



THE QUALITY OF LIFE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DESTINATION BRAND LOYALTY AND DESTINATION BRAND VALUE

Abstract

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Purpose – This study explores how perceived quality of life in a destination—specifically environmental and social dimensions—is related to destination brand loyalty and brand value. The local population plays a key role in shaping and sustaining a strong destination brand through their lived experiences.

Methodology/Approach – A survey was conducted from December 2023 to February 2024 with 217 residents from two tourist destinations in Split-Dalmatia County. Destination brand equity was assessed through brand loyalty and brand value, while quality of life was measured via environmental and social factors. The analysis also considered demographic differences based on gender, education level, and location.

Findings – Both environmental and social quality of life are significantly and positively related to destination brand loyalty and brand value. Gender differences emerged with environmental quality relating to loyalty among females more strongly than males. Educational background and location also moderated perceptions of brand value.

Originality – Set against the backdrop of rising tourism pressure and overtourism, this study offers new insights into how residents' quality of life is related to destination branding. By examining micro-locations, it emphasizes the importance of context and demographic variation in shaping brand perception, offering a more resident-centered perspective to destination management.

Keywords destination brand loyalty, quality of life, destination brand values, local population, tourist destination.

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INTRODUCTION

The tourism experience emerges through the dynamic interaction between tourists, local residents, and service providers, shaped largely by subjective perceptions and social constructs (Petrić & Pivčević, 2016; Rudan, 2012). Increasing attention has shifted from a focus on economic growth to the Quality of Life (QoL) of host communities, recognizing residents as essential stakeholders in tourism development (Nopiyanı & Wirawan, 2021). The interdependence between the quality of a tourist destination and residents' subjective QoL is well documented (Lipovčan et al., 2014; Hu et al., 2024), with enhanced tourism offerings benefiting both visitor satisfaction and local QoL (Bornioli et al., 2022).

Local residents are not merely passive observers of tourism development, but active co-creators of the destination experience and destination brand loyalty and value (Uysal et al., 2020). Their daily interactions with the environment and visitors, coupled with their perceptions of tourism's impact, fundamentally shape the destination's authenticity and appeal (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2015). Empirical evidence shows that residents' support for tourism is closely tied to perceived personal benefits, community engagement, and awareness of tourism's social impacts (Pavlić et al., 2015). Positive resident attitudes, in turn, are crucial for sustainable tourism development, as they foster sociocultural and environmental benefits that improve the community's living environment (Yu et al., 2018). Previous studies (Andereck et al., 2007; Suhartanto et al., 2020) highlight how residents' support and emotional connection to location are deeply rooted in their perceived quality of life. When residents perceive tourism as enhancing their living conditions, they are more likely to support branding efforts, adopt positive attitudes, and contribute to a favourable destination image (Caldwell & Freire, 2004; Freire, 2009). Thus, a resident-centred approach is essential in developing sustainable and resonant tourism strategies.

Consumer-based brand equity plays a central role in shaping tourists' loyalty and perceived value of a destination (Keller, 1993; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Brand loyalty and brand value are not formed solely through marketing efforts but emerge from tourists' holistic evaluations of what they gain from a destination experience versus the costs incurred (Wang et al., 2017; Lassar et al., 1995). Emotional connections, memorable experiences, and the perceived authenticity of a place are all crucial dimensions that strengthen consumer loyalty and perceived value. Integrating resident perception into destination development thus not only improves local quality of life but also enhances consumer-based brand equity, creating a feedback loop where satisfied residents and satisfied visitors reinforce each other (Trueman et al., 2007; Zanfardini et al., 2011; Ruiz-Meza et al., 2022). From the demand-side perspective, positive and memorable tourist experiences contribute significantly to consumer-based destination brand equity, particularly through increased destination attachment and satisfaction (Guleria et al., 2024). These outcomes underscore the mutual reinforcement between resident quality of life and tourist loyalty (Chen & Gursory, 2001).

The local population, with its traditions and culture, constitutes a primary resource of the destination and a key element in differentiating it from competitors (Freire, 2009). Local residents' perceptions of their own destination exert a substantial influence on the construction and perception of the destination's brand (Caldwell & Freire, 2004). The authenticity of the destination experience, rooted in the local way of life, is gaining increasing importance for tourists (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2015). Consequently, valuing tourism's contribution to enhancing the QoL of local residents becomes a critical determinant of the tourist destination brand value (Cornell et al., 2019). Understanding and respecting the perspectives of the local population is therefore paramount for successful tourism development that fosters the well-being of all stakeholders.

This research, therefore, addresses two key questions: *How is the quality of life in tourist destinations related to the destination brand loyalty and perceived brand value? And how do local residents' perceptions of QoL shape consumer-based destination brand equity?*

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The literature with proposed hypotheses is described in the next section, which is followed by methodology and data section. Results of the least square regressions are presented in the results section, while conclusion with managerial and policy implications and limitations of the study is depicted at the end of the paper.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The concept of Quality of Life (QoL) has evolved into a multidimensional construct that transcends physical and economic dimensions, incorporating social, cultural, spiritual, and political aspects of human existence (Manohar, 2016). Within this expanded framework, QoL serves as a critical indicator not only for individual well-being but also for assessing national prosperity and social progress (Rojulai et al., 2018). Lepage (2009) situates QoL within psychological paradigms as a comprehensive indicator of global living conditions, while Dolnicar et al. (2011) emphasize its holistic scope, encompassing mental, social, and physical health dimensions.

In tourism studies, QoL has become a pivotal analytical lens, often operationalised through metrics such as subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness (Ivlevs, 2017). Marans (2015) integrates both objective and subjective measures in urban QoL frameworks, while Moser (2009) highlights the dynamic interplay between individual perceptions and environmental conditions. According to Hu et al. (2024) tourism-related QoL studies focus on subjective composite models that examine the direct and indirect effects of tourism on residents' daily lives and well-being. These models are valuable in understanding the implications of tourism development and provide insights into residents' attitudes, satisfaction, and support for tourism.

QoL is also strongly linked to community support for tourism development, a prerequisite for long-term tourism sustainability (Rojulai, Aminudin, & Anuar, 2018; Kim et al., 2013). Bornioli et al. (2022) and Tovar and Lockwood (2008) highlight that well-managed community-based tourism improves resident QoL. Similarly, Nopiyani and Wirawan (2021) report that tourism provides sociological benefits by improving local infrastructure and amenities, contributing to higher communal well-being. Mamirkulova et al. (2020) stress that sustainable tourism infrastructure is key to enhancing host community QoL, particularly through investments in mobility, green spaces and public services.

Empirical evidence supports the positive relationship between perceived tourism benefits and residents' life satisfaction (Manohar, 2016). Kim (2002) and Santos-Júnior et al. (2020) suggest that these benefits may affect satisfaction across different life domains, such as material well-being, cultural pride, and social engagement. In particular, residents involved directly in tourism activities are more likely to perceive improvements in their economic circumstances and overall QoL (Woo et al., 2018). While indirect beneficiaries also report gains, perceptions can differ significantly based on demographics, destination characteristics, and tourism's maturity stage (Nopiyani & Wirawan, 2021). Early-stage tourism development often generates positive perceptions, while more advanced stages may yield mixed or negative evaluations (Jeon et al., 2016). Seasonal variation also plays a role, with peak tourism periods sometimes perceived as economically beneficial but socially disruptive. Kim et al. (2013) and Andereck and Nyaupane (2010) argue that understanding the nuanced interplay between tourism and QoL is essential to address concerns around health, safety, cost of living, and environmental degradation.

Residents' perception of tourists' connection to their quality of life depends on demographics. Studies have found correlations between factors such as income, ethnicity, and employment in tourism and the way residents evaluate personal and community-level benefits. Andereck and Nyaupane (2011) observed that older residents were less likely to view tourism as improving QoL, while higher-income individuals reported more favourable perceptions. Similarly, Snaith and Haley (1999) found that long-term residents and property owners often showed strong place attachment and a balanced view of tourism appreciating its economic and socio-cultural contributions while expressing concern over environmental degradation and shifts away from traditional livelihoods. Importantly, high QoL does not always equate to unconditional support for further tourism growth, underlining the need for participatory and sustainable tourism policy. However, there remains a notable gap in understanding how the relationship between QoL and destination brand value and brand loyalty differs depending on gender and educational level, a gap this study aims to address.

Tourism policies are increasingly framed around QoL indicators to ensure that development is aligned with community expectations (Santos-Júnior et al., 2020). Positive perceptions of tourism and increased QoL among residents can enhance long-term destination competitiveness by generating local support and fostering a hospitable atmosphere. This reinforces the importance of branding strategies that include local perceptions as a core component (Ruiz-Meza, Sotaquirá & Montoya-Torres, 2022).

Hypothesis 1: Quality of life is positively related to destination brand loyalty.

Sánchez-Teba et al. (2019) assert that negative perceptions of tourism among residents can damage loyalty to a place and decrease the community's willingness to support tourism development. Place loyalty as a concept rooted in pride of place, emotional connection, and personal investment, is a precursor to broader destination brand loyalty. Jurišić et al. (2019) find that higher brand awareness and favourable perceptions increase loyalty among both residents and tourists. According to Jurišić (2018), emotional connections and local participation in tourism initiatives contribute to stronger brand identification. López-Sanz et al. (2021) argue that loyalty is essential to sustainable rural tourism, where community satisfaction and destination image are key determinants of repeat visitation and advocacy.

Hypothesis 2: Quality of life is positively related to destination brand value.

High-quality tourism experiences are strongly associated with increased destination loyalty, particularly in niche tourism such as gastronomy, wellness and rural tourism. Hernández-Mogollón et al. (2020) demonstrate that gastronomic experiences enhance satisfaction and brand loyalty while Campón-Cerro et al. (2020) find that wellness tourism boosts subjective well-being and long-term destination attachment. Nasir et al. (2022) develop a model in which perceived value and emotional attachment mediate the relationship between QoL and loyalty. Suprina et al. (2024) reinforce this, showing that perceived value plays a central role in the QoL–loyalty link.

Despite the richness of this literature, most studies focus on tourists' perceptions, leaving a research gap regarding the resident perspective. While Alves et al. (2019) and Suprina et al. (2024) provide valuable insights into how satisfaction and value mediate loyalty, they often exclude local populations or treat them as secondary stakeholders. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how residents' perceptions of QoL is related to both destination brand loyalty and brand value.

Hypothesis 3: There exist differences in the perception of the local population of the quality of life on destination brand loyalty based on gender, age, destination, and educational level.

Destination brand loyalty is essential for sustaining tourism flows and ensuring a positive destination image. Yoon and Uysal (2004) note that loyalty involves a visitor's intent to return, make positive recommendations and promote the destination. However, residents also play a crucial role in shaping loyalty outcomes by influencing tourist experiences, supporting infrastructure, and contributing to the overall ambiance. Studies by Gursoy et al. (2004) suggest that welcoming local communities can significantly boost tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. Resident involvement in tourism governance further enhances loyalty by fostering a sense of ownership and emotional attachment (Andereck et al., 2005).

Kim et al. (2013) argue that residents with higher QoL are more likely to advocate for their destination, provide authentic cultural interactions, and contribute to sustainability. Sánchez-Teba et al. (2019) add that improving local well-being strengthens the emotional and economic ties between residents and their locale, reinforcing brand value and loyalty.

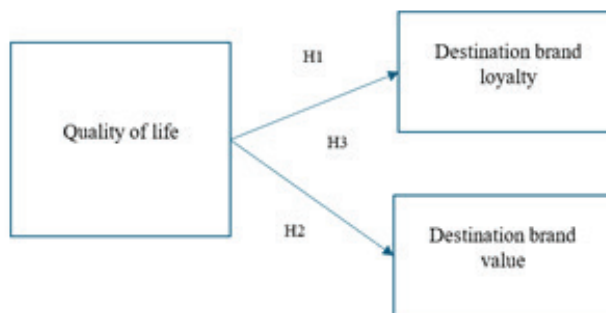
Within tourism marketing, loyalty is categorised into tourist loyalty, place/destination loyalty and destination brand loyalty (DBL) (Suprina et al., 2024). Tourist loyalty reflects behavioural intentions, while place loyalty captures long-term attachment to a geographical area (Gilboa & Herstein, 2012). Destination brand loyalty, in contrast, represents the cumulative effect of satisfaction, brand image, and value perceptions (Li et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). From a branding standpoint, Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) provide foundational models, with the former positioning brand loyalty as a key component of brand equity, and the latter seeing it as an outcome of positive brand associations and experiences.

Destination brand value (DBV) is typically assessed through tourists' perceived utility relative to the costs of their experiences (Wang et al., 2017; Suhartanto et al., 2020). This "price–utility" model aligns with consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) frameworks that emphasize consumer perception and memory (Keller, 1993). In tourism, Boo et al. (2009) adapt this model to assess brand equity using loyalty and value as key indicators. Konecnik and Gartner (2007) were among the first to extend this to destination branding, incorporating perceived quality, image, and awareness into a multidimensional structure.

Recent studies extend these models to resident populations. Zanfardini et al. (2011) and Trueman, Cornelius, and Killingbeck-Widdup (2007) point out that when destination branding efforts disregard local perceptions, they risk creating imbalances between demand and supply, weakening the authenticity and sustainability of the brand.

In conclusion, enhancing QoL among residents contributes not only to social well-being but also to the sustainability and strength of the destination brand. This study builds on the existing literature by examining residents' perceptions of QoL and how these are related to destination brand loyalty and brand value across different demographic groups.

Figure 1: Proposed model



Source: Authors' representation

2. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This study pertains to data collected in the period between December 2023 - February 2024 by a hospitality and gastronomy student for the purpose of her final thesis. The student also lives in Makarska, a well-known coastal tourist destination in Croatia. The study of Croatian coastal destinations is significant due to significant investments in tourism infrastructure and the continuous increase in the number of visitors. These cities rely on tourism as the basis of development, and the constant expansion of accommodation capacities, transport networks and cultural offerings increases the competitiveness of the destination. Consequently, there is a growing need to examine the relationship between the quality of life of the local population and consumer-based brand equity. The study was done by means of a structured questionnaire survey through Google forms platform posted on social media pages of the two tourist destinations, Makarska and Omiš, using a convenience sampling method in order to obtain the highest possible number of responses. Although the drawbacks of this type of sampling include non-random selection leading to the potential bias responses, the purpose of this study was exploratory with respect to inferring the possible differences without making generalizations to the entire tourism sector in the area, but examining the opinions of the working age population. Two similar tourist destinations, Makarska and Omiš, counting 13.301 (47% male and 53% female; 73% with elementary and secondary school and 26% obtained higher education; 21% age 19 or younger, and 28% being 60 or older) and 14.139 (50% male and 50% female; 77 % with elementary and secondary school and 20% obtained higher education; 21% of age 19 or younger and 29% of age 60 or older) people respectively (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), with industries oriented towards tourism, are on the coast of Split-Dalmatia County, and both hold the largest share of overnight stay in the county after the city of Split. A total of 217 respondents filled in the questionnaire survey. The respondents are the local population from both cities of all ages (Table 1. Characteristics of the sample).

Table 1: Sample characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	59	27.19%
	Female	158	72.81%
Age	Younger than 18	7	3.23%
	19 - 24	56	25.81%
	25 - 29	49	22.58%
	30 - 39	59	27.19%
	40 - 49	28	12.90%
	50 - 60	14	6.45%
	older than 60	4	1.84%
	Location	Makarska	130
Omiš		87	40.09%
Education	Elementary or secondary school	103	47.90%
	University	113	52.1%

Source: Authors' calculation.

2.1. Dependent variables

The survey measured two different brand items: destination brand loyalty and destination brand value, both pertaining to a location; hence their name was subsequently altered. The measurement of destination brand loyalty and destination brand value is according to scales developed by Boo, Busser and Baloglu (2009) and Liu et al. (2015). Brand loyalty is defined by Aaker

(1991), who characterizes it as the brand's attachment to the customer. When referring to a destination or place, brand loyalty would be the consumer's choice where to travel (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007). This paper examines the perception of the local population and their loyalty to the tourist destination in which they live. According to Lassar et al. (1995), consumers' decision regarding a brand is affected by how well they consider a product's price and utility are balanced. By Aaker (2012), an effective way to gauge a brand's worth is to ask consumers if they agree that a certain brand offers better value for the money than its competitors or if there are any compelling reasons to choose one over the other.

Destination brand loyalty is measured by a 4-item of destination brand loyalty scale using an ordinal scale with answers ranging from 1- "I do not agree" to 7 "I completely agree". One component was extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1 using varimax rotation. The study proceeded with principal axis factoring, i.e., confirmatory factor analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.87, Bartlett's test of sphericity' χ^2 was 849.51 (d.f. = 6, p - value = 0.00). All communalities were greater than 0.80. Total variance explained was 86.43%, while the reliability test using Cronbach's alpha was 0.95.

Destination brand value is measured with a 5-item ordinal scale. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.90, Bartlett's test of sphericity' χ^2 was 945.11 (d.f. = 10, p - value = 0.00). All communalities were greater than 0.78. Total variance explained was 80.84%, while the reliability test using Cronbach's alpha was 0.94.

2.2. Control variables

Several control variables were used in the study that might have an effect on the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Firstly, respondents' *gender* might influence respondents' loyalty and perceptions of quality. Gender can affect the answers because most of the respondents are women. Secondly, loyalty and perceptions of quality could differ depending on *age* of the respondents, because most of the respondents are from the younger population who have not yet achieved self-sufficiency or live with their parents, so they do not have a realistic perception of the costs and quality of life, but can observe from the perspective of a student. Respondents were asked to identify their age according to the following categories: (1) 19 – 24, (2) 25 – 29, (3) 30 – 39, (4) 40 – 49, (5) 50 – 60, and (6) older than 60 years old (Table 1). Thirdly, *location* of residence can impact the relationship between quality and destination brand loyalty or quality and destination brand value as the data were collected from two different tourist destinations, Makarska and Omiš. Fourthly, *education* is used as a control variable as differences in respondents' educational level might affect their perception of quality or their loyalty to specific location. Namely, respondents with higher educational attainment that live and work in the two tourist destinations, might be more loyal to a specific location. Respondents were asked about the highest level of educational attainment based on two categories: (1) elementary or secondary school, or (2) university (Table 1).

2.3. Independent variables

Quality of life. *Quality of life* is measured with 11 item ordinal Likert scale whose values ranged from 1 – "I do not agree" to 7 – "completely agree". Principal component analysis was firstly conducted. Two components were extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1 and using a rotated score coefficient matrix with varimax rotation. Component 1 consists of items 1-5 and component 2 of items 6-11. Confirmatory factor analysis was done by using the principal axis factoring on each component. For component 1 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.83, Bartlett's test of sphericity' χ^2 was 861.94 (d.f. = 10, p - value = 0.00). All communalities were greater than 0.48. Total variance explained was 68.96%, while the reliability test using Cronbach's alpha was 0.91. Component 2's Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.80, Bartlett's test of sphericity' χ^2 was 398.40 (d.f. = 15, p - value = 0.00). All communalities were greater than 0.30. Total variance explained was 42.09%, while the reliability test using Cronbach's alpha was 0.81. All tests confirmed the suitability of both first order latent constructs to be used in the study. As the first factor referred to quality of life from the environmental point of view, and the second factor from the social point of view, the first factor was named Environmental Quality of Life and the second factor Social Quality of Life.

In order to assess quality of life (QoL), this study draws on well-established multidimensional frameworks commonly applied in tourism research. One of the most influential models is that of Andereck and Nyaupane (2010) which evaluates QoL across key dimensions including community well-being, urban challenges, lifestyle, community pride and awareness, cultural and natural preservation, and recreational amenities. Building on this foundation, Liang and Hui (2016) introduced an expanded Tourism Quality of Life (TQoL) scale by incorporating the domain of personal and family well-being, reflecting cultural adaptations in the Chinese context. Similarly, Jeon, Kang, and Desmarais (2016) conceptualised QoL in terms of satisfaction, accounting for both the beneficial and adverse impacts of tourism, consistent with the framework developed by Andereck et al. (2007). Additionally, Felce and Perry's (1995) general model categorizes QoL into five core domains: developmental activity, social well-being, emotional well-being, material conditions, and physical health.

In the current study, QoL is operationalised based on residents' perceptions of tourism's positive socio-cultural and environmental impacts, following the indicators outlined by Andereck et al. (2007). This approach aligns with prior tourism research while contributing to the ongoing refinement of QoL measurement by situating the concept within a specific local context and exploring its relationship with destination brand value and loyalty.

3. RESULTS

Data obtained through the means of questionnaire survey were standardised because of the different scales used in the survey, and analysed with the statistical software package SPSS. Table 2 presents the results of the descriptive analysis.

Table 2: **Descriptive statistics**

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	S.E.	Kurtosis	S.E.
Destination brand loyalty	0.00	0.98	-2.48	1.03	-0.71	0.17	-0.50	0.33
Destination brand value	0.00	0.97	-1.58	2.45	0.50	0.17	-0.12	0.33
Environmental quality of life	0.00	0.97	-2.64	1.02	-0.95	0.17	0.01	0.33
Social quality of life	0.00	0.91	-2.30	1.74	-0.41	0.17	-0.33	0.33
Gender	0.00	1.00	-1.63	0.61	-1.03	0.17	-0.94	0.33
Age	0.00	1.00	-1.83	2.60	0.41	0.17	-0.39	0.33
Education	0.00	1.00	-2.05	2.47	0.46	0.17	-1.18	0.33
Location	0.00	1.00	-0.82	1.22	0.41	0.17	-1.85	0.33

Note: N = 217. S. D. = standard deviation. S. E. = standard error. *** p - value < 0.001 ** p - value < 0.01 * p - value < 0.05 † p - value < 0.1
 Source: Authors' calculation.

Results of the descriptive analysis illustrate that it is possible to proceed with further analysis ($\mu = 0$, S.D. ≈ 1). Cross-correlations are presented in Table 3. Correlations between variables are measured with the Person correlation coefficient.

Table 3: **Cross-correlations**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Destination brand loyalty	1							
Destination brand value	0.49***	1						
Environmental quality of life	0.62***	0.38***	1					
Social quality of life	0.57***	0.51***	0.49***	1				
Gender	0.20**	0.01	0.05	0.11	1			
Age	0.08	-0.08	-0.03	-0.13	0.07	1		
Education	-0.08	0.02	0.01	-0.04	-0.03	-0.08	1	
Location	-0.04	0.00	-0.01	-0.04	0.04	0.14*	0.06	1

Note: N = 217. *** p - value < 0.001 ** p - value < 0.01 * p - value < 0.05 † p - value < 0.1
 Source: Authors' calculation.

Statistically significant correlation exists between loyalty and: (a) values, (b) environmental quality of life, (c) social quality of life; and (d) gender on one side; and values and: (e) environmental quality of life, and (f) social quality of life on the other side (Table 3). None of the control variables are statistically significantly correlated with neither dependent of independent variables, apart from gender with destination brand loyalty. It is interesting to note that location is statistically significantly correlated with age.

Tables 4 and 5 depict the regression analysis whose dependent variables are destination brand loyalty and destination brand value respectively.

Table 4: Regression analysis between environmental QoL and social QoL and destination brand loyalty

	Destination brand loyalty						
	M1	M2 (male)	M3 (female)	M4 (secondary)	M5 (university)	M6 (Makarska)	M7 (Omiš)
Control variables							
Gender	0.13** (0.05)			0.15* (0.07)	0.11† (0.06)	0.12† (0.07)	-0.12† (0.07)
Age	0.12* (0.05)	-0.04 (0.14)	-0.01 (0.07)	0.07 (0.06)	0.19* (0.08)	0.13† (0.07)	0.13* (0.07)
Education	-0.06 (0.05)	0.08 (0.13)	0.01 (0.07)			-0.03 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.06)
Location	-0.04 (0.05)	0.02 (0.13)	0.02 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.07)		
Independent variables							
Environmental QoL	0.45*** (0.06)	0.23 (0.14)	0.15† (0.08)	0.52*** (0.08)	0.39*** (0.08)	0.45*** (0.08)	0.45*** (0.08)
Social QoL	0.37*** (0.06)	0.44** (0.16)	0.46*** (0.09)	0.29*** (0.08)	0.45*** (0.09)	0.29** (0.09)	0.47*** (0.08)
ANOVA (p-value)	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
R2	0.51	0.26	0.29	0.55	0.49	0.40	0.67
Adjusted R2	0.50	0.19	0.27	0.53	0.46	0.38	0.65
Durbin-Watson	1.58	1.48	1.99	1.90	1.93	1.60	1.65
Largest VIF	1.36	1.30	1.44	1.40	1.37	1.28	1.53
N	217	59	158	104	113	130	87

Note: *** p - value < 0.001 ** p - value < 0.01 * p - value < 0.05 † p - value < 0.1

N = 217. Standard errors in parentheses. All regression equations include a constant. M1 is a general model. M2 is a sample of male and M3 of female respondents, M4 respondents with secondary education and M5 include a sample of male respondents, while M6 and M7 distinguish between respondents from two different locations: Makarska and Omiš respectively.

Source: Authors' calculation.

Table 5: Regression analysis between environmental QoL and social QoL and destination brand value

	Destination brand value						
	M1	M2 (male)	M3 (female)	M4 (secondary)	M5 (university)	M6 (Makarska)	M7 (Omiš)
Control variables							
Gender	-0.04 (0.06)			-0.03 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.10)
Age	-0.02 (0.06)	0.11 (0.11)	0.13* (0.06)	-0.11 (0.08)	0.11 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.10)
Education	0.03 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.06)			0.00 (0.07)	0.06 (0.09)
Location	0.02 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.09)	0.05 (0.08)		
Independent variables							
Environmental QoL	0.17* (0.07)	0.55*** (0.11)	0.41*** (0.07)	0.26** (0.10)	0.09 (0.10)	0.18* (0.09)	0.14 (0.11)
Social QoL	0.46*** (0.07)	0.37** (0.12)	0.37*** (0.07)	0.37*** (0.10)	0.55*** (0.11)	0.39*** (0.10)	0.53*** (0.12)

ANOVA (p-value)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
R2	0.28	0.52	0.49	0.31	0.29	0.23	0.35
Adjusted R2	0.26	0.48	0.47	0.27	0.26	0.20	0.31
Durbin-Watson	1.85	1.48	1.69	1.88	1.98	1.96	1.69
Largest VIF	1.36	1.30	1.44	1.40	1.37	1.28	1.53
N	217	59	158	104	113	130	87

Note: *** p - value < 0.001 ** p - value < 0.01 * p - value < 0.05 † p - value < 0.1

N = 217. Standard errors in parentheses. All regression equations include a constant. M1 is a general model. M2 is a sample of male and M3 of female respondents, M4 respondents with secondary education and M5 include a sample of male respondents, while M6 and M7 distinguish between respondents from two different locations: Makarska and Omiš respectively.

Source: Authors' calculation.

Regression analysis presented in Table 4 illustrates the positive and statistically significant relationship of both environmental and social quality of life on one side and destination brand loyalty on the other side (H1). There are no statistically significant differences in the level of education or location of respondents on the relationship between either quality variables, environmental or social QoL and destination brand loyalty. However, there is a slight difference in the relationship between environmental QoL on one side and destination brand loyalty depending on gender. In the sample of female respondents' environmental QoL is statistically significantly associated with destination brand loyalty at a 10 percent significance level while it is not statistically significantly associated with destination brand loyalty in the sample of male respondents.

The relationship between environmental and social QoL on one side and destination brand value on the other side is statistically significant and positive. There is a difference in educational level and location on the relationship between environmental QoL and values. Environmental QoL is statistically significantly associated with destination brand value in the sample of respondents with secondary education as the highest level of education attained while they are not significantly associated in the sample of respondents with higher education. Similarly, in the sample of respondents from Makarska, environmental QoL is statistically significantly associated with destination brand value, while in the sample of respondents from Omiš environmental QoL is not statistically significantly associated with destination brand value.

The obtained results create a space for further research in this area. Regression analysis (Table 4) describes that both environmental and social qualities are statistically significantly associated with the loyalty to a destination, thus confirming Hypothesis 1. This provides empirical support for the proposition that a higher level of environmental and social quality results in stronger destination loyalty. The results confirm Hypothesis 2 since the relationship between environmental and social quality of life on one side, and destination brand value, on the other side, is statistically significant and positive. Quality of life is not only connected to visitor loyalty but also shapes the perception of destination brand value. The results partially confirm Hypothesis 3 as they confirm differences in the perception of quality of life among certain demographic groups but not in all expected dimensions (e.g., age did not show a significant effect).

3.1 Discussion

The empirical findings of this study substantiate the theoretical linkage between perceived quality of life, particularly its environmental and social dimensions, and destination brand loyalty. Regression results confirm that both environmental and social quality of life are statistically significantly and positively associated to destination brand loyalty (supporting Hypothesis 1), a result consistent with earlier work by Andereck et al. (2007) who emphasised the role of perceived tourism benefits in shaping residents' attitudes. These findings affirm that residents' lived experiences, rooted in environmental integrity and social cohesion, are integral to how they relate to and support the branding of their community as a tourism destination. Unlike prior research, which largely examined resident attitudes as a by-product of tourism impacts, this study places residents at the core of brand loyalty formation, framing their quality of life as an active driver rather than a passive outcome.

Hypothesis 2 is also confirmed, as both environmental and social quality exert a significant and positive relationship with destination brand value. This aligns with Liang and Hui's (2016) expanded Tourism Quality of Life (TQoL) model, which includes personal and family well-being as vital factors in assessing tourism's value. Their findings, particularly in urbanizing areas where homeowners express concerns about environmental degradation, resonate with the present study's results: community members who perceive higher environmental and social quality tend to ascribe greater value to the destination brand. Hence, the quality of life is not just a passive outcome of tourism development but an active determinant of brand perception and destination commitment. This research advances the literature by empirically linking residents' subjective well-being to brand value metrics—an area previously underexplored in the context of place-based branding.

Furthermore, the analysis offers partial support for Hypothesis 3. While broad demographic variables such as age and education are not consistently related to the perceptions of quality or loyalty, some subgroup-specific effects emerged. Gender, in particular, was found to moderate the relationship between environmental quality of life and loyalty. Among female respondents, environmental quality of life is significantly related to brand loyalty at a 10% significance level, while no such effect was

found among male respondents. This finding echoes Pasaco-González et al. (2023) who observed that female tourists report higher levels of satisfaction and perceived quality, indicating greater environmental sensitivity or affective engagement with the destination. However, this study adds new insight by identifying this sensitivity not among tourists, but among female residents, thereby expanding gender-based loyalty research to include host communities.

Additional demographic differences were observed in the relationship between environmental quality of life and destination brand values. For respondents whose highest education level was secondary school, environmental quality of life is significantly associated with destination brand value, whereas no such relationship was found among those with higher education. Similarly, location played a varying role: in Makarska, environmental quality is positively associated with destination brand values but in Omiš, this effect was not statistically significant. These location-based differences mirror Snaith and Haley's (1999) findings that residents with property rights and stronger place attachment, particularly in longer-established tourism communities, are more likely to assess tourism's impact in nuanced terms, valuing economic benefits while also expressing concern about environmental and cultural changes. By comparing two geographically and culturally proximate towns this study provides rare intra-regional evidence of how spatial and socio-educational variation mediates the impact of perceived quality on destination brand outcomes.

Interestingly, no other control variables, neither age, education, nor employment status, demonstrated significant correlations with destination brand loyalty or destination brand value variables, apart from gender. This aligns with Rohman's (2020) research on adventure tourism which found demographic factors such as gender, marital status, and origin were largely irrelevant in predicting tourist loyalty, suggesting that psychological processes and value alignment may outweigh demographic traits in shaping behavioural outcomes. Yet, unlike Rohman's tourist-focused work, this study's resident-based approach offers a grounded understanding of how local identity and quality perceptions intersect with destination branding in a lived community context.

Hence, the importance of contextual and demographic variation should not be overlooked. Monteiro and Borges (2015) observed that satisfaction with tourism events was significantly higher among older, married, educated, and employed visitors. Similarly, return visitors reported greater satisfaction, an indirect marker of subjective quality of life and long-term emotional investment in a destination. While such patterns were not uniformly present in this study, they underscore the potential for future research to further unpack how socio-demographic characteristics interact with evolving perceptions of tourism's benefits. This study's novelty lies in its shift away from event-specific or tourist-return satisfaction metrics, focusing instead on resident-rooted perceptions of place and value in everyday life.

Taken together, the findings confirm that quality of life dimensions, especially environmental and social QoL are central to shaping both loyalty to the destination and the perceived value of its brand. While the effects of demographic variables are not universal, the nuanced differences across gender, education level, and location highlight the importance of locally tailored, community-inclusive branding strategies. This study contributes to the broader literature by empirically modelling the relationship between subjective quality of life and destination brand loyalty, moving beyond traditional tourist-centric loyalty frameworks to consider the central role of resident perspectives in sustainable tourism development. In doing so, it offers a novel resident-centric brand equity model that positions quality of life not only as a community outcome but also as a strategic branding asset.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the relationship between residents' quality of life in a tourist destination and key destination brand equity dimensions, namely destination brand loyalty and destination brand value. Specifically, it posits that an enhanced quality of life among residents contributes to increased destination brand loyalty and value. For this purpose, an online questionnaire survey was administered between December 2023 and February 2024, and the collected data were analysed using the statistical software package SPSS. The results of the analysis revealed that environmental quality and social quality exert a positive and statistically significant relationship with both destination brand loyalty and destination brand value. Subsequent regression analyses conducted on various respondent subsamples indicated slight differences in the perception of destination brand loyalty based on gender. Specifically, environmental quality was found to be statistically significant at the 10% level in the female subsample but not in the male subsample. In contrast, subsamples differentiated by education level or location did not exhibit statistically significant differences in the perception of destination brand loyalty. Furthermore, the findings suggest that environmental quality is statistically significantly associated with destination brand value for respondents with secondary education but not for those with higher education, and for residents of Makarska but not for residents of Omiš.

In the theoretical part of the research, the scientific contribution of this paper is reflected in the established connection and relationship between the quality of life and the tourist destination brand measured by destination brand loyalty and destination brand value. The established empirical model determines the further development of the destination and provides specific guidelines for action. These findings contribute to complementing the theoretical models by empirically linking quality of life to brand loyalty and destination brand value. The majority of the previous models base loyalty solely on tourists' perceptions, whereas this study emphasises the role and importance of residents.

The applied contribution of the research is related to information that is useful for decision makers on the development of tourist destinations. In order to increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations, those responsible for the development

of tourist destinations as well as local tourist communities need to invest in destination brand loyalty. From the managerial perspective, local authorities governing the tourist destinations, marketing organisations, and local businesses can benefit from gender-sensitive policies, education-specific activities and strategies. These activities can then be tailored and communicated to specific residential groups to promote events designed for particular residents, to address potential sources of discontent among them, engage local communities in tourism infrastructure, thereby promoting sustainable cohabitation between residents and tourists. Several additional practical implications emerge. Firstly, residents' perspective, as key stakeholders, should be included into branding strategies. Namely, residents who perceive high environmental and social quality are more likely to support and promote the destination brand. Secondly, investment into environmental and social well-being should take a form of a branding asset as they influence positive brand perception and loyalty. This includes investments into: environmental sustainability (e.g., clean public spaces, green infrastructure) and social cohesion (e.g., inclusive community programs, local festivals). Thirdly, using QoL indicators as a signal to monitor brand strength. Finally, ensuring that all residents benefit from tourism development which could enhance collective efforts in brand promotion and reduce resistance to branding efforts.

The results of the study are interesting and have several practical implications. Firstly, it is interesting to note that while social quality of life is statistically significant in all samples, environmental quality of life's relationship with brand loyalty is only significant in the sample of female respondents implying greater awareness about the relationship between environmental quality of life and destination brand loyalty. Secondly, the relationship between the perception of the environmental quality of life and destination brand value is not statistically significant in the sample of respondents from Omiš and respondents with secondary education, whereby further qualitative studies should be made on the reasons for these differences. Instinctively, respondents with higher education should have greater awareness about the relationship between environmental quality of life and destination brand value and it is interesting to note that the rationale does not apply in the obtained sample of respondents. The practical implications of the research clearly indicate the need for community involvement in the development of tourism strategies and tourism policies that focus on improving the environmental and social dimensions of quality of life in order to improve the living conditions of the local population in a destination, which in turn leads to greater loyalty towards the destination.

There are several limitations of the study. Firstly, the study is confined to a sample of respondents obtained through the online survey using a convenient sampling technique. The results might be different if responses are collected at the provided locations and contain purposeful sampling that represents the structure of the population living in Makarska and Omiš. As mentioned above, the purpose of this study was exploratory aiming at making inferences about the possible differences in the working age population, which is the most represented in the sample. Secondly, the study is done in one period in time, during winter, which does not enable us to inspect the dynamics of these effects. Future studies should incorporate larger sample made on residents of various locations in Dalmatia and include differences in local infrastructure.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI GENERATIVE SOFTWARE

In preparing this paper, the authors used generative AI for improvement of readability of the paper and language editing. Following the use of this tool/service, the authors have reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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