

F.24. CULTURAL FOOD IDENTITY, PLACE ATTACHMENT, AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM SUPPORT: A CROSS-SECTIONAL ATTITUDINAL STUDY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract. Resident support constitutes a structural prerequisite for long-term tourism destination viability, yet the cultural and psychological determinants of this support remain poorly documented in post-Soviet, transitional-economy contexts. The Republic of Moldova — a country that has strategically invested in gastronomic heritage and wine routes as pillars of tourism development — has received no prior quantitative attention in the resident attitudes literature. This cross-sectional survey study addresses this gap by examining the attitudinal predictors of sustainable tourism support among urban Moldovan residents, with particular focus on cultural food identity, place attachment, pro-environmental worldview, and digital technology attitudes. Data were collected between April and November 2025 via a bilingual (Romanian and Russian) online questionnaire administered to adult residents of Moldova. A total of 182 valid responses were obtained (115 females, 63.2%; predominance of the 18–24 age cohort, 56.0%). Six psychometric instruments were administered comprising 48 Likert-type items rated on a seven-point scale. These instruments measured: (1) the Food Involvement Scale (FIS; 12 items), capturing personal relevance attributed to food purchasing and preparation; (2) the Traditional Products Attitudes scale (TPA; 12 items), a study-developed instrument assessing cultural identification with traditional food products, perceived quality, and trust in local producers; (3) the Place Attachment Scale (PAS; 6 items), operationalizing place identity and place dependence; (4) the Sustainable Tourism Attitude Scale (STAS; 6 items), measuring endorsement of responsible tourism development; (5) the New Ecological Paradigm scale (NEP; 6 adapted items), assessing pro-environmental worldview; and (6) the Digital Technology Attitudes scale (TECH;

6 purpose-built items), examining openness to digital and mobile platforms for heritage promotion. Open-ended responses regarding traditional product identification were analyzed via tokenization and diacritic normalization. Four scales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency (Cronbach alpha ranging from 0.862 to 0.909). NEP and TECH showed suboptimal reliability ($\alpha = 0.523$ and 0.574 , respectively), necessitating cautious interpretation. Mean scores were highest for STAS ($M = 6.39$, $SD = 0.92$) and PAS ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.24$), indicating near-universal endorsement of sustainable tourism and strong place attachment. Bivariate analysis with Bonferroni correction ($k = 15$ comparisons) revealed a densely interconnected cluster comprising TPA, PAS, FIS, and STAS, with the TPA–PAS correlation ($r = 0.647$) being the strongest in the dataset. NEP showed no significant association with food or place constructs, yet was positively correlated with STAS ($r = 0.285$), indicating a structurally independent ecological pathway to tourism support. Multiple linear regression ($N = 159$ complete cases; $R^2 = 0.500$; $F(7, 151) = 21.54$, $p < 0.001$) identified TPA as the dominant independent predictor of sustainable tourism support (standardized $\beta = 0.439$, $p < 0.001$), followed by PAS ($\beta = 0.215$, $p = 0.008$), TECH ($\beta = 0.153$, $p = 0.008$), and NEP ($\beta = 0.144$, $p = 0.011$). FIS was non-significant once cultural food identity was controlled ($\beta = -0.003$, $p = 0.967$). Gender and age did not independently predict STAS. Content analysis of open-ended responses identified a compact consensual culinary canon anchored by sarmale (stuffed cabbage rolls; 38.5%), mamaliga (cornmeal porridge; 33.0%), and placinte (filled pastries; 22.0%), with a sharp frequency drop beyond the fifth-ranked product. These findings provide the first quantitative evidence that cultural food identity and place attachment constitute the primary attitudinal infrastructure for sustainable tourism support in a post-Soviet context, with pro-environmental worldview and digital technology openness constituting structurally independent, additive motivational pathways. Destination management strategies anchored in gastronomic heritage are likely to generate stronger and more durable resident support than economically framed arguments. Future research should employ probability-based sampling, structural equation modeling to formally test mediation pathways, and psychometrically refined versions of the NEP and TECH instruments.

Keywords: sustainable tourism attitudes; cultural food identity; place attachment; New Ecological Paradigm; digital heritage promotion; Republic of Moldova.

Acknowledgments: The research was supported by Institutional Project, subprogram 020405 “Optimizing food processing technologies in the context of the circular bioeconomy and climate change”, Bio-OpTehPAS, being implemented at the Technical University of Moldova.