




Rural tourism and local authority satisfaction: Social, economic, and environmental effects

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ABSTRACT

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The research examines rural tourism and local authority satisfaction and its social, economic, and environmental effects. The Republic of Serbia, with its scenic surroundings and historical sites, offers enormous potential for the growth of rural tourism. In many respects, local government is essential to the expansion of tourism. The purpose of his study is to examine how owners' opinions of the social, economic, and environmental effects in rural tourism regions are perceived. The key issue of the paper is the measurement of the effects of local authority in rural tourism and the perception of rural tourism household owners about the dimensions of sustainable development. The research was conducted using the methodology of partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The data for the SEM analysis were collected from a questionnaire among the owners of rural tourist households in the Republic of Serbia. The questions for analysis focused on three components of sustainable development: economic, environmental, and socio-cultural, as well as their impact on satisfaction with local authorities expressed by the owners of rural tourist households. The findings of the research suggest that local self-government units should pay more attention to the economic dimension of the sustainability of rural tourism. This study is one of the first to quantify the impact of local government on rural tourism from the viewpoint of rural tourist household owners using the SEM-PLS approach. For academics and stakeholders in rural tourism, the study's results and conclusions have significant implications and opportunities for the future.

Contribution/Originality: This study is among the first to use the SEM-PLS approach to measure the effects of public administration in rural tourism from the perspective of owners of rural tourist households. The study's findings and conclusions offer important ramifications and future prospects for scholars and stakeholders in rural tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public services have always been in the sphere of interest of both the general public and the scientific body of thought. Numerous administrative reform projects have clearly linked preserving or reestablishing public trust in government to the need to increase citizen satisfaction with public service. However, very few public services have been researched in the domain of rural tourism, and it seems increasingly necessary to measure satisfaction in order to improve service. It is especially important to understand the entrepreneurs and investors in rural businesses because their values can influence the performance of this sector (Getz & Carlsen, 2000).

Over the past few decades, researchers and tourism practitioners have shown a growing interest in rural tourism. The owners of the homes engaged in rural tourism can enhance their offerings by carefully planning and selecting the best marketing and advertising campaigns, as well as by making the best investment decisions, with the aid of research on the subject. It is known that rural tourist households and employees who are predominantly of lower education (Dimitrovski, Todorović, & Valjarević, 2012) are in trouble when they face the public administration. In order to function and receive additional funds, it is necessary for them to apply and timely monitor all public policy flows related to their activity. The purpose of the public service for rural tourism is to support its growth and achieve rural rejuvenation (Xu et al., 2022).

Using different theories, like stakeholder theory and social exchange theory (Byrd, 2007; Jaafar & Rasoolimanesh, 2015; Nicholas, Thapa, & Ko, 2009), past research has looked at how locals feel about tourism growth, how involved they are in their community, and how much they support it. However, very few authors have investigated the relationships and perceptions of owners of rural tourism households (Bensemam & Hall, 2010; Dimitrijević, Ristić, & Bošković, 2022; Huang, Yang, Tuyến, Colmekcioglu, & Liu, 2022). Most researchers have focused on entrepreneurship in rural tourism (Işık et al., 2019; Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & Van Es, 2001) as well as the small and medium-sized businesses' significance in rural tourism (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Lerner & Haber, 2001; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011).

This paper uses the findings of a structural model to look at how satisfied people are with their local government in rural areas. It then looks at this experience from the point of view of people who own rural tourist homes. This paper aims to contribute to the very limited existing knowledge regarding satisfaction with local authority in rural areas from the perspective of owners of rural tourist households. Additionally, this paper aims to expand the scientific discussion of sustainability dimensions (economic, social, and environmental) on satisfaction with local authority. Bearing in mind all of the above, the main goal of the paper is to determine the links, as well as the strength and direction of links, between sustainable development and satisfaction with local authority in local self-government in rural tourist households. At the beginning of the research, the paper embarks on a theoretical background in order to define research hypotheses. Through the methodology section, the authors will clarify the population and sample, the selected research area, and the way to collect and instrument the research. In the empirical results section, we will present analysis and model fitting, structural equation modeling, and other important results. At the end of the paper, a conclusion will be specified with recommendations for future research expansion.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to Hall (2004) research, rural tourism frequently contributes to the stimulation of regional economic activity in both developed and developing nations. Given the unique development objectives, economic standing, and tourist resources of each nation, it is not surprising that the livelihood strategies chosen by rural households, along with the variables influencing these choices, vary significantly. Based on statistical data, the tourist industry contributes around 10% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and employs roughly 10% of the global workforce (UN WTO Tourism Highlights International Tourism Highlights, 2023). These figures are regarded as the sector's true economic effects. In Serbia, for example, tourism is a very important segment of the economy. By 2024, projections indicate that tourism revenue will reach \$744.00 million, exhibiting an expected annual growth rate of 5.7%. Rural tourism households with a capacity of 816 registered in Serbia have devised a means of ensuring the survival of tiny rural family residences and are contributing significantly to the social and cultural advancement of rural areas.

Gajić et al. (2019) recommend that the future development of rural tourism be reflected in the natural resources and landscapes of the rural community, but that support to rural households begin with public ownership, and the quality of the service provided is a current global issue. However, as pointed out by Ballesteros and Ramírez (2007) the positive economic impact of tourism depends on the involvement of the local community, its openness to

accommodation, and the degree of its permission to use natural and anthropogenic resources as a tourist attraction. The growth of tourism in rural areas may have a positive impact on several regional industries. The economic, social, and environmental components of tourism development can be regarded as evidence of this (Hassan, Salem, & Abdelmoaty, 2022). Additionally, tourism adds value to heritage sites, historic structures, and the performing and artistic arts.

Based on statistical data, the tourist industry contributes around 10% of global GDP and employs roughly 10% of the global workforce; these figures are regarded as the sector's true economic effects. In addition to these fascinating facts, the research findings confirm that the majority of people wish to benefit from the growth of the tourism industry. In this regard, it is stated that losses in rural tourism accounted for the majority of the losses to rural economies, and farming also turned out to be the root of the issue (Tchetchik, Fleischer, & Finkelshtain, 2006).

Owners of rural tourism establishments exhibit a binary perspective on sustainability, and they primarily link it to economic and environmental factors. As previously discussed in the theoretical framework (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011), we expect tourism to assist individuals in adopting sustainable environmental practices. Rural tourism, therefore, has a particularly significant role to play in this regard (Machado, Vareiro, Mendes, & Sousa, 2022).

According to Zhou (2021) rural tourism may stimulate the local economy while offering new ideas for development plans. This is particularly relevant in the age of the internet, technology, artificial intelligence, and the digitization of the construction industry. The impact of rural tourism on culture and society is specifically highlighted there. In order to strengthen the local economy and attract more visitors to rural areas, governments may provide funding for tourism-related projects that develop the facilities at popular tourist locations and gradually modify the way locals depend upon agriculture as their main source of income (Almeida & Machado, 2021).

The researchers of Popova, Popova, Kazanchuk, Bandurka, and Kyrieieva (2021) state that identifying elements that can favorably impact the region's growth is one of the most crucial goals and responsibilities of local self-government organizations. A very important tool for the positive long-term development of the region includes local self-government development strategies, with an emphasis on the social and economic importance of tourism (Anszperger, 2017). In addition, tourism is considered a chance for local economic development and community empowerment (Bačlija Brajnik & Rangus, 2022) and previous research shows that local administration plays a vital role in the development of tourism (Žibert, Rozman, Rangus, & Brumen, 2020).

Bearing in mind all the above, the authors believe that the issues of satisfaction of capital owners in the rural tourist household are very important for the further development of tourism in this area, both at the regional and national level.

This study also puts forth the following hypothesis in light of the previously indicated theoretical framework:

Hypothesis 1: The undertaken effects of economic measures positively affect the satisfaction with local authority of tourism in rural tourism.

Hypothesis 2: The undertaken effects of environmental impact positively affect the satisfaction with the local authority of tourism in rural tourism.

Hypothesis 3: Socio-cultural effects impact positively on satisfaction with the local authority of tourism in rural tourism.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Population and Sample

The Republic of Serbia will attract close to 2.13 million international tourism arrivals in 2023, with 160 thousand employees in the tourism industry (UN Tourism, 2024). In addition, the Republic of Serbia has been designated as one of the countries with a high potential for rural tourism (Dašić, Živković, & Vujić, 2020), and the most important factor seems to be the sustainability of rural tourism (Dimitrijević et al., 2022). In the researched region, over 800 tourist facilities were registered in the category of rural tourist households—the concept of accommodation and other tourist services in the countryside that shape the overall experience of tourism in a creative way (with a capacity of

2298 accommodation units and 5296 beds). The study included respondents-owners of rural tourist households in the Republic of Serbia.

3.2. Data Collection and Instrumentation

The survey included 11 items that evaluated four constructs alongside the typical inquiries about the home. There are seven different aspects of sustainability that are looked at in this study. The right number of questions (statements) are used to measure the economic impact (3 questions), sociocultural impact (2 questions), and environmental impact (2 questions) that affect satisfaction with local authority (3 questions). "I strongly disagree" is indicated by 1 on a Likert scale with five points, and "I strongly agree" is expressed by 5. The poll also includes six questions regarding the respondents' age, gender, and other demographic information. In view of the previous study findings by Sanchez del Rio-Vazquez, Rodríguez-Rad, and Revilla-Camacho (2019) the questions were modified.

The targeted number of respondents was a total of 132 rural tourist households, taking into account equal geographical distribution in the territory of the entire research region. The research team conducted the survey in the field and online using survey sampling. All answers were finally entered into the online questionnaire for data sorting and processing. The questionnaire was sent to 816 potential participants through various communication channels, including email, Facebook, Viber, and phone calls. Participants were informed that the research was voluntary and that a scientific publication would result. During the six-month survey, two more reminders were sent to participants who might not answer the questionnaire. Finally, 132 owners of rural tourist households filled out the questionnaire, out of 816 registered in January 2024.

Figure 1 presents the theoretical model of the study. It shows that satisfaction with local authority on rural tourism is measured by the impact of exogenous latent variables, namely economic impact, sociocultural impact, and environmental impact.

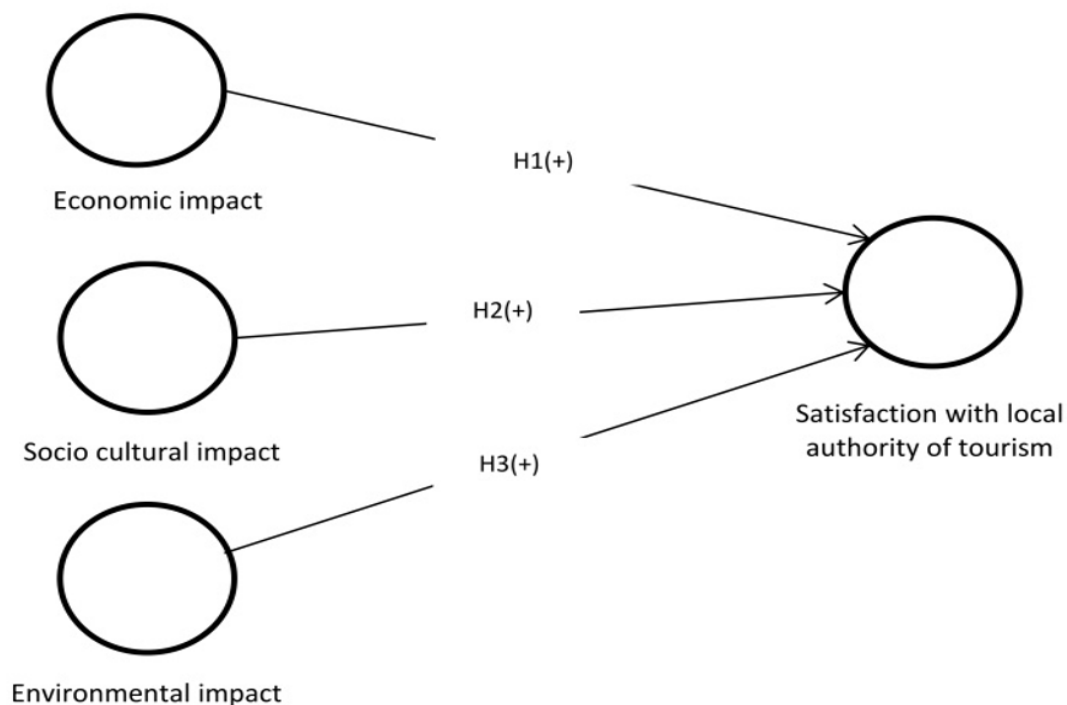


Figure 1. Research model.

The authors use the method known as PLS-SEM with the SmartPLS software to explore how social, economic, and environmental factors influence local authority in rural tourism. Despite the fact that this software and the previously described PLS-SEM method are frequently used in research, this study defines and approaches research

specific to the viewpoint of rural tourist household owners. The data was analyzed using IBM-SPSS statistics software version 25.0 and SmartPLS version 4.1.0.4. Descriptive statistics were used to make a profile of the people who live in rural areas and do tourism. Partially least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the theoretical model and the assumptions. There are, in fact, two phases to standard PLS model estimate research: (1) examination of the measurement model's validity and reliability and (2) assessment of the inner or structural framework (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016). A structural model is composed of latent variables and the conceptually or theoretically established connections that link them (Richter, Cepeda, Roldán, & Ringle, 2016). In accordance with Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2022) the measurement model looks at the relationships between variables and the indicators that go along with them.

3.3. Demographics

Among the surveyed 132 rural tourist households, most of them are registered as individual persons (130), while only one rural tourist household is registered as a legal entity and one in the legal form of an entrepreneur.

Among the 132 respondents, according to the gender that invests the most labor in the tourist household, 77 were men and 36 were women, while 19 of them declared that they were equally involved in the affairs of the rural tourist household. The largest number of respondents (60.6%) is between the ages of 41 and 64, followed by an equal percentage of those under 40 and over 65 (19.7%). A total of 56.8% of respondents had a high school diploma, while 34.8% had a college or other higher education. The majority of respondents have a medium capacity with 5 to 9 beds (47%), then a large capacity (10 or more beds) has 30.3% of respondents, while a small capacity (1-4 beds) has only 22.7% of respondents. The main activity in the field of rural tourism is characterized by only 24.2% of respondents, while for the remaining 75.8% of respondents, rural tourism is an additional economic activity. Out of all 816 respondents, 132 provided feedback based on their experience and satisfaction with local authorities in the field of rural tourism.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first and last hundred sets of replies were used in a series of t-tests on measurement items, as advised by Armstrong and Overton (1977). Table 1 shows the results, which show that the constructs used in the study were valid and reliable. This supports the robustness of the measurement model. For further analysis, the data are suitable. Factors having an eigenvalue greater than 1 and a factor loading greater than 0.4 were identified and extracted for this investigation (Liu & Yen, 2010). Additionally, reliability was shown by the Cronbach alpha value being higher than 0.6 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) result being above 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; HaronShafiee, Halim, & Ismail, 2023; Prayogo & Kusumawardhani, 2017).

Table 1. Construct reliability and validity.

Constructs	Indicators	Indicator loadings	Cronbach's alpha	rho_a	CR	AVE
Economic impact	E_1	0.538	0.615	0.995	0.760	0.522
	E_2	0.588				
	E_3	0.908				
Sociocultural impact	S_1	0.544	0.710	1.050	0.857	0.753
	S_2	0.995				
Environmental impact	EV_1	0.766	0.664	0.727	0.763	0.542
	EV_2	0.958				
Satisfaction with local authority in tourism	ST_1	0.589	0.693	0.709	0.768	0.506
	ST_2	0.894				
	ST_3	0.821				

In order to evaluate discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criteria was utilized (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The Fornell-Larcker criterion states that in order to demonstrate discriminant validity, a construct's AVE must be higher than its squared correlations with every other construct. A value of 0.65 or 0.88 has been determined to offer adequate proof of discriminant validity as a recommended criterion. The findings of the Fornell-Larcker criterion are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker).

Variables/Model consturcts	EI	SOCIAL	ENV	SATISF
EI	0.649			
SOCIAL	0.234	0.868		
ENV	0.340	0.580	0.736	
SATISF	0.412	0.570	0.709	0.711

Note: Economic impact (EI), Sociocultural impact (SOCIAL), Environmental impact (ENV), Satisfaction with local authority of tourism (SATISF).

The measurement model was found to have strong reliability and validity by showing high factor loadings, good Cronbach's alpha values, composite reliability values, and strong convergent and discriminant validity. This led to the estimation of the structural model. PLS-SEM's structural model (Figure 2) shows how different constructs in our study relate to one another.

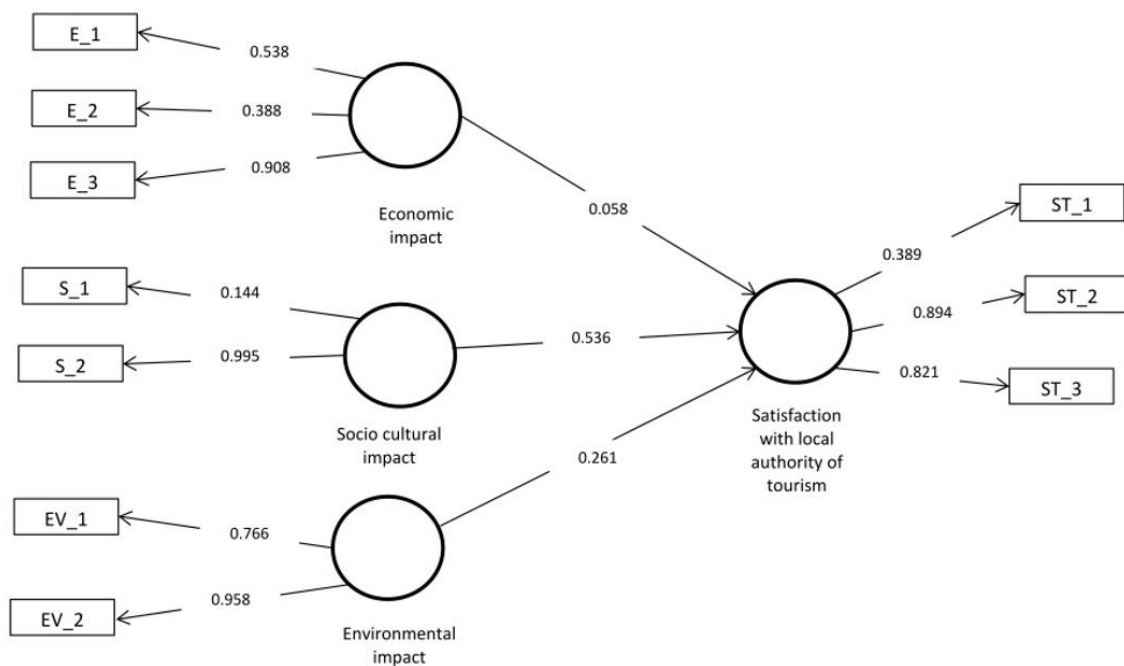


Figure 2. Structural model.

After the model's fit and validity were checked, Figure 2 shows the PLS-SEM model's preliminary results. The values of the regression coefficients were then calculated. The structural model in PLS-SEM (Figure 2) displays the relationships between several constructs in our study.

Based on the data in Figure 1, it is feasible to conclude that all regression coefficients are positive, as suggested by the study hypotheses. However, the relevant p-values for each regression coefficient must be calculated in order to test the hypotheses that have been stated. This procedure establishes the statistical significance of the generated coefficients. The results of the bootstrapping method are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Structural model assessment: Hypotheses testing.

Path	β	T	p	Support
H1: Economic impact -> Satisfaction with local authority of tourism	0.058	0.513	0.008	Supported
H2: Environmental impact -> Satisfaction with local authority of tourism	0.261	2.545	0.011	Supported
H3: Socio-cultural impact -> Satisfaction with local authority of tourism	0.536	4.595	0	Supported

This relationship chain shows a progression that leads from sustainable factors (economic, social, and environmental) to perceived satisfaction with local authority of tourism in (Rural Tourist Households) RTH.

All regression coefficients are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, according to the data displayed in Table 3. The author comes to the conclusion that H1 is true because the regression coefficient is positive (0.058), which shows that there is a link between the economic impact and satisfaction with the local government. In fact, these are questions related to the following points: *the possibility of paying off the investments of rural tourist households, the stimulation of the purchase and sale of food by local authorities, and the contribution to employment in rural tourist households.*

A significant regression coefficient (0.536) was found for the relationship between sociocultural influence and satisfaction with the tourism local authority, based on which it can be concluded that hypothesis H2 was confirmed. These questions related to *cooperation with employees in the local municipality or to the preservation of tradition and culture.*

The next relation that was tested was that between the environmental impact and the satisfaction with local authority of tourism. This instance likewise had a positive regression coefficient of 0.261, indicating that hypothesis H3 was supported, which is consistent with the findings of Hassan et al. (2022) and Martínez-Navalón, Gelashvili, and Saura (2020). The set of questions aimed to gather opinions from the owners of rural tourist households regarding the local self-government's concern for preservation of the environment and the level of involvement in this issue.

The literature frequently examines satisfaction as one of the factors influencing the attitudes and behaviors of tourists. In the domain of satisfaction of the owners of tourist households, the influence and strength of the relationship between three important sustainability variables and the satisfaction of local authorities in engaging in rural tourism was assessed. The set of questions that dealt with this latent variable refers to *satisfaction with the number of tourist visits, satisfaction with the possibilities of earning money from work in rural tourism, as well as satisfaction with the cooperation of local self-government and the promotion of rural tourism at the local level.*

All of the above points to the fact that the relationships between the mentioned variables are positive. However, the relationship between the economic impact and satisfaction with the local authority of tourism yielded the lowest regression coefficient (0.058). The above evidence was also confirmed by the authors of Tichaawa, Idahosa, and Nunkoo (2022) who showed that the highest level of satisfaction in tourism occurs at the local level and the lowest at the national level.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, all proposed pathways are validated, suggesting that the model's constructs are coherently linked and that the model as a whole has strong explanatory ability. Economic, social, and environmental dimensions positively impacted by satisfaction with local authority of tourism.

5.1. Outcomes for Policy Makers and Practitioners

The findings provide managers of rural tourism with insightful information and useful suggestions, particularly those who draft local and national tourism policy. It suggests that the owners of rural tourist houses will be satisfied if the rural tourism destination receives support in the areas of the economy, society, and environment, and vice versa. The literature provides ample evidence that rural tourism boosts the local economy (Milošević, Perić, & Škrbić, 2021; Nastić, Vujko, & Dragosavac, 2024; Pratt, 2015) and that these benefits are very quantifiable. In addition to the above,

the results of the economic, social, and environmental effects of the sustainability dimension in function of rural tourism also provide a critical review of future operations in times of crisis.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

The conducted research also has several limitations. Since, due to its character, the research was conducted in an ad hoc period, it does not provide a trend of monitoring changes in a longer time interval. Thus, increasing the research time range would increase the response rate, another limitation. It remains to be seen in the future what the trend of the movement of these variables will be, that is, whether the strength of the connection between the economic and social dimensions has become statistically stronger and stronger, which would be indicated by the higher values of the regression coefficients. This is particularly important for research in the future, bearing in mind that in 2024, the government of the Republic of Serbia activated the measure of economic support for rural tourism through the public call for grants for the development of rural tourism. This new strategy in tourism has opened up new chances and opportunities for rethinking tourism policy in the field of rural tourism.

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Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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