that the place they live in reflects their own personalities. In other words, people who describe place as exciting, sincere, and competent think that place image and their self-image match. Pan et al. (2017) have already stated that there is a significant relationship between tourists' self-images and the destination personality. Matzler et al. (2016) stated the brand personality is the precursor of the self-congruity, and that the self-congruity attitude forms when the personality of the destination and the tourists' own personalities/self-images match. Su and Reynolds (2017) stated that hotel brands with the image of excitement and sincerity

affect the self-congruity attitude of tourists positively. These explanation shows that results are consistent with previous studies (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Kılıç & Sop, 2012; Matzler et al., 2016; Pan et al., 2017; Su & Reynolds, 2017).

The sincerity dimension of place personality explains 44%, and the excitement dimension explains 38% of place attachment. The effect of the sincerity dimension on place attachment is stronger than the excitement dimension. Upon place attachment, competence dimension does not pose a direct significant effect; but has an indirect significant one. In terms of sincerity attitude, locals who describe the place as sincere (honest, authentic, realistic, family-oriented, reliable, candid, and friendly) feel that they belong to the place, are proud of the place where they live, describe themselves as part of the place and miss the place they live when they are away. Locals, who describe the place as bold, cool, exciting, modern, unique, creative, new, contemporary, and up-to-date in terms of excitement, feel that they belong to the place, are proud of the place where they live, describe themselves as part of the place, and miss the place they live in when they are away. Accordingly, Huang et al. (2017) found that the excitement and charm dimensions of destination personality have a significant effect on destination attachment. All these statements show that the locals' feelings, thoughts, and perceptions towards themselves are transferred to the place, thus creating an emotional bond with the place. The more the locals' self-perception and the feelings and thoughts attributed to the place match, the stronger the locals' attachment to the place will be. In accordance, Sedikides and Strube (1995) stated that human beings act with the motivation to feel good and maintain their self-esteem. Huaman-Ramirez et al. (2021) stated that destination attachment can be formed through destination personality. One of the most intriguing results gained through the study is the strong effect of sincerity on place attachment. Individuals who attribute qualities such as honesty, authenticity, being realistic, family-oriented, reliable, candid, and friendly to the place they live in have a stronger place attachment attitude, and they also embrace the place more and see the place as a part of their own selves.

Excitement explains 32%, sincerity explains 20%, and competence explains 21% of the residents' welcoming attitudes. In terms of excitement dimension, those who describe the place as bold, cool, exciting, modern, unique, creative, new, contemporary, and up-to-date are pleased that the tourists visit the place and they treat tourists fairly. Also, they think that tourists contribute to the local economy. In terms of sincerity dimension, locals who describe the place as honest, authentic, realistic, family-oriented,

reliable, candid, and friendly are pleased with the visiting of tourists to the place where they live, and they appreciate that tourists contribute to the local economy. Also, they treat tourists fairly. In terms of competence attitude, locals, who describe the place as successful, institutional, reliable, leader, self-confident, and hardworking, are pleased with the arrival of tourists to the place where they live, think that tourists contribute to the local economy, and treat tourists fairly. These results are consistent with other studies in the literature (Moghavvemi et al., 2017; Kumar & Nayak, 2018). Also, there is only one research investigating the place personality and residents welcoming tourist in tandem (Unurlu, 2022). As a result of this research conducted in Edirne, it was found that excitement and sincerity dimensions of place personality positively affected residents welcoming tourists. However, the sophistication dimension of place personality negatively affected residents welcoming tourists. As a result of this research conducted in İstanbul, it has been determined that the residents' excitement, sincerity and competence attitudes formed, but residents' ruggedness and sophistication attitudes did not form. In this study, as in other study, excitement, sincerity and competence dimensions of place personality positively correlated with residents welcoming tourists.

Place attachment attitude explains 12% of residents' welcoming attitudes. In other words, individuals who feel they belong to the place they live in are proud of it, describe themselves as a part of it, and miss it when they are away are pleased with tourists' arrivals to the place. Also, they treat tourists fairly, and think that tourists contribute to the local economy. These results are consistent with other studies in the field (Kyle & Chick, 2004; Woosnam et al., 2018; Aleshinloye et al., 2020). Additionally, self-congruity attitude does not have any direct significant effect on residents' welcoming attitudes, but does have indirect effect. Because the total effect of self-congruity attitude on residents' welcoming attitudes is .53. This result indicates that self-congruity does not affect residents' welcoming attitudes directly, but affects indirectly. This result is consistent with other studies in the literature (Joo et al., 2020; Hajar et al., 2021).

Theoretical Implications

This study, drawn upon the theory of anthropomorphism (Guthrie, 1997), self-congruity theory (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998), and emotional solidarity theory (Durkheim, 1992), has shed new light on the role of place personality on self-congruity, place attachment, and residents' welcoming attitudes. While previous studies on place personality, which is based on the theory of anthropomorphism,

measured the place personality' effect on welcoming attitude through the positive and negative effects of tourism, it is the first study measuring the residents' welcoming attitudes towards tourists during the pandemic process, based on place personality, self-congruity and place attachment.

In terms of sustainable tourism, research on the residents' place personality attitude is a very limited in the tourism literature (Unurlu, 2022). This research has determined that place personality is intimately related to place attachment, self-congruity and residents' welcoming attitudes. In other words, place personality strengthens the effect of place attachment, self-congruity and residents' welcoming attitude. All these explanations indicated that the place personality construct is a strong predictor. Considering residents are the most important interest group in sustainable tourism (Choi & Murray, 2010), these findings of this research on local people's place personality attitude can be a reference for future studies. On the other hand, for the first time, this research was conducted during the pandemic, measured the welcoming nature, which is a sub-dimension of the Emotional Solidarity Scale (Woosnam et al., 2009), applying quantitative research methods upon the perspective of locals. Thus, this study has enlarged the horizon of the Emotional Solidarity by associating it with the attachment theory, self-congruity theory and anthropomorphism theory.

Additionally, during the pandemic, the hospitality attitude of the locals towards tourists in Istanbul was determined as positive. This result is consistent with SET. According to this theory, as long as the tourism costs do not exceed the tourism benefits, the residents' attitudes towards tourists will be positive (Perdue et al., 1990). Warm welcoming attitudes of residents living in İstanbul indicates that tourism costs do not exceed the tourism benefits during the pandemic.

Managerial Implications

First of all, the results show that the most outstanding personality traits of Istanbul are excitement, sincerity, and competence. In the integrated marketing communication to be made for Istanbul, these features of the city should be brought to the fore, and the residents' attitudes about excitement, sincerity, and competence should be strengthened. In terms of excitement, the modern, unique, creative, contemporary, and bold features of Istanbul should be highlighted. In this sense, opportunities and facilities that make the residents say "I really live" should be provided to them, and these opportunities should be introduced with integrated marketing

communication. For example, Vialand with its concerts and cultural events, Istanbul Sea Life Aquarium also called Turkuazoo, Legoland Discovery Center, Mio Park entertainment center, Pirate Island situated in Tuzla, Escapist, Museum of Illusions, Xtrem Aventures Istanbul, entertainment and excitement-themed places such as VR Hause and Snowpark should be highlighted in marketing communications. In addition, investments in excitement-themed outdoor sports activities such as parasailing, paragliding, rock climbing, surfing, scuba diving, buildering, mountain biking, Wingsuit flights and Creeking should be encouraged. In terms of sincerity, the qualities of Istanbul such as honest, authentic, realistic, family-oriented, reliable, candid, and friendly should be highlighted, and investments should be encouraged in this direction. Also, city-specific themes of food, beverage, culture, friendliness, affordability, livability, hospitality, and happiness should be handled more in integrated marketing communications. In terms of competence, the city's successful, institutional, reliable, leader, confident, and hardworking qualities should be highlighted and emphasized in integrated marketing communications. Successful, safe, technical, and institutional features of the investments in the city should be emphasized and integrated marketing communication should be made in this direction.

The most striking result obtained as a result of this study is that despite COVID-19 pandemic, locals' welcoming attitudes towards tourists have formed. Results show that the locals living in Istanbul developed self-congruity attitudes. For the locals, Istanbul has some symbolic traits such as excited, sincere, and competent, and the locals express their identity through these symbols. In this respect, Istanbul is a place of symbolic value for the locals. In terms of self-congruity attitude, locals want to achieve status via the place they live in. Therefore, both local governments and destination management organizations should provide the residents with the excitement, sincerity, and competence they seek, both with public facilities and private sector investments. In this regard, the market should be segmented in terms of place personality. Different products, different prices, different place (attractions) and different promotions should be used for each market segment.

In terms of the significant effect of place personality on place attachment, the themes of excitement, sincerity, and competence should be brought to the fore in the city in order to increase the place attachment of the residents. Emphasizing these features of public services and private investments will also contribute to the locals' place attachment attitude. In terms of the significant effect of place personality on residents' welcoming

attitudes, locals who describe the place as exciting, sincere, and competent show positive attitudes towards tourists and tourism. In this context, the excitement, sincerity, and competence attitudes of the locals should be reinforced and the awareness of the locals about tourism should be increased. In terms of the effect of place attachment on residents' welcoming attitudes, increasing locals' place attachment levels will also improve locals' positive attitudes towards tourism and tourists. "Consciousness of a resident of Istanbul" should be developed in order to increase the locals' attitude towards place attachment, and various activities should be organized to reinforce this awareness. In addition, some investments should be made on infrastructure and superstructure, recreation facilities, and measures to increase the quality of life of the locals should be taken and arrangements should be made regarding recreation areas where the locals can spend time together. Fair conduct should be ensured between locals and tourists in accessing resources in the city, and a win-win strategy should be created in the interaction between locals and tourists.

In Istanbul, as a well-branded city, both tourism planners and destination management organizations need to make efforts to encourage emotional solidarity between tourists and locals. In this regard, interactions between locals and tourists should be encouraged through special events, and social distance should be reduced. Such special events can be held in historical and cultural areas specific to the destination, or within accommodation establishments. Through these activities, common values and behaviors can be created between locals and tourists. As a result, to ensure the sustainability of tourism in Istanbul, the personality characteristics of the local people, their self-concordance and their commitment to the destination should be taken into account, and emotional solidarity between the local people and the tourists should be encouraged in this regard. These incentives will positively affect the hospitality attitude of the local people towards tourists and contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in the destination.

Limitations and Future Research

For this study, which was carried out in Istanbul during the COVID-19 pandemic, convenience sampling method in which everyone who responded to the survey was included in the sample was used as the data collection method. However, the data obtained by simple random sampling method has a higher ability to represent the population. Therefore, future studies can use simple random sampling method for this research model. In addition, future studies can also examine this conceptual model in terms

of demographic variables such as age, income, occupation, gender, family size. Also, dramatic results can be obtained from the data to be collected from the participants, especially those with and without tourism-related occupations.

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