Article

Affective Dimensions of Compound Crises in Tourism Economies: The Intermountain Western Gateway Community of Nederland, Colorado

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Abstract: Affective economies align people and places according to identities and emotional capital, particularly during compound crises such as COVID-19. Through an embodied research approach, affect becomes an integral part of furthering knowledge production within crisis management to understand individual and community resilience. This research explores how affective dimensions express individual and community resilience as part of crisis and disaster management of tourism-based economies. We contribute knowledge of sustainable destination management in the context of intermountain western gateway communities (IWGCs) to center residents as primary stakeholders within conservation and resilience planning. The IWGC of Nederland, Colorado, is presented as a microcosm of change through which the lived experiences of residents during COVID-19 are analyzed. This approach embraces the potential of affective scholarship for conservation and destination planning through creative qualitative methods of inquiry. Within a crystallization methodology guided by a feminist new materialist epistemology, we incorporate residents' creative expressions to understand how affective dynamics influenced resilience throughout compound crises. Findings are presented via three themes including affective dimensions of resilience, identity, belonging and responsibility, and affective tourism economies. Affective knowledge centering resident experiences may inform future planning for crisis and disaster management across IWGCs and other gateway communities balancing tourism, conservation, and community planning.

Keywords: affect; crisis and disaster management; intermountain western gateway communities (IWGCs); resilience; identity; sustainable tourism; tourism and conservation

1. Introduction

Emotions affect us across spatial and temporal boundaries aligning individuals within social collectives that are mediated by changes within the tourism system [1–3]. The study and theorization of affect within tourism geographies critically explores ways of understanding complex, multi-scalar dimensions intertwining identities and places entrenched within tourism. Affective knowledge offers "researchers insights into how meaning is generated through subjectivities that are both individual and collective" ([4], p. 3). This paper engages affective processes through empirical research to explore resident identities and resilience processes within the intermountain western gateway community (IWGC) of Nederland, Colorado, in the United States, to critically inform sustainable tourism planning and conservation for gateway communities. Our study explores connections between an IWGC bordering national parks and protected areas, and the changing impacts of tourism during COVID-19.

Recent scholarship has explored affective phenomena within tourism economy power structures in the context of crisis and disaster management (CDM) [5,6]. This research defines crises as results from action or inaction during an event that creates damaging

impacts on people and/or a place [7]. A disaster may describe situations in which "an enterprise (or collection of enterprises in the case of a tourist destination) is confronted with sudden unpredictable catastrophic changes over which it has little control" ([7], p. 136). Within CDM, gateway communities hold deep knowledge regarding how living within tourism-based economies influences emotional and affective processes. This is significant for empirical examples of social, political, economic, and ecological dynamics of change during crises and disasters.

It is recognized that gateway communities require deeper representation within conservation social science research [8,9]. Stoker et al. (2021) distinguish IWGCs from other gateway communities as places of "150 to 25,000 people that are: (1) within 10 linear miles from the boundary of a national or state park or forest, major river or lake and (2) further than 15 miles from a census-designated urbanized area by road" ([9], p. 23). This description was originated within the scope of the United States, referring to the western side of the Cascade and the Sierra Nevada Mountain ranges. However, we offer this designation of IWGCs for consideration within a global context for gateway communities bordering parks and protected areas in different geographies.

IWGCs and gateway communities are microcosms of social–ecological issues across diverse geographies. These communities are stewards to diverse ecologically and culturally significant bioregions bordering their homes and livelihoods. While geographic factors uniquely shape issues faced by gateway communities, many have shared commonalities with tourism-based economies. This creates specific challenges for gateway communities who face these complexities "with limited staff, resources, and time" ([10], p. 3). Parks and protected areas in the United States have witnessed unparalleled and unexpected visitation since COVID-19 [11]. This justifies specialized focus in conservation and tourism research as this increased visitation impacts both residents and visitors due to millions of international and domestic visitors to IWGCs [9,10].

The presented IWGC study employs an innovative research design incorporating emotional and affective knowledges oriented from resident experiences. Previous research has incorporated resident experiences through mixed qualitative and quantitative methods such as interviews, surveys, and geographic mapping [12]. However, research investigating the affective dimensions of resident experiences during crises is needed to support growing calls for gateway community and outdoor recreation research focused upon resident quality of life [13]. As resident quality of life is entangled with global mobility and is impacted by the tourism system [5], the following research approach expands upon resident experiences through qualitative and affective methods of investigation. This contributes to filling the identified gaps in conservation social science and tourism research related to gateway communities. This research approach demonstrates the value for tourism and conservation scholarship regarding IWGC affective experiences during crises and disasters. Our findings reveal complex aspects of individual and community resilience as, "feelings rehearse associations that are already in place" ([2], p. 39).

Transdisciplinary critical and affective feminist scholars have furthered emotional and affective research within tourism and conservation by substantiating and progressing its strengths and validity [1,3,14]. D'Hautesserre (2015) describes affect as a relational "line of force, [or] a capacity to act" connecting individuals to social bodies as collectives with feelings in common ([14], p. 79). Emotions and affect in tourism have been found to aid the understanding of human engagements with tourism's power of worldmaking [15] through the synthesis of narrative and affect [16]. The capacity of tourism impacts within a place to produce affective environments [17] relates the temporal and spatial dimensions of tourism as contact zones of impressions [18]. This is evidenced within scholarship about dark tourism, volunteer tourism, and slum tourism showing that affective states and moods mediate "our engagement with the world" [16] (p. 68) [3,19,20]. An influential concept expanding within materialistic, affective, and critical tourism research is Ahmed's concept of affective economies [2]. This concept has been used to analyze how "emotions work to secure collectives" by aligning people with or against others ([16], p. 25).

Synthesizing transdisciplinary works with a careful selection of seminal resources, this research approaches *affect* as the capacity, movement, and intra-actions of emotions, cognition, feelings, and their effects between people, spaces, places, and objects. Furthering this critical and affective movement, our research identifies and addresses gaps of affective scholarship within CDM for sustainable tourism planning from IWGC residents' perspectives. Research has incorporated affect theory in response to the onset of crises such as COVID-19 [5,21,22]. However, empirical data derived from residents of mountainscape tourism geographies are needed to robustly understand the social, systemic, and economic dependency shaping the relationships between tourism and IWGCs during crises and disasters [9,23]. In response, this research addresses gaps in tourism scholarship by centering the embodied knowledge and experiences of Nederland residents through material and intangible manifestations of affect elicited during compounding crises of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Location and Context

The town of Nederland is a small, remote, mountain town 17 miles west of Boulder, Colorado, positioned as a gateway to popular parks and protected areas including Rocky Mountain National Park and Eldora Mountain Resort. IWGCs bordering parks and protected areas of the Western United States mountain regions received record visitation and tourism impacts during COVID-19, disproportionate to the rest of the United States [9,10,23]. Within the gap of resident-centered experiences within CDM in tourism, IWGCs specifically lack inclusion and representation, signaling a need for mountain community contexts in research. Akin to many other gateway communities, Nederland has experienced significant changes through the commonality of a tourism-based economy influencing compounding crises and disasters of the COVID-19 pandemic [5,24]. Nederland residents lived and adapted through imbricated health, social, political, environmental, and economic crises, and disasters. Therefore, we extend critical and affective research in tourism and conservation through an embodied research design by exploring changes experienced by Nederland residents through discursive and affective methods.

Building across 43 interviews providing empirical accounts of Nederland residents and 300 secondary sources, this research positions affective ways of knowing within an embodied approach to qualitative inquiry embracing that "affects, emotions, and senses cannot be divorced from the body" ([25], pp. 11–13). Designed to explore resident experiences during mobility limitations and health precautions of COVID-19, this research investigates the affective dimensions of information communication technologies (ICTs) as they influence social and political dynamics of change during crises and disasters. This approach informs a research design through a crystallization methodology in which creative genres are included as methods of eliciting resident knowledge to conceptualize and interpret affective dimensions of individual and community resilience during crises and disasters [26]. Positioned within a feminist new materialist paradigm, affect becomes a tool guiding critical, qualitative methodological exploration of resident experiences during crises and disasters. Our analysis posits that by conceptualizing tourism-based economies of gateway communities as both affective and touristic constructs, the ways in which emotions "do things" within tourism dynamics may inform sustainable CDM and tourism planning.

The rise of crises and resilience-oriented research since the onset of COVID-19 has presented conservation social science and tourism scholarship opportunities to further critical and affective scholarship [27]. The lived experiences of Nederland residents particularly hold embodied knowledge that is strongly situated to meet calls and agendas of the tourism academy seeking research designs capable of addressing planning and development issues in tourism planning through resiliency frameworks [9]. These contributions to knowledge fill gaps maintained within affective literature, resiliency, and CDM in tourism by centering Nederland residents' perceptions, knowledge, and lived experiences during the height of COVID-19. Our research utilizes critical qualitative and affective methods of inquiry

eliciting robust knowledge to support proactive planning in many gateway community types throughout future uncertainty, crises, and disasters.

2. Materials and Methods

The following section details the philosophical positioning of the research informing the development of a crystallization methodology. Our epistemological foundation, methodological approach, and methods were chosen to construct a research design capable of furthering critical and affective knowledge in tourism to explore the experiences of Nederland residents during COVID-19.

2.1. Epistemological Foundation

This research orients within a feminist new materialist paradigm, which questions relationality in everyday life, objects, affects, agency, ways of thinking, and the power imbued within materiality and relationality between more-than-human life [28]. This philosophical lens draws from the study of being and becoming—a strong realm of interpretation in the study of change influenced across multi-level systemic change experienced locally by Nederland residents. Feminist new materialism recognizes human researchers as one aspect amidst other active materials behind the practices and products of sociocultural processes and relationships [29]. New materialist governance paradigms in recent tourism research have been suggested to guide participatory and resilient forms of governance for resident communities of tourism destinations drawing from new materialist scholarship [30]. Overlapping with philosophical tenets of feminist new materialist and ecofeminist-posthumanistic research [5], these ideologies in tourism are well situated to focus upon expressions and reactionary phenomena of emotion as a platform advocating for purposeful change [1]. Therefore, a feminist new materialist epistemology positions affective literature, methods, and thinking to critically conceptualize individual and community resilience of Nederland residents during COVID-19.

### 2.2. Methods of a Crystallization Methodology

This research guides the exploration of affective spaces, or contact zones of impressions [2], through embodied narratives by eliciting discursive and affective forms of resident data. This research applies multi-scalar thinking to relationships within tourism economies utilizing critical qualitive methods including arts-based inquiry. Arts-based research has helped to expand human dimensions of natural resources research to situate lived experiences within complex social–ecological topics [31]. A crystallization methodology was chosen for this research design, defined by Ellingson (2009) as qualitative projects incorporating thick, complex representations of meanings behind phenomena, with one artistic or creative analytic approach, researcher reflexivity, as well as understanding knowledge as "situated, partial, constructed, multiple, embodied, and enmeshed in power relations" (p. 10). Crystallization places particular emphasis upon utilizing multiple genres of writing or mediums of art as part of science, explicitly refuting assumptions of an art/science divide [26]. Therefore, the following methods detail the application of a crystallization methodology to achieve the aim of this research. Our crystallization methodology was comprised of different methods including semi-structured, in-depth interviews [32,33] complimented by fieldnotes [34], and a collection of over 300 secondary sources (e.g., local music, authors, news, and social media). Crystallization methodologies emphasize creative or artistic genres within data collection to provide greater depth in understanding complex phenomena. Each method supports the purpose of this research by eliciting rich, qualitative data encapsulating resident experiences during COVID-19.

Fieldwork was conducted within a 7-month period from March to September of 2022 after obtaining IRB approval receiving determination as exempt status research (protocol #3146). Research reflections relating to interviews, field visits, and emerging findings were documented via journaling throughout fieldwork [35]. Therefore, data sources included a diverse array of creative and artistic expressions, described by McNiff (2015) as "an

incremental building process of responsive acts" ([36], p. 12). Artistic, creative genres of data collection included residents' creative expressions such as art, writing, photography, or music. Creative expressions of resident experiences during COVID-19 were elicited during interviews, and within secondary source collection.

In total, 43 residents participated (22 women and 21 men) choosing to meet in-person or virtually based on availability, comfort, and health concerns. Residents self-identified their cultural heritage resulting in 41 residents identifying as White/Caucasian, one identifying as Native American, and one as European/Indian. This resulted in 86 hours of interviews and the collection of over 300 secondary sources. Thematic saturation, determined as finding less than 5% of new information compared to an initial sample of interviews, was met within the 16th and 17th interviews [37]. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter AI. Transcripts were edited for accuracy providing significant time with each participant's interviews to revisit and organize notes, build codes, and identify major themes [38]. Edited transcripts, notes, recordings, and all secondary sources were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA, for effective organization, coding, and annotating across a large database of diverse source types. The reflexive thematic analysis process grew through collection, familiarity, analysis, reflection, and abductively drawing between emic and academic sources [39]. Through multiple iterations and cycles of the reflexive thematic analysis process, a codebook was developed organizing groups of codes under major themes with example excerpts from interviews and secondary sources.

The study findings were organized into three major empirical themes, which are illustrated in Figure 1. This research design meets the objective of this research and fills multiple gaps in the present knowledge by positioning a crystallization methodology employing affective methods to explore expressions of individual and community resilience within an affective tourism economy during crises and disasters from the residents' perspectives.
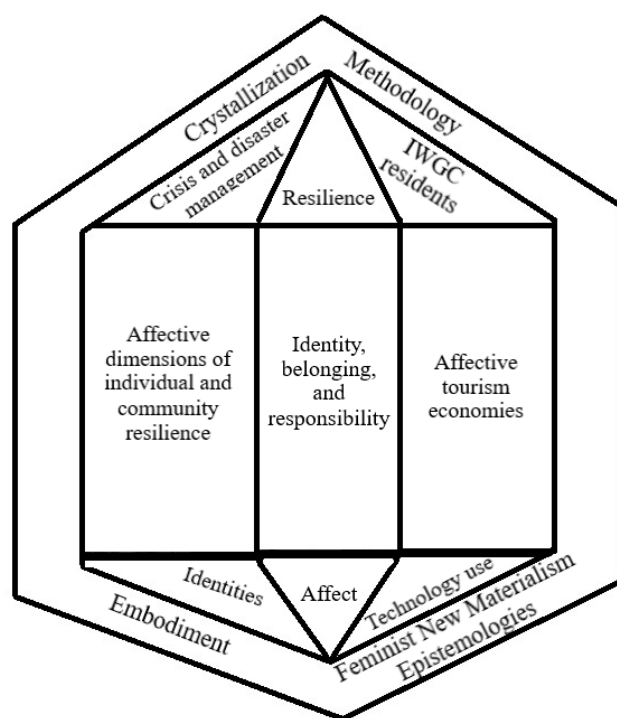
Figure 1. Crystallization figure of empirical themes (source: authors).

3. Results

Three themes are presented as major findings of this research, demonstrating the importance of conceptualizing affective components of resident perspectives within community-centric planning for tourism, conservation, and protected area management. These findings support and build upon the need for resident-centered methods to inform community-

based tourism planning for unique tourism geographies such as IWGCs and other communities bordering amenity-rich areas. The following three themes presented below include (a) affective dimensions of resilience, (b) identity, belonging, and responsibility, and (c) affective tourism economies.

3.1. Affective Dimensions of Resilience

Residents were given space to reflect upon complex and emotional meanings of places and life in Nederland during COVID-19 through interview excerpts, local art, and creative outlets including resident-only online communities. These expressions built rich and complex understandings of individual adaptation and behaviors for well-being [40], situated within community-level engagement utilizing resources to engage processes of resilience [41]. This was represented within the theme *affective dimensions of resilience*, demonstrating affective and emotional mediation of individual residents collectively building community resilience to processing internal and external changes. This theme specifically identifies affective dimensions of community resilience in response to compound crises and disasters impacting multi-scalar relationships within Nederland. Our reflexive thematic analysis through crystallization of multiple genres of empirical data identified salient themes of resilience. These empirical themes provided deeper descriptions and meaning through resident interviews, artistic expression, and publicly available documentation such as town hall meeting notes. Expressions of affective dimensions of resilience were identified through the coding of residents' emotional associations with places, people, and adaptive processes during COVID-19.

Individual-level practices mediating emotional well-being included residents being drawn to certain activities, places, or people to process or regulate certain emotional states. Jack (25) shares the meaning of being along the trails of Nederland, finding endurance sports as a metaphor to enduring the psychological challenges of the pandemic. Upon reflection during an interview, Jack expresses the feeling of mountain biking during COVID-19 and how time spent on the trails provided meditative resilience practices:

> *I guess, freedom, right? Like, I mean, riding your bike feels free and you feel like a kid. That's kind of the feeling that I'm always chasing. . .it's like a form of meditation. . .as long as I keep telling myself that I can keep going, I can keep going. . .I think that's been a great outlet really helped me through the past couple of years of the pandemic.*

Jack's mention of "freedom" within this excerpt relates to a strong local value, where feeling free and freedom were frequently coded in resident associations of life in Nederland's mountainscape. Freedom is noted as a common value categorized under a suite of values describing "rugged individualism" of Americans ([42], p. 8), relating this theme from a scale of singular experience to a collective community and cultural understanding of individualistic resilience. Jack's feelings towards endurance sports exemplify individual mediation of emotional well-being during crises connecting individual to community identities and values. This in-depth exploration provides deeper understandings of how resident values and identities encompass important places and practices for resident well-being.

Affective dimensions of individual or community resilience expanded to online spaces, backyards, and local spaces such as local businesses and community events to commune safely. These third spaces and places, or "locations where people spend time talking, socializing, connecting, and building relationships" ([43], p. 2), affirmed place identity within the cultural landscape of Nederland, eliciting strong affective reactions to residents as they recounted emotions and moods of COVID-19.

Anna (28) shares how living in Nederland cultivated embodied expressions of happiness and excitement within the cultural landscape and surrounding nature. Figure 2 crystallizes affective dimensions of resilience as Anna emphasizes how her mental well-being was affected by a historical nonprofit called the Carousel of Happiness:

> *Definitely happiness. . . I have to bring up the Carousel of Happiness. . .It is transportational, getting on that carousel. . .You sit on this horse or whatever animal it is that was*

carved back in like World War Two era. The music comes up as the carousel starts to crank...The music starts and as it goes faster, more pieces of music come in. . . [you] can't help but feel the joy and feel the love that went into all of the hand-painted animals and all of that as you're sitting there. . .It is one of the happiest places on earth.

Figure 2. Hand-carved characters of the Carousel of Happiness (source: authors).

ICT use, predominately related to social media such as local Facebook pages and Instagram accounts, created virtual spaces for local life where residents spent time sharing and communicating. Nedheads, a historical name used by locals referring to those living in Nederland, doubled as the name of the primary Facebook page used by Nederland residents. This page was managed by administrators, granting access to locals and residents of surrounding IWGCs who regularly visited, worked, and socialized in Nederland.

Emphasis upon ICTs to explore the social dynamics of residents revealed critical meanings and purposes for the use of virtual spaces, and their relationships to local identities. The Nedheads Facebook page acted as a third virtual space hosting conversations, photos, and changing emotions over time during COVID-19. Virtual spaces mediated emotional well-being by circulating and moving strong emotions towards other locals, travelers, and various content such as transportation or politics. Ralph (66) noted his disappointment after witnessing "the horrible hatred, the online hatred" on local and global forums. Meryl (67) shares that despite the popularity of using Nedheads to stay abreast of local happenings, "it tends to get a little controversial and I just don't need that energy in my life". Younger residents noted stages of "digital detox" where time was needed away from social media and screens, particularly avoiding the emotional impacts of community dynamics experienced on Nedheads or other forums. Werner (34) summarizes the magnitude of Nedheads as a virtual third space mediating emotional well-being during COVID-19:

. . .we talked on social media. . .probably more than we ever did, because we felt so isolated otherwise. . .we shared our feelings you know, we shared our fears and shared our longings for, you know, missing that sense of community even in a small community like this. . .we shared a lot of our common experience during the pandemic through social media.

Within these affective dimensions, how emotions moved between people and places affected individuals' experiences during crises, contributing to collective well-being and community resilience. Both physical and virtual spaces utilized during COVID-19 created surfaces and boundaries between residents, where emotions and feelings could be felt, transformed, and mobilized [18]. As gateway and academic communities look to deeper understandings of individual and community resilience within CDM, identifying affective dimensions of resilience as experienced by residents prompts the support and protection of places and processes for resident quality of life. This may be applied within gateway community planning and development through emerging concepts such as emancipatory

zoning, which protects sensoryscapes and spaces that support individual and community resilience to future crises and disasters [17].

The following section expands upon findings characterizing affective dimensions across scales of individual and community resilience of Nederland residents during COVID-19.

3.2. Identity, Belonging, and Responsibility

Changes within Nederland during COVID-19 were mediated by internally and externally held representations both of residents and the town. This multiplicity of multi-scalar identities during crises revealed affective values of identities, and how they aligned certain people to feel a sense of belonging to a place. Notable outcomes of this affective alignment of identity were verbal and behavioral expressions of responsibility, which our analysis finds to be underexplored factors for IWGC planning [44,45]. This theme represents expressions of resident agency within adaptations to change where identity, belonging, and responsibility affect individual and community resilience throughout compound crises and disasters. This theme is embedded within localized relationships connecting many identities within Nederland as an IWGC including visitors, residents, government leaders and decision-makers, representations of the town, and the identity of tourism itself. These different identities became focus points within daily conversations online and in public meetings as values and visions of residents intertwined with discussion of tourism and planning for the town's future.

Residents' perceptions elicited through interviews, secondary sources, and field notes demonstrated how facets of belonging and well-being stemmed from identity at the individual and community level. Werner (34) reflects upon ancestral ties to identity at an individual level, and how feelings of belonging are impacted by changes in global mobility. He questions who is considered a resident, a tourist, why, and how these impact feelings of belonging to a place, and how definitions may become exclusive in practice:

> *The identity part is important. That makes me think of the rate of return that is held by many Indigenous or people who identify as Indigenous communities around the world, the right to return to their ancestral lands. . . maybe someone from the southern Arapaho tribe who now lives in Oklahoma who comes to Boulder to visit, like are they a tourist? How does this definition actually work in practice?*

In discussing the role of creative and artistic expression during COVID-19, Irina (45) reflected upon a revelation regarding her identity during a creative writing session:

> *. . .there was this overwhelming sense of loss of self because I became so busy after COVID . . .I don't even know who I am anymore. . . I used to be a writer, and that was the first time that I put pen on the paper since 2020 . . .One of the things that I wrote was, 'Is this seriously the only 10 minutes that I've had to myself in the last three years?'*

In expressing his frustration with common struggles within town management, Werner (34) continues his discussion with how identity at the community level relates to the ability of the town to adapt to demographic changes of residents:

> *. . .part of Nederland's identity that makes it so particular and unique is also its greatest weakness as a town, is all this resistance to what is perceived as change when it is only improvement, right? . . .we can't get a sidewalk put in in town without massive outrage. And we have an aging community and they need the sidewalk to get to the store. . .*

As salient expressions of this theme were coded, the subtheme *economy of care* arose, demonstrating connections to multi-scalar identities. The role of care, caretaking, and nurture was repeatedly expressed within stories of how the interconnected mountain communities, both including and surrounding Nederland, cared for one another throughout crises and disasters. Nederland area residents shared stories of harsh winters, windstorms, floods, and fires during COVID-19 where localized caring for one another as intermountain residents created a socialized economy of care. This theme echoes Cartier and Taylor [12], who found that the resilience process of a mountain community during a wildfire included

residents identifying as a resilient community, identifying as a collective, and caring about neighbors. Nederland residents shared the need for self-organization during these compounding crises and disasters, aligning many residents through collective identities of *mountain folk* or *small town*, creating a strong sense of belonging to the Nederland area. These collective identities contained implicit and affective values that resonated with acts of care during COVID-19 derived from shared understandings of the town and residents' shared identities. Feelings of belonging, and subsequently responsibility, to the environment and people of Nederland during COVID-19, demonstrated how "emotionality as a responsiveness to and openness towards the worlds of others involves an interweaving of the personal with the social, and the affective with the mediated" ([2], p. 28).

Nederland shares similar infrastructural and geographic characteristics to other IWGCs that shaped life during COVID-19. Often due to weather, quarantine, or transportation limitations, many residents were unable to drive down the mountain canyon road to nearby cities for medicine, supplies, or appointments, thereby relying upon online and informal networks to find help. The Nederland Community Center was frequently mentioned for its community garden, food and clothing pantry, wellness center, and theater as critical parts of well-being for members of the Peak-to-Peak community. During COVID-19 where shortages in access to food, cleaning, and medical supplies fluctuated, the community center was a vital place for residents to receive health and human services from a trusted place of care. Employees of the community center and public works who were interviewed recognized their critical role in day-to-day maintenance of life in Nederland, particularly during wildfires, floods, rising economic struggles, and health crises.

Residents commonly shared stories of drastic increase in work hours and complex social interfaces with residents and transient populations during COVID-19. Women's accounts within these roles revealed increased roles as caretakers in their own homes requiring additional work. Notably, many resident men of Nederland expressed countercultural values of Western gender and power dynamics, holding roles in public and community service with additional commitments in caretaking at home. However, a higher ratio of women across the greater Nederland area held professional and private roles where workloads increased substantially during COVID-19, expressing higher levels of stress and burnout. This supports findings by Cavaliere (2017), who notes that within an economy of care, women commonly hold roles receiving lower compensation and commoditization compared to the true workload of care and services provided [33].

Adapting to COVID-19 as an IWGC forced Nederland residents to realize immediate dependence upon caring for one another that temporarily superseded dependence upon a tourism economy. These processes within an economy of care align with the work of Dengler and Strunk (2018), who posit feminist and alternative economic models are needed to challenge growth perspectives that perpetuate gendered and environmental injustice by revaluing care and nature through systematic change [33,46].

Residents reflected upon life during COVID-19 making connections between personal identity and actions to care for others. Some residents, though regularly giving their time and building an identity as a caring resident, experienced conflict related to both the level of care they provided and expectations of care from others. Caretakers within the community reflected upon conflicts of labor and providing care such as Chelsea (60):

> ...*since the pandemic I took a bigger role with my family in terms of care...that's when I started these jobs, which also was a very caring position, helping people, trying to help people, trying to guide people through what was happening...I'm not that kind of person... I have to protect my own mental health. So I try not to get too caught up in things that I can't do.*

Research of economies of care has focused upon unpaid, gendered, and environmental inequality based on women performing as caretakers [33,46]. However, within the interviewed residents, both men and women were commonly identified as caregivers of the community. Forms of care spanned a wide variety as identified and valued by residents. From the contactless delivery of eggs, the making and delivering of masks, or providing

emotional and physical support, Nederland residents across genders shared how life within a mountain community during COVID-19 heightened an economy of caring actions intertwining individual well-being to that of the entire community. This demonstrates the need for greater recognition of gendered experiences within IWGCs, as meanings of care and identity affect decision making in community planning. Particularly in remote communities bordering national parks and protected areas, recognizing how resident identities affect economies of care as part of social–ecological well-being is missing from approaches to IWGC planning and conservation.

The affective value of identities generating a sense of belonging maintaining Nederland's economy of care pulls from a deep undertone and local value of responsibility. This responsibility extended to keeping visitors safe throughout their time around Nederland, which was often challenging as many visitors were inexperienced in mountain environments, and disrespectful to the mountains and their communities. Resident's responsibility towards the well-being of their home as a shared space with visitors connected individual visions for the town's future. Some residents discussed responsibility and caretaking of the town as foundational in guiding tourism planning. For example, Chelsea (60) reflects upon conflicting power dynamics of dependence upon tourism influencing how the community builds its future:

> *This has always been a tourist town. There's always been tourists and we rely on it. . . we can't stop it. . .we need to build a community that we want to live in, with things that we want to do, and then share it with people. . .on the good ways to have fun, sharing it with the people who live here, realizing that people live here and are sharing our space with them—which is easier said than done.*

Whereas growth paradigms, such as neoliberal ideations of tourism economies, enforce "structural devaluation of care and nature" ([5], p. 161), Nederland's economy of care during COVID-19 repositions valuing "paid and unpaid care work" as top priorities for individual and community resilience during crises and disasters. We link degrowth to economies of care where value of ecological and nurturing processes displaces dominant value upon economic growth processes [33]. These challenges to neoclassical economics are means of combatting environmental degradation, climate change, and social–ecological deterioration by restructuring foundations of human decision making through alternative resilient economic models [1,47].

3.3. Affective Tourism Economies

Since the 1990s, as tourism became part of Nederland's planning and development, emotions about the effects of tourism have accumulated in affective and social value. Emotions and affect in tourism have been found to aid in the understanding of human engagements with tourism's power of worldmaking [15] through the synthesis of narrative and affect [16]. Strong emotional themes arose within our analysis revealing how emotions, often affected by complex relationships to a dominant tourism economy, aligned residents with (or against) other residents, people, and places. Relating to Sarah Ahmed's theory of affective economies [2,18], we found that affect and emotions moved through and between residents in physical and online settings, influencing the social dynamics of the community's collective body. The connection of this affective economy to Nederland's tourism economy was clarified through resident accounts of frustration, joy, relief, loss, resentment, and gratitude as stories often embedded feelings towards their tourism-based economic structure during COVID-19. These complex affective forces of tourism are related to the uneven circulation of affect reflecting the structural inequalities of global tourism.

Therefore, *affective tourism economies* were found to be the third of the major empirical contributions of this research. Affective tourism economies may be understood as critical conceptualizations of the circulation and exchange of emotion mediated by tourism economies aligning people and places according to identities and emotional capital. This theme builds upon research of affective economies of tourism [6,48,49] to specifically incorporate lived experiences mediated by the power dynamics of tourism-based economies in

many gateway communities. Critical exploration of this theme demonstrated four interrelated expressions of affective tourism economies including *communal loss*, *queer optimism*, *empathy and sympathy*, and *humor*. This finding contributes descriptions, examples, and in-depth discussions of the affective forces of tourism as mediated by the power dynamics of Nederland hosting a tourism-dependent economy during crises and disasters.

We found affective tourism economies and their unique forms relate to how emotions align people, places, objects, and identities according to Nederland's tourism geography during crises and disasters. The following sections crystallize how these emotions and moods were exchanged, allocated social capital, and affected social dynamics both in-town and online as important factors in individual and community resilience during COVID-19.

3.3.1. Communal Loss: Economies of Anger, Fear, and Anxiety

The intricacies of affective economies intertwined within the power dynamics of tourism economies were expressed within resident emotions, opinions, behaviors, and relationships. Across multiple accounts, a theme of *communal loss* arose as resident reactions to unwanted or unexpected change, fear of changes to come, and trauma grew and circulated within the community, forming collective experiences of anger, fear, and anxiety during COVID-19. Communal loss encompasses collective resident experiences of a community embodying perceived and actual loss within relationships and identities. Where resident values (e.g., peace, nature, freedom, collectivism, and anti-authority) generated positive affect and emotion over time, changes violating these values (e.g., crowding, disrespect, greed, and corporate influence) garnered heightened negative affect and emotion. As the volume of visitors in Nederland changed throughout the pandemic, these affective forces intensified.

Coding of anxiety brought greater clarity to specific places, people, and objects related to fear and anger. Fear is differentiated from anxiety where "anxiety becomes attached to particular objects, which come to life not as the cause of anxiety but as an effect of its travels" ([18], p. 125). Anxiety relates to the affirmation of identities across multiple scales, as well as the formulation of negative identities [50]. Ahmed argues that "anxiety and fear create the very effect of borders, and the very effect of that which 'we are not,' partly through how we turn away from the other, whom we imagine as the cause of our fear" ([2], p. 132). Exploring anxiety in its relationship to defining who we *are* by who we are *not*, we reference Vandana Shiva's writing of living and negative identities [50]. She contrasts living economies, democracies, and cultures with the toxic paths of colonial neoliberal power, where negative economies build upon negative cultures and identities. Shiva describes living cultures and identities as shaped by place, ecosystems, and economies, but warns that "as identities are displaced and insecurities grow, identity is shaped by insecurity—culture is experienced through negation of the 'other'" ([50], p. 9).

For example, Iris (58) shares the building of anxiety of Nederland residents due to the growing presence of remote workers, new residents, and tourists during COVID-19. Iris shares about communal loss about anxiety of changes to come:

> *I'm still anxious a little bit about what's going to happen. . .so much has changed around us...people that maybe didn't travel before COVID realized that they can work from home, and travel.. . .now we can move to the mountains because we can work from home'. And I think that it's going to affect us overall as a community a lot.*

The growth in influence and dependence upon a tourism economy over time within Nederland's development shaped forms of communication, identities, and local norms defining a "love–hate" relationship with tourism. Economies of hate and fear circulate effects of strong emotion towards certain people, objects, and places [18]. Applying this economic model of emotion to Nederland during COVID-19 explores how emotional responses are mediated by the influence of tourism economies.

Importantly, in understanding communal loss, this theme did not code stagnant states; communal loss recognizes emerging, collective emotions and the differences of these losses that shape what is felt, by whom, and how effects are materialized. For example, COVID-19

crystallized and intensified pre-existing values, perspectives, and emotions relating to complex issues. Brianne (61) describes the following:

> *"a lot of anger there and a little frustration and disagreement with the antivaxxers or the people and the actions that people have taken...the violence, the political discourse, the disease, the pandemic, global warming. I mean, what more can we take?"*

We refer to Erickson and Pugh [51,52] by questioning what may be lost by Nederland and relatable gateway communities if community resilience becomes understood as the ability to withstand greater levels of disruption while maintaining, but redefining, system functions. When we understand the complexities of emotional attachment to place and how this influences identity, we have more details about both impacts to communities from crises, and strategies for resilience. Jerry (67) clearly expresses the anger and frustrations of residents when tourism planning is not connected to affective dimensions of resilience such as community identity:

> *Estes Park is the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park and it sucks, it's a fucking bullshit tourist town where you can go buy a tomahawk made [abroad]. What the fuck is that man?*

Resident expressions of fear and anxiety circulated through topics such as affordable housing, cultural changes with influxes of new residents, and short-term rentals. This was exemplified on the town of Nederland's Instagram account inviting residents to engage with community surveys based upon the question: "Are you worried about losing your housing? For some folks in Ned this is a real, everyday fear" (July, 2023). Fear of change and perceived change during COVID-19 aligned residents along topics of development—a highly contentious issue. Whether topics were framed as planning, progress, or management, change elicited strong reactions from residents.

Tourism's influence on changes within town is viscerally understood by residents fearing loss of autonomy through tourism. In terms of changes within town administration and governance, Werner (34) shares that, "Tourism is the only way this town survives...at this point, it's our only revenue stream as a government... we would lose autonomy over our destinies, as a community completely...so I think that tourism is what sustaining us". This theme demonstrates that through data expressing anger, fear, and anxiety, we can more deeply perceive past and potential communal losses of IWGCs in relation to affective tourism economies.

3.3.2. Queer Optimism: Economies of Gratitude, Luck, and Appreciation

Within critical studies, connecting optimism with knowledge production within crisis, disaster, and resilience may be perceived as conflicting. However, research exploring facets of optimism holds values within knowledge for CDM, sustainable destination planning, and resiliency [53]. The global, long-term changes from the pandemic affected residents uniquely based on individual and community circumstances intertwined with state, national, and global systems. Speaking with residents of various residency lengths within the Nederland area, strong themes arose connecting gratitude, luck, and appreciation within an overarching theme of optimism. However, the term "optimism" may come with connotations of naivety and hope for happiness without the need for action. Queer optimism is reframed in queer theory as a form of critical thinking and can be considered a form of meta-optimism that "seeks to take positive affects as serious and interesting sites of critical investigation" [54,55].

Therefore, *queer optimism* in this research refers to ways residents critically thought about instances of feeling good as interesting and cognizant aspects of individual and community resilience. We found queer optimism reformed and redistributed the accumulation of negative affect by prompting critical reflection and reconsideration in the feelings towards certain identities and bodies. Whereas when anger, fear, and anxiety were featured on social media eliciting residential responses amassing negative emotions and "toxicity", features highlighting sentiments from this optimistic suite of gratitude,

luck, and appreciation inspired larger volumes of acknowledgement and engagement with community members.

The following expresses queer optimism as Dan (47) shares how the difficult experience of COVID-19 prompted complex feelings growing from pains of loss during COVID-19 to self-improvement and feeling optimistic about the possibilities of the future:

> *I've changed a lot…I've gained more self-respect for myself, internalized my feelings about a lot of things that I'd just pushed away for so long… watching people get sick and die, and hearing about it. So much pain just made me realize what mattered was the love I have for people and the passions that we can create.*

This excerpt represents the depth of emotions and affect that may be seen within queer optimism. The mountains, forests, and wildlife of Nederland were intertwined in stories of residents mediating emotional well-being, demonstrating how the surrounding social–ecological communities are critical pieces of individual and community resilience during crises and disasters. Residents cited gratitude within their motivation to be heavily involved or participate in local service to the town and surrounding natural areas. For example, Diana (54) reflected that "…the pandemic just like sealed it for me. I was like, I love nature and space, it just grounds me in a way… So I'd say grateful." Understanding complex expressions of optimism such as gratitude, luck, and appreciation connects the affective tourism economies of residents, visitors, and multi-system factors to state, national, and global dynamics.

3.3.3. Economies of Empathy and Sympathy

Focus upon empathy often takes precedence in affective research, whereas findings of this research identified empathy as one of many interdependent and significant emotional variables deserving greater attention in future research. The findings of our thematic analysis support research indicating empathy as a motivating affective status within resident reactions during disasters [56]. However, within tourism scholarship regarding individual and community resilience throughout COVID-19, the role of empathy requires deeper exploration. Within this analysis, niche expressions of different types of empathy in concurrence with feelings of sympathy more accurately characterized resident actions and responses towards other residents and tourists [57,58]. Therefore, this theme of *empathy and sympathy* developed in categorizing complex ways residents imagined the lives, thoughts, and emotions of others as intertwined with their own lived experiences.

Empathy is generally understood as imagining the feelings of others, while sympathy comes from sharing the feelings of others based on similar experiences [59]. Research has differentiated types of empathy including cognitive, emotional, cosmopolitan, and empathetic unsettlement (see [57,58,60,61]). Research detailing cosmopolitan empathy argues for its ability to collapse spatial and social geography to challenge preconceived notions of others [62]. However, political and transnational research of empathetic unsettlement and confrontational empathy warns scholars to critically consider how we take the perspectives of others without assuming others' identities. Nuanced expressions of empathy and sympathy within affective tourism economies recognize the deep conflict and emotions of residents who live with the effects of postcoloniality and oppression from tourism [60–62]. The different types and descriptions of empathy are noted to demonstrate depth and complexity of empathy and differences from sympathy. This demonstrates the potential areas to contribute new knowledge of affect and emotion from resident perspectives by incorporating affective methods of inquiry through tourism and conservation research.

As found through photo-elicitation analysis, the following picture (see Figure 3) from Louis (23) illustrates his own feelings of isolation in relation to others' perspectives during COVID-19. Louis's photograph expresses his notion of the increasingly isolated atmosphere of residential life in Nederland during COVID-19. This photograph also encapsulates Louis's frustration with the increasingly polarized perspectives constraining the capacity for empathy and sympathy between differing ideologies and perspectives. This crystallization of Louis's creative expression through photography, his interview, and

researcher reflection illustrates connections to the emergence of this empirical theme. The caption provided by Louis reads: "Each had a crow's perch, from which they gained their own understanding of the coming storm".

Figure 3. "Crow's Perch" (source: Louis, 23).

During COVID-19, residents witnessed changes in themselves and one another related to empathy. David (64) shares that:

> *My overall impression is that the pandemic—if it did one common thing to all of us...it reinforced concepts of ourselves. And then either it made us dig in deeper, or open ourselves up to new possibilities... I watched my partner become less empathic of people who moved here... It's a common theme for me about how the pandemic affected a small rural gateway community—whichever way we were leaning, we leaned into it further.*

Acts of sympathy and empathy coming from places of lived understanding were able to cross political, cultural, and economic differences. These fueled some residents' actions that preceded COVID-19, shaping caretaking, support systems, and town development from deeply situated knowledge and emotional understanding. The place-based influences of Nederland's surrounding mountainscape and forests demonstrate the interconnections between residents and nature for social–ecological well-being, which is paramount in future sustainable destination planning and conservation for IWGCs.

3.3.4. Affective Economies of Humor

The final expression of affective tourism economies was found through a strong sense of humor, revealing nuances conveying personal adaptation during crises reflecting sense of self within place through joking or comedic expressions. A strong presence of humor was featured within resident accounts in processing and expressing changes during COVID-19. Sense of humor has been explored in mediating stable positive affect, psychological resilience, and well-being [63,64]. Nederland residents' expressions of humor were found in verbal, physical, and textual forms within all genres of data collection. The reflexive thematic analysis of humor as an affective force was found particularly in processing difficult elements of the COVID-19 crisis, or environmental changes such as wildfires and climate change.

For example, in discussing his feelings of mask mandates and reactions of residents and visitors during COVID-19, Jerry (67) expressed, "it's like how do you feel if it rains?

...change is mandatory...you can't be the only one who doesn't wear a mask. You know? That's like having a pee section in a pool". Coding expressions of humor showed culturally salient expressions of crises/disasters, adaptations, vulnerabilities, and resilience. Particularly in recognizing affective elements of individual and community-level resilience, humor gave residents flexibility to convey difficult or complex topics with greater comfort. Importantly, residents shared the meaning of humor to individual processing of overlapping crises during the pandemic.

At the community level, humor was important in reinvigorating and encouraging the community during peaks of the pandemic. When utilized by community leaders across channels accessible to residents during the pandemic, humor aligned local values of community members across scales of identity to build community resilience. Diana (54) shares how partnering with local musicians and community members to make humorous videos contributed towards community resilience during COVID-19:

> *...there are local musicians in our community...who were so energized because it was about six months and five months into the pandemic, when people were really feeling down. When people saw 'oh, wow', you know, they can be creative, they can adapt, they're really about the community... we did some really funny videos...we did a spoof on the shining at the library...it kept the energy up.*

The strength of this theme throughout our thematic analysis demonstrates the potential for greater understandings of how humor relates across individual and community-level resilience responses. Importantly in relating the experiences of Nederland residents hosting tourism economies, the affective dimensions of resident experiences conveyed through humor demonstrate how emotions and moods are recognized, mediated, transformed, and transferred through an affective tourism economy.

4. Discussion

The scope of this research contributes new knowledge for community-based approaches to sustainability and conservation planning from Nederland residents' experiences as multi-scalar entanglements within global systems. The aim of this research was met by contributing new knowledge within the critical and affective turns within tourism and conservation scholarship through an embodied research design, exploring the influence of affect and identities of Nederland residents. This research conveys the need for alternative economic models incorporating affective dimensions of resident livelihoods, while respecting limits of social–ecological systems interlaced within tourism management and IWGC planning [5].

This research embraces the abstraction of affect through a feminist new materialist epistemology to elicit and co-construct knowledge from the lived experiences and perspectives of Nederland residents. Qualitative methods of inquiry incorporating creative expression made space to study the catalytic intra-actions of affect and emotions between residents, visitors, and the surrounding mountainscape of Nederland. The interdependence of tourism and resident livelihoods with accessibility of the western forests, parks, and protected areas of the U.S. requires recognizing and respecting the interconnected nature of resilience of residents, visitors, and our more-than-human kin within IWGCs [65].

As social, economic, political, and climate change shapes gateway resident lives, this research contributes resident-centered research and engagement by incorporating affective methods of investigation to elicit and interpret data encompassing the complexity of resident lives intertwined with the tourism system. This research builds upon understanding changes as embodied experiences, where global crises are embedded within the tourism system through new contextual knowledge of impacts upon Nederland residents [5,66]. Residents hold empirical knowledge of dynamic adaptation and resilience processes pertinent to gateway communities of similar scales and experiences [9]. This is important amidst place-based risks, opportunities, and adaptive capacities of different gateway communities globally. The findings of this Nederland case study expand upon critical tourism and conservation research through analyzing empirical social, environmental, and economic

perceptions of change within an IWGC. This approach and its emergent themes are cross-applicable and adaptable to other mountain, coastal, or geographically remote communities seeking new ways of incorporating resident-centered knowledge within tourism planning and development research.

This research positions resiliency and affect theory within an embodied approach to a crystallization methodology to elicit, interpret, and contribute new knowledge for CDM and tourism planning. The findings bring new contributions to tourism and conservation scholarship. First, this research posits affective dimensions of individual and community resilience of Nederland residents experienced during the compounding crises of COVID-19. Emotions affected the adaptations and well-being of residents in their interactions, seen through the affective dimensions of individual and community resilience. This was found through the application of qualitative and arts-based methods of inquiry comprising a crystallization methodology. This methodology identified ways residents' individual actions and adaptations built collective understandings, processing internal and external changes during COVID-19. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the crystallization of empirical themes through arts-based manifestations of affective change, supporting innovations in conservation social science. In addition, these creative expressions also contribute to demonstrating new ways of understanding affective dimensions of individual and community resilience. The various actions and adaptations of Nederland residents within our findings depict how shared local values, emotions, and identities were shaped by time spent in physical and virtual third spaces.

Within these dimensions, resident agency was recognized within adaptations to change where identity, belonging, and responsibility affected individual and community resilience during the compound crises and disasters of COVID-19. This research further substantiates the concept of affective tourism economies by sharing knowledge from Nederland residents' structural revaluing of care and nurture during COVID-19. Residents' social organization of care and caretaking reinforced identity, belonging, and responsibility through an economy of care, specific to the needs of an IWGC. The affective exploration of Nederland's economy of care during the pandemic brings a gendered and critical analysis to the identities of caretakers, and how these identities overlap with local leadership in management of complex tourism impacts.

The final theme presented within this research posits affective tourism economies; critical conceptualizations of the circulation and exchange of emotion mediated by tourism economies aligning people and places according to identities and emotional capital. The use of affect theory to guide critical, qualitative inquiry finds that the affective tourism economies of Nederland influenced connections between residents, visitors, and surrounding environments during overlapping crises and disasters during COVID-19. This theoretical grounding elicited emotional accounts of Nederland residents, demonstrating the presence and power of a tourism-dependent economy, influencing how emotions do things by moving people to act, feel, and identify with (or against) one another [18].

Methodological contributions are made by offering new research employing arts-based research within scientific inquiry [31] to advocate for a deeper engagement with residents whose lives are mediated by tourism-based economies. The resulting findings address gaps in knowledge of tourism impacts during crises and disasters through resident perspectives, to explore factors to inform natural resource management with critical and rich data representing actors within the human dimensions of IWGCs. These findings offer ways of thinking about the social contingency of resilience to critically question who benefits from resiliency research in CDM and tourism. Importantly, our findings support questioning to what extent neoliberal growth paradigms within research create resilient subjects to withstand crises and disasters symptomatic of global systems of environmental, social, political, and gendered injustice [1,47,53].

With growing risks and uncertainty from climate change, there is an urgent need to support the intermountain western regions of the United States and global gateway communities. Currently addressing this demand are growing partnerships comprised of

academic and industrial groups, representing many IWGCs as part of resiliency networks that are focused upon mountain communities and conservation. Some of these organizations are supported by staff with capacity and expertise rooted in principles of equity within their resiliency solutions to include tribal engagement and social readiness within environmental justice to find specified solutions for intermountain western communities [67,68]. This research, in tandem with the work of intermountain western networks, may support government funding for IWGCs post-crises and disasters such as Colorado's Recovery Assistance for Tourism [69] by the following: growing IWGC and resident-oriented research in tourism; increasing the visibility and importance of multilateral support for IWGCs living with tourism economies; and encouraging IWGC representatives to pursue grants and financial assistance with academic support for infrastructure specifically stressed by tourism. It may also encourage new approaches to conducting effective and affective social and environmental impact assessments to understand the status and needs for health and human services and mountain town infrastructure (e.g., parking, plumbing and water use, affordable housing, and ICT systems).

5. Conclusions

By drawing from queer, affective, and feminist new materialist scholarship to explore the affective dimensions of individual and community resilience of Nederland residents, these findings may encourage further tourism planning to critically consider what, and who, is valued within affective tourism economies. Though the literature of this research identified various definitions and types of empathy, the scope of this research was unable to succinctly define and differentiate different types of empathy and sympathy seen throughout the transdisciplinary literature. Future research is encouraged to devote itself to these complex suites of affect. We encourage researchers to integrate affective dimensions into future studies to better understand how emotions matter and influence individual and community resilience. Therefore, this analysis serves as a foothold for future research to build future research designs to incorporate complex understandings of empathy and sympathy within crisis and disaster responses.

Specific forms of utilizing nuanced aspects of affect and emotions within tourism and planning are essential to the conservation of identity [5]. Future conservation and tourism research may also explore affective tourism economies to analyze dynamics of dependence generated by unsustainable tourism [17]. It is our hope that future research will consider these findings to further critical studies of identities, CDM, and gateway residents' quality of life.

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