



Attachment as a factor in generating satisfaction with, and loyalty to, rural tourism destinations

El apego como factor relevante en la generación de satisfacción y lealtad hacia los destinos de turismo rural

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Abstract

Place attachment has recently become a research topic of interest as a relevant concept in understanding some tourist behaviours. It is a relational concept based on cognitive and emotional connections with destinations, yet it has seldom been studied as a loyalty predictor. The objective of this research is to test the influence that attachment exerts on satisfaction with, and loyalty to, rural tourism destinations, through attachment's main dimensions: identity and destination dependence. The application of attachment to rural tourism is considered interesting because of the particular relationships that tourists establish with the associated environments. In addition, this field lacks causal studies related to marketing, to better plan, manage and commercialise these destinations and their companies. To test the theoretical model, a sample of data on 464 rural tourists was collected through an on-line survey. An analysis was carried out using a Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique through structural equation modelling. The results reveal that both destination identity and dependence are significant antecedents of overall satisfaction with, and loyalty to, rural tourism destinations, but destination dependence has a greater influence. The model shows a good capability to explain the endogenous constructs of overall satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: Attachment, satisfaction, loyalty, tourism destination marketing, rural tourism.

Resumen

El apego al lugar se ha convertido en un tema de investigación de interés en los últimos años, siendo un concepto relevante para comprender ciertos comportamientos turísticos. Se trata de un concepto relacional basado en conexiones cognitivas y emocionales con el destino, aunque su estudio como predictor de la lealtad ha sido escaso. El objetivo de este trabajo se centra en testar la influencia que ejerce el apego en la satisfacción y la lealtad hacia el destino de turismo rural, a través de sus principales dimensiones identidad con el destino y dependencia del destino. Se estima interesante su aplicación al contexto del turismo rural por las particulares relaciones que el turista establece con estos entornos. Además, en este ámbito se echa en falta un salto hacia estudios causales relacionados con el marketing para una mejor planificación, gestión y comercialización de estos destinos y sus empresas. Para testar el modelo se ha recogido una muestra de 464 turistas rurales a través de encuesta on-line. Su análisis se ha llevado a cabo con la técnica *Partial Least Squares* (PLS) para la evaluación de modelos de ecuaciones estructurales. Los resultados revelan que tanto la identidad con el destino como la dependencia del destino son antecedentes significativos de la satisfacción global y de la lealtad hacia los destinos de turismo rural, siendo la dependencia del destino la dimensión que mayor influencia ejerce. El modelo tiene una buena capacidad explicativa de sus constructos endógenos satisfacción global y lealtad.

Palabras clave: Apego, satisfacción, lealtad, marketing de destinos turísticos, turismo rural.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of place attachment has become a topic of interest within research on tourism marketing (Tsai, 2012). Recent studies on leisure and tourism have pointed to the importance of place attachment in understanding some leisure and tourism behaviours (Alexandris, Kouthouris & Meligdis, 2006). Place attachment can be defined as a relational construct that reflects visitors' cognitive and affective connections to destinations (Morais & Lin, 2010).

In past decades, rural tourism has attracted the interest of researchers and practitioners, due to its potential to foster the development of these environments and to accommodate new tourism demands (Kastenholz & Lima, 2011). Rural tourism, as a tourism phenomenon, has mainly

been studied in recent years because of the strong growth of this kind of tourism in countries like Spain. It is a multidisciplinary field of research of great interest that has witnessed a recent increase in qualitative studies. However, there is still a lack of causal studies, which are needed to improve planning, management and marketing of rural companies and destinations in order to face the challenges in this sector.

This study tested if place attachment affects satisfaction with, and loyalty to, rural tourism destinations. The specific characteristics of this kind of tourism make it necessary to research loyalty within this setting. Multiple micro-destinations and the diversity of rural accommodations produce such a wide and diverse offer that intention to revisit can be low. In this context, it is important to analyse the capacity rural tourism has to retain visitors by generating



place attachment, which can have both theoretical and practical repercussions for better sector performance.

Therefore, this study focuses on the influence place attachment has on satisfaction with, and loyalty to, rural destinations, through their main dimensions – place identity and dependence – given the specific relationships tourists develop towards the associated environments. The objective is to analyse the influence this construct has on satisfaction and loyalty in rural tourism settings, that is, tourists' intentions to return or recommend destinations. The resulting understanding could be used to maximise added value for destinations through these satisfied tourists.

This paper is composed of five sections. The first section focuses on introductory issues. The next section focuses on theoretical issues related to the concepts under study: attachment, satisfaction and loyalty, as well as an analysis of the relationships between them. Section three and four present the study's methodology and results, respectively. The last section presents the conclusions.

2. Relationships between place attachment, satisfaction and loyalty in rural tourism settings: research hypotheses

The study of relationships between people and places started to develop in the 70s, achieving extensive development in the last decade along several lines of research in social sciences. One of the most relevant among these lines of research is the study of peoples' attachment to places. In the last decade, these studies have focused on places that are not permanent residences, especially because of economic processes that have transformed rural places into leisure and tourism centres. Researchers have also studied the capacity of Western cultures to possess more than one residence and to travel (Lewicka, 2011). William and Vaske (2003) found that place attachment relates to affective and symbolic relationships that individuals establish with leisure resources. Along the same line, Yüksel, Yüksel and Bilis (2010) interpreted this as the process through which individuals form affective connections to places, in other words, feeling 'at home' – a sign of affective attachment to those place. Kil, Holland, Stein and Ko (2012) also state that place attachment generates an affective connection between people and environments, reflecting positive, negative or mixed feelings about relationships between people and places. Tsai (2012: 139) argued that 'place attachment refers to the emotional and psychological bonds formed between an individual and a particular place'. According to this author, researchers conceptualise place attachment in different ways, thereby generating discrepancies. The first discrepancy relates to construct dimensionality, including two or three dimensions, although there are also authors that propose only one dimension. The study presented in this paper follows William and Vaske's (2003) approach, which considers two dimensions: place identity, associated with emotional attachment, and place dependence, related to functional attachment. The second discrepancy, according to Tsai (2012), arises from causal antecedents. Some authors propose self-expression or lifestyle, others, physical environments or quality of interactions and results, and still others, tangible and intangible aspects of

destinations, such as physical environments, open-air activities, affective connections, social links and destination tradition. These theoretical discrepancies generate uncertainties in terms of the appropriate strategic measures to be implemented in order to foster place attachment.

The study of satisfaction has received great attention in marketing research, being loyalty its main consequence. Then, destination managers have to consider the maximization of satisfaction as a key element for tourism companies and destinations (Rey-Moreno, Medina-Molina & Ruffin-Moreno, 2013). Concerning satisfaction, it is necessary to strengthen efforts to analyse associated processes (Rodríguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008), since tourist dissatisfaction can lead to few recommendations of destinations (Rivera & Croes, 2010). This study adopts a broad vision of satisfaction. Chen and Tsai (2007: 1116) defined overall satisfaction with destinations as 'the extent of overall pleasure or contentment felt by the visitor, resulting from the ability of the trip experience to fulfil the visitor's desires, expectations and needs in relation to the trip'. Subsequently, Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur and Leistriz (2013: 95) defined it as 'the individual's subjective consumption evaluation that is based on all the elements associated with the experiences'. In summary, the concept includes all trip service encounters that generate satisfaction with tourists' experiences.

Currently, the search for innovative strategies and competitive advantages, such as loyalty, have become an essential task within highly competitive global market environments, as a strategy that stimulates benefits that emerge from re-visitation and recommendation (Fyall, Callod & Edwards, 2003; Shirazi & Som, 2011). Besides this, as Chen and Gursoy (2001) stated, it is necessary to understand how tourists become loyal to destinations and what determines their loyalty. These authors defined loyalty to destinations as tourists' perception levels of these destinations as recommended locations, pointing out that studies that consider re-visitation the only indicator of loyalty are incomplete. This is because sometimes tourists do not return if they are searching for new experiences in new places, even though they are still loyal to places they have visited before.

Loureiro (2010) found that rural tourism faces challenges in an ever more competitive market, in which it is in locations' interest to retain visitors, to guarantee the long-term success of tourism firms operating in rural destinations. Phillips et al. (2013) emphasised that encouraging repeated visits is the greatest challenge faced by rural destinations and that generating recommendations is one of the most important marketing tactics to attract new visitors. Therefore, place attachment as a predictor of loyalty has attracted researchers' interest in recent years (Yüksel et al., 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

Regarding the relationship between place attachment and overall satisfaction, Yüksel et al. (2010) and Prayag and Ryan (2012) verified the mediating effect of overall satisfaction between place attachment and loyalty/behavioural intention, measured through re-visitation and recommendations. From this, it is possible to establish H_1 and H_2 :

H1: Destination identity influences overall satisfaction with rural destinations.

H2: Destination dependence influences overall satisfaction with rural destinations.

According to Tsai (2012), place attachment to destinations may include a strong sense of security, trust, attraction, joy and personal identification. In this sense, it can be understood as a differentiation factor in tourism marketing that has a positive impact on loyalty. Empirical evidence has also been found in other studies, which supports the relationship between attachment and loyalty (George & George, 2004; Alexandris et al., 2006; Mechinda, Serirat & Gulid, 2009; Morais & Lin, 2010; Yüksel et al., 2010; Kil et al., 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Tsai, 2012; Chen & Phou, 2013) and allows us to establish H₃ and H₄:

H3: Destination identity influences loyalty to rural destinations.

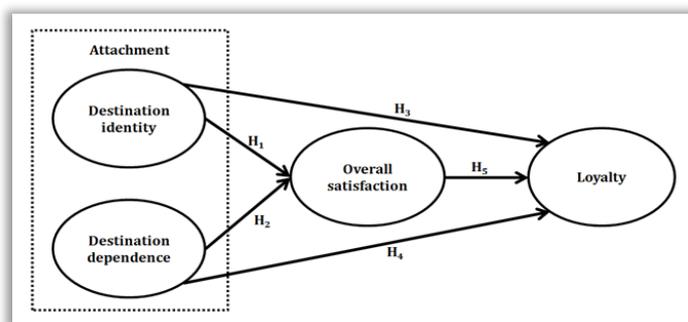
H4: Destination dependence influences loyalty to rural destinations.

The relationship between overall satisfaction and loyalty has been extensively verified in theoretical studies (e.g. Rodríguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Mechinda et al., 2009; Williams & Soutar, 2009; Rivera & Croes, 2010; Wang & Hsu, 2010; Žabkar, Brenčič & Dmitrović, 2010; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Forgas, Palau, Sánchez & Callarisa, 2012). This includes research within the context of attachment (Yüksel et al., 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2012), although it would be of interest to verify this relationship's importance within the context of rural tourism. Based on these researches, H₅ is formulated as:

H5: Overall satisfaction influences loyalty to rural destinations.

Figure 1 presents the theoretical model that will be tested in this study, which shows the concepts studied, as well as the hypotheses developed.

Figure 1 - Theoretical model



Source: Authors.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory research approach, using a quantitative on-line survey. To measure the constructs under study, scales already tested in other studies were adapted for the context of rural tourism. To measure the attachment construct's dimensions of place identity and place dependence, William and Vaske's (2003) scales were used. To measure overall satisfaction, we incorporated the contributions of Rodríguez del Bosque and San Martín (2008), Williams and Soutar (2009), Wang and Hsu (2010), Yüksel et al. (2010), Žabkar et al. (2010) and Forgas et al. (2012), as well as the indicators proposed by Tse and Wilton (1988) and Oliver (1997). For the study of loyalty, the scale proposed by Mechinda et al. (2009) was considered as it includes not only recommendation but also re-visitation -indicators considered core to measuring loyalty. The scales used in this study were validated and pretested by experts (i.e. teachers and researchers of several Spanish universities and professional experts in rural tourism, general tourism and marketing).

The current study was carried out in Spain, a country where rural tourism has experienced exceptional growth in recent years. A questionnaire was disseminated by e-mail, social networks, a web page and a blog, trying to create a snowball effect in the number of answers gathered. The universe of this research consisted of all individuals that experience

rural tourism at least once every three years, this being the first question of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was first pretested with a small subsample of 11 respondents in order to verify its accuracy. The data were gathered between April and June 2013, and the final sample is a convenience sample composed of 464 rural tourists.

Table 1 - Technical specifications of the empirical study

Universe	People who engage in rural tourism with some frequency (at least once every two or three years)
Scope	Spain
Data collection method	Online survey
Population size	Unknown
Sampling	Non-probabilistic convenience sample
Fieldwork	From 22 April to 18 June 2013
Valid responses	464 (completed questionnaires)

Source: Authors

The descriptive analysis used the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 21 software. In order to test the conceptual model, a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach to structural equation modelling was used, as it is deemed appropriate to use in exploratory studies with predictive objectives, as in this study (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011). Although PLS estimates the structural and measurement model simultaneously, they have to be interpreted and analysed in two steps, a process that ensures that valid and reliable measures of the constructs are obtained before establishing



conclusions about relationships among the constructs (Barclay, Higgins & Thompson, 1995). In the following section, the results obtained are detailed.

4. Results

With regard to the demographic characteristics of the sample, it is composed of 41.2% men and 58.8% women. By age, the most representative group is 'from 26 to 35 years' (53.9%). The age groups between 26 and 55 years cover 85.6% of the sample. With respect to the profile of these respondents as rural tourists, 49.8% practice rural tourism 'once or twice a year'. That means that half of the sample engages regularly in rural tourism. For this reason, this sample can be qualified as appropriate because of its level of interest and knowledge about this type of tourism. Next, the results of the theoretical model assessment are discussed.

4.1 Measurement model assessment

Models that use constructs with reflective indicators, as occurs in this study, must be evaluated respecting their reliability and validity. It is necessary to analyse indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2011). Indicator reliability assessment requires observation of the

loadings (simple correlations) of each indicator with its respective construct. The indicator can be accepted in its construct if it has a loading equal to or greater than 0.707 (Hair et al., 2011; Barclay et al., 1995), although loadings of 0.50 or 0.60 can be accepted in initial stages of scales development or when those scales are applied to different contexts (Barclay et al., 1995). The analysis in this study showed that the indicators have higher values than 0.707, with the exception of DD1 (0.656), DD6 (0.6768), OVS6 (0.6631), LOY1 (0.5686) and LOY2 (0.5881); however, the values are on the critical tolerance threshold. Internal consistency can be verified through composite reliability. Its value has to be between 0.60 and 0.70 in exploratory studies and between 0.70 and 0.90 for more advanced research stages (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Since the values found in our analysis range between 0.8587 and 0.9473, they are adequate. The assessment of convergent validity is realised through the average variance extracted (AVE). These values have to be above 0.5. This means that more than half of the variance of latent variables is explained by their indicators (Hair et al., 2011). All values for the AVE of each construct in this study were above of the proposed critical level. These results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Assessment of the measurement model

	Mean	Standard deviation	Loading	T-test*	Composite reliability	AVE
Destination identity (DI)	-	-	-	-	0.9473	0.7499
[DI1] I feel it is a part of me.	4.54	1.514	0.8609	48.5111	-	-
[DI2] It is very special to me.	4.71	1.473	0.8792	53.6459	-	-
[DI3] I identify strongly with it.	4.58	1.498	0.8865	55.7964	-	-
[DI4] I am very attached to it.	4.42	1.590	0.8986	73.535	-	-
[DI5] Visiting it says a lot about who I am.	4.56	1.530	0.8102	35.6582	-	-
[DI6] It means a lot to me.	4.56	1.586	0.8574	44.5834	-	-
Destination dependence (DD)	-	-	-	-	0.8646	0.5164
[DD1] It is the best place for practicing rural tourism.	5.56	1.223	0.656	25.1263	-	-
[DD2] No other rural tourism destinations can compare to it.	4.55	1.478	0.7362	25.5097	-	-
[DD3] I prefer to visit that destination to any others.	4.56	1.695	0.763	26.1122	-	-
[DD4] For me, it is more important to experience rural tourism there than in any other place.	4.44	1.781	0.7576	24.4378	-	-
[DD5] It is an unsubstitutable place.	4.59	1.836	0.7152	19.9276	-	-
[DD6] I don't enjoy the same experiences in similar places.	4.52	1.867	0.6768	18.2888	-	-
Overall satisfaction (OVS)	-	-	-	-	0.9401	0.7253
[OVS1] I have had a good experience.	5.77	1.051	0.8625	56.8317	-	-
[OVS2] I made a wise choice.	5.73	1.105	0.9036	81.3284	-	-
[OVS3] I found exactly the rural tourism destination that I was looking for.	5.44	1.191	0.8781	51.4115	-	-
[OVS4] I feel satisfied with my decision to visit it.	5.74	1.093	0.8944	63.2824	-	-
[OVS5] My expectations were fulfilled at all times.	5.50	1.146	0.8838	54.1199	-	-
[OVS6] I feel it is a close-to-ideal destination.	4.88	1.348	0.6631	17.7043	-	-
Loyalty (LOY)	-	-	-	-	0.8587	0.5562
[LOY1] I consider myself a loyal visitor.	4.70	1.625	0.5686	11.2251	-	-
[LOY2] I will visit it on my next rural tourism trip.	4.58	1.736	0.5881	12.8762	-	-
[LOY3] I will visit the destination again in the future.	5.43	1.390	0.8093	41.1022	-	-
[LOY4] I will recommend it to people who ask my advice.	5.94	1.159	0.8591	54.6	-	-
[LOY5] I will tell other people positive things about it.	5.99	1.112	0.8476	48.6996	-	-

Source: Authors.

*Critical t-values for a two-tailed test are 1.65 (significance level = 10%), 1.96 (significance level = 5%), and 2.58 (significance level = 1%) (Hair et al., 2011: 145).

The evaluation of discriminant validity was carried out by demonstrating that correlations between the constructs were lower than the square root of the AVE (Barclay et al.,

1995). The square root of the AVE is presented on the diagonal in bold in Table 3. This data confirmed that the model has discriminant validity.

Table 3 - Discriminant validity analysis

	Destination dependence	Destination identity	Loyalty	Overall satisfaction
Destination dependence	0.7186	0	0	0
Destination identity	0.6268	0.8660	0	0
Loyalty	0.6298	0.5306	0.7458	0
Overall satisfaction	0.579	0.5124	0.7041	0.8516

Source: Authors.

With this analysis, the measurement model could be verified as reliable and valid. It was then possible to continue with an assessment of structural model adequacy.

4.2 Structural model assessment

The steps followed to assess the structural model were an R² analysis for each dependent construct and an analysis of path coefficients' significance, using a bootstrapping procedure (Hair et al., 2011). The objective of structural equation modelling analysis with PLS is prediction, thus it is necessary to explain the variance of endogenous latent variables, specifically at the R² level. In marketing research studies, R² values of 0.75, 0.5 or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables are described as substantial, moderate or weak, respectively (Hair et al., 2011).

The model in this study has a weak to moderate explanatory capacity for overall satisfaction, because the model's predictors explain 37.2% of this construct. For loyalty, its capacity is moderate because its explained

variance reaches 57.6%. It is necessary to explain the level at which the predictor variables contribute to the explained variance of the endogenous variables. This is represented by the β coefficient, which collects the path coefficients (standardised regression weights). Each endogenous construct's explained variance in terms of another latent variable is given by multiplying the β coefficient by the correlation coefficient of both variables (Falk & Miller, 1992). The most influential factor in overall satisfaction is destination dependence, which explains 24.6%, while destination identity influences 12.6%. The relevance of both dimensions of attachment to loyalty has a similar level of impact. Destination identity has a slight impact in overall satisfaction, at 5.5%, with destination dependence achieving a value of 17.8%. The main antecedent of loyalty is overall satisfaction, which covers 34.4%, and it also engages attachment values because of this construct's performance as a mediator. Table 4 details the results discussed.

Table 4 - Effects on endogenous variables

	R ²	Direct effect (β)	Correlation	Explained variance
Overall satisfaction	0.372	-	-	37.2%
H ₁ : Destination identity→Overall satisfaction	-	0.2462	0.5124	12.6%
H ₂ : Destination dependence→Overall satisfaction	-	0.4247	0.5790	24.6%
Loyalty	0.5761	-	-	57.6%
H ₃ : Destination identity→Loyalty	-	0.1037	0.5306	5.5%
H ₄ : Destination dependence→Loyalty	-	0.2826	0.6298	17.8%
H ₅ : Overall satisfaction→Loyalty	-	0.4874	0.7041	34.3%

Source: Authors.

The analysis of path coefficients' significance, using a bootstrapping procedure, revealed that the proposed hypotheses are empirically supported (see Table 5).

Table 5 - Structural model results

Hypothesis	Path coefficient (β)	t-value (bootstrap)	Support
H ₁ : Destination identity → Overall satisfaction	0.2462***	4.6705	Yes
H ₂ : Destination dependence → Overall satisfaction	0.4247***	9.4959	Yes
H ₃ : Destination identity → Loyalty	0.1037**	2.4252	Yes
H ₄ : Destination dependence → Loyalty	0.2826***	5.93	Yes
H ₅ : Overall satisfaction → Loyalty	0.4874***	9.738	Yes

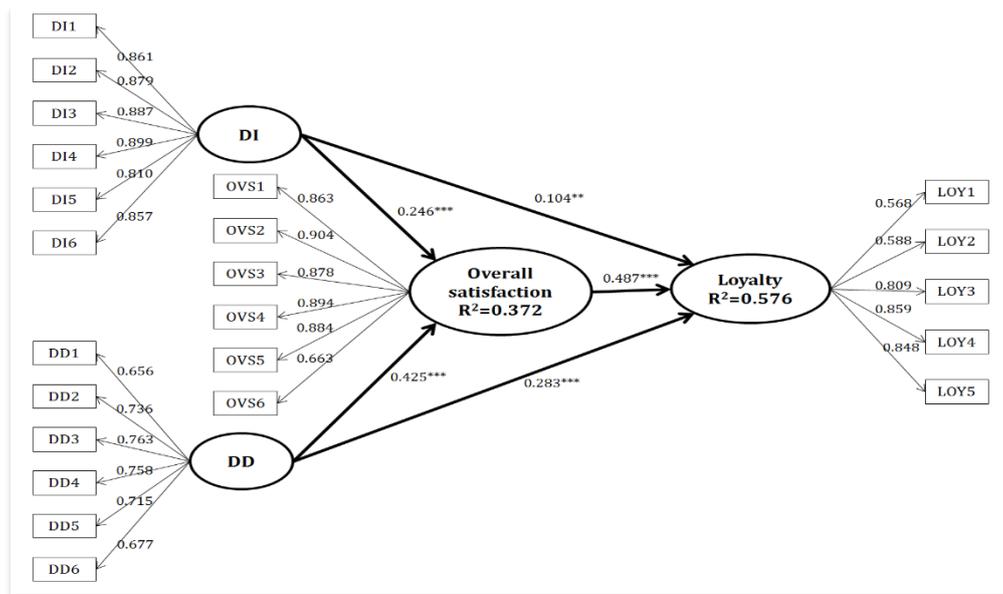
Source: Authors.

*Critical t-values for a two-tailed test are 1.65 (significance level = 10%), 1.96 (significance level = 5%), and 2.58 (significance level = 1%) (Hair et al., 2011: 145).

A graphic summary of the assessment of the proposed model is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 - Graphical results of model testing



Source: Authors.

4.3 Discussion of results

The analysis of the theoretical model proposed for this research indicated a good fit of the measurement model and support for the empirical hypotheses formulated. The H₁ and H₂ hypotheses represent the possible influence of attachment in overall satisfaction through the dimensions of destination identity and dependence. These hypotheses have empirical support, which is consistent with previous studies (Yüksel et al., 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Attachment can explain 37.2% of the variance of overall satisfaction, where destination dependence exerts a greater impact (24.6%) than destination identity (12.6%). The relationship between attachment and loyalty, namely the H₃ and H₄ hypotheses, produced statistically significant results, in accordance with other studies (George & George, 2004; Alexandris et al., 2006; Mechinda et al., 2009; Morais & Lin, 2010; Yüksel et al., 2010; Kil et al., 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Tsai, 2012; Chen & Phou, 2013). As a loyalty predictor, destination identity has little influence (5.5%), in contrast to destination dependence (17.8%). Regarding the relationship between overall satisfaction and loyalty towards rural tourism destinations, the H₅ hypothesis obtained empirical support in the context of rural tourism, a result consistent with a broad range of studies (e.g. Chi & Qu, 2008; Rodríguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Mechinda et al., 2009; Williams & Soutar, 2009; Rivera & Croes, 2010; Wang & Hsu, 2010; Yüksel et al., 2010; Žabkar et al., 2010; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Forgas et al., 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). In addition, the most important causal factor in loyalty generation is overall satisfaction, because the latter can explain 34.3% of the variance in loyalty, although it is evident that the direct effect of overall satisfaction on loyalty has to be added to the indirect effect of attachment on loyalty through overall satisfaction.

In summary, the obtained results support the structure of the theoretical model presented in this paper, where attachment in a rural tourism context explains 32.2% of overall satisfaction and 57.6% of loyalty variance for this

type of destination. The explicative capability of this model, which links attachment, satisfaction and loyalty in the context of rural tourism, is moderate.

5. Conclusions

This study sought to obtain an understanding of the importance of attachment in generating satisfaction with, and loyalty to, rural tourism destinations. After an evaluation of the model through a PLS technique, it can be asserted that the model has a moderate explicative capability for the endogenous constructs of overall satisfaction and loyalty, taking into account attachment as a predictor in the context of rural tourism destinations. This can be regarded as the main theoretical implication of this study. Moreover, attachment influences loyalty— both directly and indirectly – through overall satisfaction. For this reason, it can be affirmed that attachment is a relevant determinant of satisfaction with, and loyalty to, rural tourism destinations.

The theoretical implications of this study need to be considered in the management policies of tourism destinations, as well as in their strategies and actions, but these findings have to be adapted to specific kinds of destination (Rey-Moreno, Medina-Molina & Rufin-Moreno, 2014). Based on the endogenous resources of rural environments, managers can design different kinds of significant tourism experiences to attract and satisfy the rural tourist. However the question is how to successfully manage rural tourism products (Kastenholz & Lima, 2011). Therefore, regarding the practical implications of this research, attachment can be considered as a competitive advantage (Mechinda et al., 2009) for rural tourism destinations. As a result, it appears to be of interest to foster identity and dependence for these destinations. However, Alexandris et al. (2006) argued that place identity construction is more complex, due to its emotional implications. To promote destination attachment, the organisation of events is useful, in order to increase the participation of tourists and to create closer connections

with destinations (Alexandris et al., 2006; Mechinda et al., 2009). Rural tourism destinations can develop events linked to their history, cultures and natural heritage and landscapes. These periodically will encourage tourism flows, which would attach more people to the destinations through knowledge about, and enjoyment of, these places. This will promote repeated visits and recommendations. On the one hand, developing events related to local personalities, tastes and interests could foster destination identity. On the other hand, conducting ongoing activities in nature could favour place attachment, encouraging functional or dependence responses to activities that can only take place in these rural settings.

This paper has focused on a study centred on attachment, satisfaction and loyalty in rural tourism contexts. As a result, the most important limitations of this research could be not taking into account other variables such as emotions, authenticity, familiarity or novelty seeking. Thus, future studies need to focus on combinations of these variables. In short, researchers should continue to deepen the understanding of the determinants of satisfaction and loyalty for rural tourism destinations. In this way, it will be possible to enhance the profitability of the customer value offered by companies and rural tourism destinations, with important socioeconomic consequences for these areas.

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