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ARTICLE

Sustainable tourist management: Participation and collaboration for innovation

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Abstract This paper contemplates the redefinition of the tourism planning and management concept based on sustainability, from the definition of planning within tourism, and the necessary components that serve to integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

The main novelty offered is the correlation stemming from the relationships between the components of the three dimensions and how they are interrelated, unable to consider the economic, social and of course environmental elements as isolated elements. The nexus, or essential component is the participation of the agents involved in the tourism process – not only the tourist-customer, but also the residents of the destination, both at an individual and collective level. Thus, it becomes necessary to create a model of collaboration in order to quantify, from a standpoint of sustainability, the progress reached among the agents present in the destination.

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1. Introduction: the integral conception of tourism

Tourism has been primarily studied from its extremes: numbers, statistics, the flow of visitors, the investment, and the resorts; it would appear that tourism exists only from an economic standpoint. And it is precisely from economics that its

terminology is assigned. A terminology that limits it, renders it confusing and buries it (Magaña, 2009). In previous papers, Magaña and Padín (2009) justified the importance of promoting a more suitable, less confusing language, as in the denomination of tourism as an industry. Stating that it is an “industry without smokestacks” in reference to a negative assertion of what an industry is, does not help much to define tourism.

Even though an industry has the ability to interact with other sectors, hire suppliers and make a valuable contribution to society, it cannot be compared to the larger capacity that tourism has to interact with the majority of the sectors;

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moreover, tourism's qualitative and quantitative benefits are perceived much faster by society.

The purpose of tourism planning should be to seek the interconnection of tourist activities with the rest of the activity sectors, and with society as well. Therefore, a tourist model is needed to carry out the exercise of planning and linking tourism with the agents in the area, which is an essential part of this process and main purpose of this work.

Reality shows that tourism activities follow a unique pattern of spatial localization, and although the tools of analysis for locating economic activities in general can be applied to it for study, we must take into account that specificity derives primarily from the essential feature of the service-based or tangible or intangible product that requires that its consumption be carried out in the place where it occurs.

This specificity involves, on the one hand, the existence of a direct and physical relationship between the resources and the tourism products that are produced within them and on the other, the relationship with the tourist-consumer that will travel from their habitual residence in order to satisfy that specific demand over another.

From this philosophy of analysis, we should point out that tourism is not considered just another economic activity, but rather a cluster of activities that transform, without destroying, a certain number of natural, historic and generic resources. Or a collective social practice that, due to its special relationship mechanisms, affects a territory and two social communities – that which travels (tourist-client), defined by concrete cultural characteristics, and that which dwells in the said territory, equally defined by certain cultural characteristics, that may be absolutely different to the first and thus represent a clear attraction and motivation for travel.

According to this viewpoint, more than an economic activity, tourism may be cataloged as a cultural exchange among societies, situated within a territory, that utilizes the characteristics and resources of that territory and goes hand in hand with the generation of certain number of economic activities, to the extent of being able to reconfigure and reorder said territory.

We can define a tourist destination as a territorial system of singular elements in which two or more social communities come together, that integrate, as basic components, primary elements that make up its attractiveness that motivate the tourist community to travel, and some secondary elements that facilitate its consumption (lodging, restoration, commerce, etc.).

With that in mind, the territorial articulation of tourism presents profound connections with the rest of the economic activities and does not limit itself to the processes that transform the surrounding and natural environment to create tourist products that satisfy the demand for leisure, rest, adventure, or knowledge of the visitor. On the other hand, tourism, as an economic activity, but also as a phenomenon and social practice, integrates singular forms of action and relation that affect the territory and condition the rest of the activities and economic and social relations, configuring a new social, economic and territorial structure (Valls, 2004).

A line of research has been incorporated into the tourism literature that seeks to conceptualize tourism into an

integral system as opposed to its limited, sectorial study. One should not only take into consideration the impact that tourism generates as immediate economic spill over, but the social use that tourism originates as well.

The interactions of tourism with its subsystems and with other economic activities it complements can be explained. This conceptualization is necessary in order to allow the system to regulate itself and to modify the perception that it has of itself within the operation and in the scientific-academic field, and in this sense, arrive at a holistic model for planning the tourist activity (Magaña, 2009).

2. The holistic model for tourist activity

Based on the concept of tourism as an open, dynamic and probabilistic system, and defining a holistic approach to tourism activity involves thinking about the actors and the processes involved. It represents giving tourism a multi-activity quality of a global impact. It does not involve the measuring of the economy as a fundamental aspect; while the economic aspect is a pillar of sustainability, this benefit is given when the productive characteristics of tourism are covered. Designing and defining all the true impact of tourism activity through a holistic-systemic model will provide the real economic significance for the region or country.

It is a simple definition: a system is a set of closely related elements that keep the system directly or indirectly linked together and more or less stable, and, whose overall behavior pursues a certain goal. A system, on the inside, is composed of elements; these elements can be objects or processes. There is a relationship between the elements of a system and between other existing systems (The inside is fundamental in order to understand the behavior of the system on its own). These relationships can be one directional or reciprocal. These interrelations, that have certain stability among the elements, are called structures.

Open processes always have an INPUT/OUTPUT model. That is, when external inputs are received, it processes them and generates result – output currents. According to where they go, these outputs can be services, functions or retro-inputs. The services are targeted as an input to other systems or subsystems; functions are outputs that are used for maintenance of inputs of systems large than those that generated them, and the retro-inputs are outputs directed at the same system.

Moreover, the theoretical foundations of Synergetic Holism have been established in previous works (Magaña & Padín, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Magaña, 2009). This concept integrates and complements the vision of a holism that not only serves to break down the elements for their study, but also to analyze those parts and conceive their relationships within the system and promote the creation of a holon that sums up the proactive parts that make up the system. In other words, innovation is present. When you put together the elements of the system, synergy is generated and a holon is born.

The theory of synergetic holism involves the union (holon) of the subsystems that provides the innovation and the difference. Each system or subsystem presents distinct characteristics and diverse relationships between the agents. The network theory complements the TGS as it helps to name, categorize and study the interactions among the

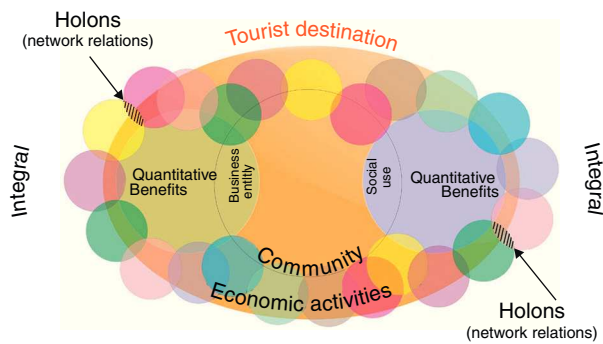


Figure 1 The system of an economic activity of a tourist destination from a holistic-synergic perspective.

Source: Magaña and Padín (2009).

subsystems and their elements characterized in the Theoretical Model represented in Fig. 1.

In this sense, it is understood that each holon present within the components of the system, serve to explain the myriad of relationships and actions within the tourist activity that constantly and continually are ignored by the reductionist analysis carried out from a strictly economic-sectorial vision of tourism. They are ignored to such a degree that not even the statistics or the state of the economy is considered. Thus, it becomes necessary to break the traditional tourism paradigm in order to build an inclusive and integrative system of tourism. Until now, analyzing tourism only from economics and statistics to visualize its impact in terms of qualitative and quantitative benefits limits the vision and minimizes its essence.

That is the reason why seeing it from synergy allows you to generate something new, which translates into benefits; moreover it will allow us to define the social use of tourism in the community that is identified as a tourist destination.

As we can see in this model, the holistic system-synergistic proposes how a series of economic activities are generated between the field of tourism and an entire universe that can be defined as infinite in the sense of the versatility that tourism naturally manifest.

In a tourist destination, interactions between the various economic activities may be observed in which the union of them are represented by the holons (language of the holistic system-synergistic) and are reflected generating the multiplicity of relationships that make it up. Economic activities represented are found both within the system as in its borders. It becomes evident that these economic activities serve the tourism system and other systems at the same time. Similarly, it is important to clearly present to the community (benefited with the tourist resource) that they are the paradigm actor that receives the output currents of the system identified in a result. These results are the benefits – both quantitative and qualitative – and are expressed as the social use of tourism from the conception and management of the business unit.

3. The competitiveness of destinations: applying the holistic model

The planning of a tourist destination, understood as the process of bestowing value upon its resources for

recreational use, should be conceived from competitiveness and sustainability as parts associated to the integral model of the destination. When interpreting the tourist system as a dynamic process, it is necessary to establish a systematization of the dimensions and critical factors that should be planned but also monitored and evaluated.

It is necessary to improve the understanding of the factors that determine the competitiveness of the tourist destinations, nevertheless, it is the theoretic models that analyze the destination once it has been planned, and evaluates the diverse areas or dimensions from prefixed standards. Nonetheless, there have been advances in the theoretical models the complex tourism system is trying to represent, with the help of the Mazaro conception (2007), and the so called “Competitive and Sustainable Model” as a methodology for evaluating and monitoring tourism from a viewpoint of emergent tourist destinations, in search of tourist development within a competitive and sustainable framework.

The contribution of these models is the systematization of the variables that should be present in the destination in order for it to be competitive, and predict the attributes and factors needed for planning, organizing and managing of the destinations (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Mazaro, 2007; Ritchie & Crouch, 2000). The holistic model proposed, hold implicit the concept of competitiveness for the process of integration proposed, based on the search for development. This development is understood as the process of improving the living condition of the community, on a qualitative as well as a quantitative level, and therefore, improvement in the competitiveness, seen from the environmental, social and cultural potentialities and restrictions. Moreover, it is necessary to establish the factors that guide the process under criteria of global competitiveness and sustainability once the model has been founded.

Four are the strategies and dimensions proposed that may serve to facilitate the tangibilization of the concept of an integral destination:

- The tourist structure: it is undeniable that the infrastructure, structure and supra structure schematize the tourist activity en in the economic development.
- The Government structure is essential to facilitate the management of the tourist activity from the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Government branches, through a network of work relations whose basis should be the Public Policy, in order to strengthen and improve the results, thus benefiting the tangibilization of the wealth in the participating community.
- The citizen, as an element of awareness and tourist intention in which the identity of the place and its people allow for participation, from different positions, for a totally responsible tourism.
- Sustainability, as the order of the tourist exercise in its development, with the purpose of protecting it in the sense of maintaining its generation permanent, as a natural resource capable of generating economic development.

These four dimensions or strategies should be taken into account to analyze the evolution of a destination, observing the interactions among the diverse economic activities

in which the union of these is represented by holons, so that from these holons, the multiplicity of relations that make up the destination is manifest. Theoretically, the first step is to determine the holons and identify whether the relation has to do with the tourist structure, with the government structure, with the citizen or with sustainability. It is evident that the interrelations can be with more than one dimension, and are not closed, since the holistic model is open and dynamic.

4. Advances in implementation: the integral destination Colima (Fig. 2)

The city of Colima is located in the area of the Mexican Pacific; it is a part of the State with the same name, and one of the smallest of the Republic. It ranks highest in safety and standard of living indexes in the country (Second Government Information, 2005).

The proposal of the integral destination concept for the state of Colima, stems from previous work (Magaña & Padín, 2008a, 2008b, 2009) in which a diagnosis of the historical center as a space of leisure was carried out, as well as the analysis of the attractions of the historical center and the proposal for recreational use. Work was also done with groups of experts as well as interviews to personalities in the fields of history, art, culture and resident neighbors of downtown Colima to determine the identity and role of the actors within the dynamic vision of the tourist process (Fig. 2).

Concrete proposals of action were established that respond to the objective planned in the research project, which were to carry out a diagnosis and identify the areas of action, and the proposal of projects in which the basis of the proposals are: Colima, an attractive landscape in green

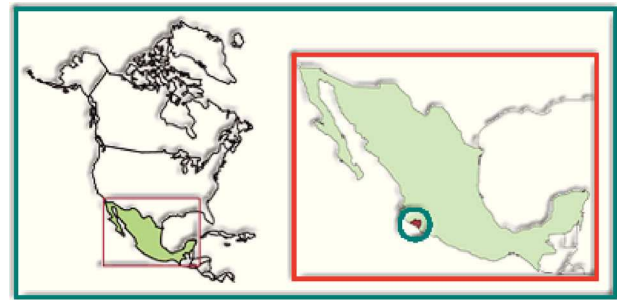


Figure 2 Location of the area of study.

Source: Segundo Informe de Gobierno, 2005. Colima.

that represents the intensity of its tropical landscape, where the Valley, the Ocean, Lagoons and Rivers, the typical Urban, Gastronomy, the Mountains, the Magical, The Windows, the Volcano and the Poetry, are seductive characteristics that integrate the diversity of scenery that Colima has to enjoy (Fig. 3).

Each of these elements identified in the proposed model are the units and inputs to the product-concept: Colima, an attractive landscape, and the service and delivery of this tourist product, first, to the internal client of the State of Colima, through the satisfaction of having a clear picture of the sustainable tourist product sellable to many different niche markets interested in the offer, Colima, an attractive landscape.

Six nucleus or areas of acting in the historical center of the city of Colima were determined, using the general model applied to Colima as a starting point.

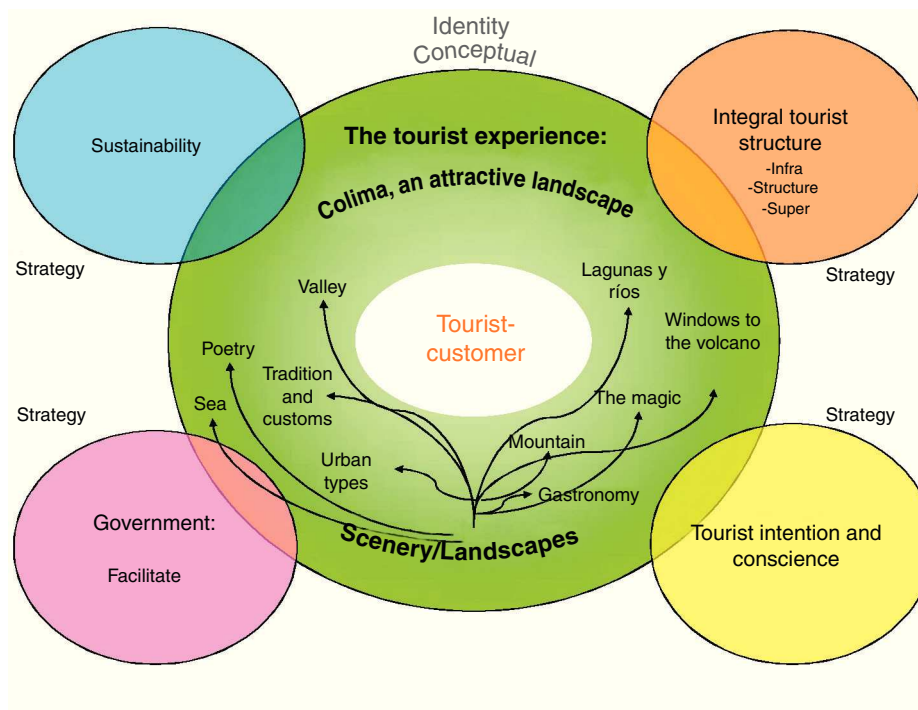


Figure 3 Model of innovative destination for Colima.

Source: Irma Magaña Carrillo, 2009.

The proposal for integrating the identity of the historical center of the city of Colima through representing it in a holistic model, is primarily for the purpose of establishing an order at the moment of implementing the proposed actions and so that each of the resources that conform each nucleus are taken into account. The integration of the six nuclei is based on a holistic perspective that serves to fully achieve and implement the concept "authentic", considering each of the proposals that this project highlights and others that it will be generated in the future, with the main purpose of carrying out the proposed action with a systemic basis.

5. Conclusions

The proposed central model is inserted within the theories of local endogenous development, since the tourist activity is not laid out as a branch of economic activity, but rather as a set of activities that transform, without destroying, a series of resources. The target may be defined as a territorial system that integrates – as basic elements – a group of primary elements that configure its attractiveness and motivate travel; and a few secondary elements that facilitate consumption (accommodation, restaurants, shops, etc.).

The development and consolidation of a tourist destination, especially if the intention is to construct a destination of quality, will always be linked to the value given to the local resources, these being natural, historic, cultural, anthropological, etc. coming together in what is simply called the natural and historic patrimony. It is important to note its presence within the territory, and, its analysis for planning the progress of the sector, should be proposed as an opportunity to recuperate, rehabilitate and revitalize, but especially, to give them value as elements integrated within the tourist-product, capable of generating and incrementing activity, employment, and the combination of revenues and rents in the local sphere.

The basic idea is that if in Colima, there is a need to develop tourism in an integral form, it is necessary to carefully evaluate the resources available for such an activity, since these are the basic components, and will condition the type of development and activities carried out; and will, therefore also condition the tourist-customer profile targeted. Through this evaluation, it will be decided whether the area has the potential for development or expansion (in the case of consolidated destinations), and the most convenient modality of tourism. The evaluation must be understood as an exercise in development feasibility in terms of the tourist activity, because if it is found that suitable potential for development does exist, the assessment will constitute the basis for the task of detailed planning.

The difference (or uniqueness), as an element of competitiveness in the XXI century markets, is understood as diversifying from the competition; said differentiation is stated in the model proposed by the resources and the essence of Colima, because it is precisely that which will achieve the consolidation of the destination Colima compared to its competitors and, above all, strengthen it within a strategy of integral economic development.

The pending tasks needed to continue the development of this project are the following: (a) The tangibilization of the basic strategy based on the model proposed in this research project, (b) complete the exercise of the model Serve with Total Quality in what refers to the added value of an intangible product.

Based on the objectives set at the beginning of this document, and those that result from the advances of this research Project, we can state the following: In order to define the concept The Integral Tourist Destination for the State of Colima, founded upon geo-tourism, we must consider as a result, the proposal carried out in Fig. 2, which shows us the strategies needed to carry out the proposed concept.

On the possibility of promoting the culture of tourism among the people of Colima, based on the proposed model of excellence for tangible and intangible products and their delivery or service. The researchers responsible have opened a parallel investigation titled "The Identity of Colima and its people". This research project has been completed and was funded through the Ministry of Culture of the State of Colima, in collaboration with the University Center for Social Research at the University of Colima. It is intended that its results serve as inputs for this specific section that makes still needs complementing and that by its diversity and complexity, requires it to be studied in isolation.

On promoting the idea that all commercial establishments of the state of Colima are regarded as tourist commerce by transversality found in the tourist practice. In this sense, contribution is made by another of our research products in which the Model of Open System of Tourism is proposed – a model in which all of the contributions of the activity can be integrated for the strengthening of the system.

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