Sustainable Tourism Model

An Integrated Systems Approach to Managing Tourism Growth: A Destination Marketing Organization Perspective

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1. SCOPE OF THE SECTION

This section presents a model that incorporates a systems approach for ensuring sustainable tourism. From a destination perspective, tourism takes place in a series of embedded systems – tourists, enterprises, clusters, destinations, and the larger social/economic/political system. In order to maximize the benefits of tourism each of these systems must perform key tasks that maximize the benefits of tourism and/or mitigate or reduce the costs of tourism. In order to perform optimally, each level of the system must function in an effective manner and be mutually supportive. This model addresses the tasks and functions at each level of the tourism system required to achieve sustainable tourism.

The destination is also an important part of the tourism system. As such, tourism managers must interact with other components of the tourism system to optimize the benefits of tourism.

This model has been developed for use by **departmental and municipal government tourism officers**. A generally accepted term for tourism offices is Destination Management Organizations or Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs). People working for these organizations will be described a DMO managers. The report is also is designed to provide practical insights for national-level planners and other stakeholders engaged in tourism development in the Orinoquia.

This section will first focus on a destination model for competitive and sustainable destinations. It will then explore linkages to other parts of the tourism system.

2. TOURISM IN THE ORINOQUIA IN CONTEXT: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE MODEL DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Tourism in Colombia

Tourism is currently Colombia's number one export industry, surpassing foreign exchange earnings from traditional commodities exports (Medina, 2016). Tourism accounts for almost 6% of GDP in Colombia and supports, either directly or indirectly, over 1.87 million jobs (WTTC, 2015) While much of development in recent years has taken place in Cartagena and Bogota (Oates, 2014), significant tourism potential remains largely untapped within the interior of the country. The Orinoquia region of Colombia offers unique natural and cultural attractions. The Orinoquia includes El Tuparro and Sierra de la Macarena National Parks. Over recent years there has been limited tourism in this region but new development is expected. Tourism has been recognized as an engine for regional development in Colombia and can be organized to ensure social and economic benefits accrue to community members directly and indirectly engaged in the delivery of tourism services. Ecotourism/agritourism projects have been shown to reduce rural poverty and support economic development within indigenous communities. Tourism-oriented social enterprises, which leverage local entrepreneurial spirit to solve social issues, have been shown to provide resources to reduce poverty, address health issues, and increase access to education. However, to ensure tourism opportunities result in sustainable social/cultural, environmental and economic benefits for municipalities and local communities careful, inclusive planning and implementation will be required.

### 2.2. Developing Tourism in the Orinoquia

The development of tourism contributes to improvement in the quality of life of the people of Colombia's Orinoquia. The principles and models used for the Orinoquia will draw upon these related fields but will be customized to the specific circumstances not only within each specific destination within the region.

2.3. Destination Lifecycle Considerations

After many years of conflict, tourism in much of the Orinoquia is in the **early stages of growth**. Recognizing the specific needs of these newly opened areas is critical to applying sustainable tourism principles in meaningful, helpful ways in destination communities and businesses.

Destinations in the early stage of development are characterized by a high need for investment. Destinations need to invest in infrastructure to support growing demand for services (Mill & Morrison, 2012). Natural attractions that are gaining in popularity require investment to ensure visitors are managed in an appropriate manner as traffic increase. At the same time, the private sector will invest in tourism related products and services. Beyond financial resources, at a destination level this means educating community leadership on a range of activities required ensure sustainability and competitiveness as the destination moves through the lifecycle.

It is important to note that the greatest sustainability challenge for many small business is developing a profitable business. These micro businesses have special challenges:
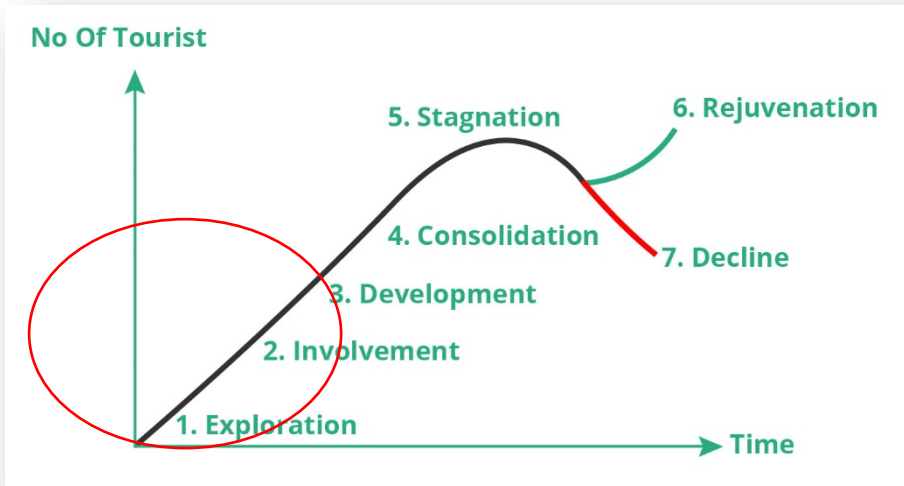
- Many of these business owners and entrepreneurs are new to tourism
- Many are operating their tourism businesses as supplemental businesses to their main business (agriculture)
- Many of the businesses are extremely small with limited resources.

Sustainable tourism criteria and models will be applied in ways that recognize the challenges of these fledging businesses. An important contribution of this project will the staged implementation of sustainability criteria.

3.   SUSTAINABILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS DRIVE DESTINATION SUCCESS

The long-term value of tourism to the Orinoquia is determined by both its sustainability and competitiveness. These concepts are closely integrated. Sustainability tourism principles ensure that the benefits of tourism are maximized and the negative impacts are minimized. Sustainable tourism actions contribute to high quality tourism experiences, differentiated offerings and higher yields. Competitiveness ensures that the destination and its component enterprises continue to attract visitors and drive sustainability actions.

Destination governance that encourages both sustainability and promotes competitiveness maximizes the benefits of tourism for the destination community. One of the core elements of effective sustainable tourism is the ability to attract and satisfy select markets. Without travelers, the benefits of sustainable tourism cannot be achieved. While it is clear that competitiveness in the marketplace contributes to sustainable tourism, it must be noted that sustainable tourism contributes to competitiveness. Sustainable tourism principles lead to an authentic, quality experience desired by many travelers today.

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3.1. Destination Sustainability
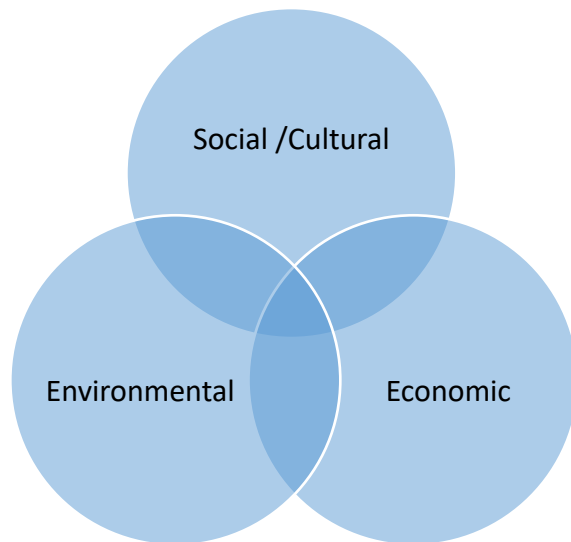
Figure 1: Colombia has adopted triple-bottom-line principles in its sustainable tourism programs

Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities". Sustainable tourism is not a "niche tourism sector"; **sustainable tourism principles can apply to all types of tourism** including ecotourism, agritourism and even mass tourism. Sustainable tourism principles recognize that tourism must balance **economic, social and environmental** issues in order to maximize benefits for destination communities. This project will utilize those criteria and adapt them to the specific needs to the destination communities and specific enterprises. GSTC criteria – for both destinations and industry - are organized along 4 dimensions:

A.   Demonstrate Effective Sustainable **Management**
B.   Maximize **economic benefits** for the host community and minimize negative impacts
C.   Maximize benefits to communities, visitors, and **culture**; minimize negative impacts
D.   Maximize benefits to the **environment** and minimize negative impacts.

Colombia is a leader in the implementation of sustainable tourism practices.

3.2. Destination Competitiveness

The World Economic Forum (WEF) defines competitiveness as "the set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity" (Cann, 2016). At a national level, tourism competitiveness is measured using 4 themes including enabling environment, travel and tourism polices and enabling conditions, infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources. The competitiveness of sub-national regions – including departments and municipalities - can be derived from this index. It is important to note, that members of the tourism system – including tourism

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officers, while not directly responsible for some factors of competitiveness, have an important role in advocacy for the development of this factors.
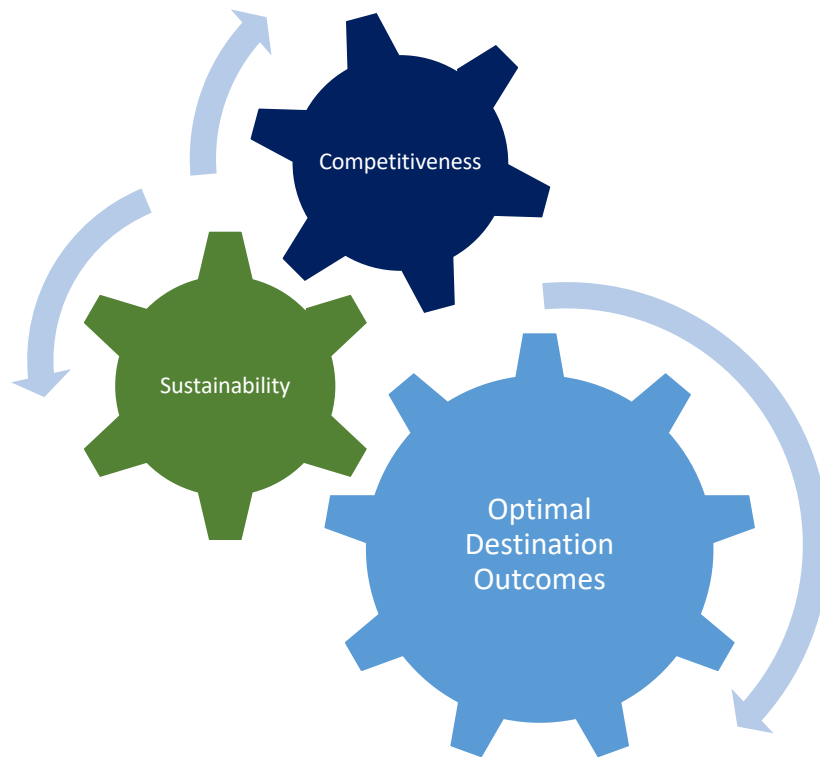
Figure 2: Competitiveness and sustainable management are mutually supportive drivers of long term benefits

4. THE DESTINATION SYSTEM

As tourism as a whole can be considered a system, so the destination is a system of actors working together to provide experiences to visitors. At the core of the visitor experience are the attractions that motivate visitation. These attractions can include natural and cultural heritage attractions, events and festivals and commercial attractions. Also core to the delivery of tourism experiences are the businesses and other entities directly involved in providing services to visitors.

It is critical to note that the destination system extends beyond those organizations that identify themselves as part of the tourism system. Critical to the effective operation of the destination are the suppliers of infrastructure and other services. It has been said that effective tourism is a "whole of

government" activity. As such, those entities directly involved with tourism must engage with leaders and organizations in the "Macro-Destination".

Also critical to the functioning of the destination system are the suppliers to companies directly related to tourism. The inclusion of these indirect providers is critical to achieve optimal economic benefits – reducing economic leakage from the system and extending employment opportunities.

In referring to the systems nature of destinations it is important to highlight characteristics of destinations. Some characteristics of destination systems:

- Destinations are made of a wide range of actors acting independently.
- Some actors in the tourism system may have responsibility over aspects of system function but this is not necessarily the case. For instance, the destination marketing organization (DMO) may be responsible for destination level marketing. Nevertheless, these entities rarely have the ability to "command or control" other destination system members.
- Unlike businesses – where there is a chain of command – destinations are networks. No-one is in charge of the destination system.
- Destination systems – and clusters within these systems – are fluid. They will self-organize as needs are perceived and change as conditions change.
- Maintaining effectively function destination systems and clusters within the destination, requires attention to group process and skills in collaboration and cooperation. Resources must be applied to both group functioning and task achievement.

Destination system
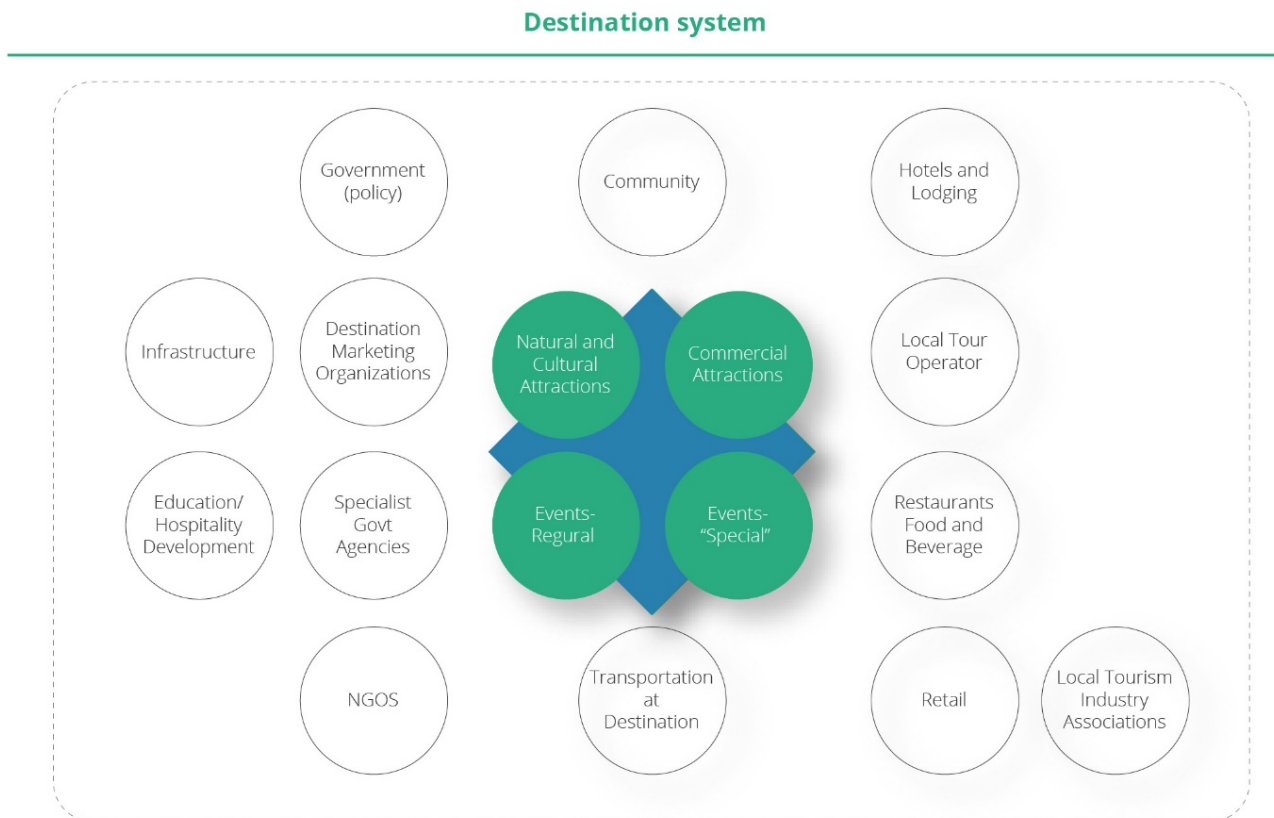
Figure 3: Destination System

4.1. High Impact Actors in the Destination System

Several actors with the system have high potential to impact system functioning. Strategies that focus on these actors will have greatest potential to create positive outcomes for the system. High impact actors include:
- Government and Macro-level Destination organizations
- Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)
- NGOs and Associations
- Tourism Clusters (clusters of product targeting specific markets)
- New product/business: Tourism Enterprise Development

4.2. Destination System Hierarchies

Destination system can be considered as a series of embedded systems or subsystems. While each subsystem may act independently - the performance of each subsystem in linked to the system as a

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whole. The optimal outcomes from tourism will be achieved when each level of the system is working towards the common goals.

To achieve the best results the systems must organize to achieve a specific set of tasks that maximize the net outcomes of the triple bottom line. In order to achieve these tasks, the system must function effectively and so requires a set of skills or capacities. This model will address the key tasks and skills required to achieve sustainable tourism.

The success of tourism in the Orinoquia will be determined the competitiveness and sustainability of the system at each level of the system.

These factors can be represented in the following model for Sustainable and Competitive Destinations.
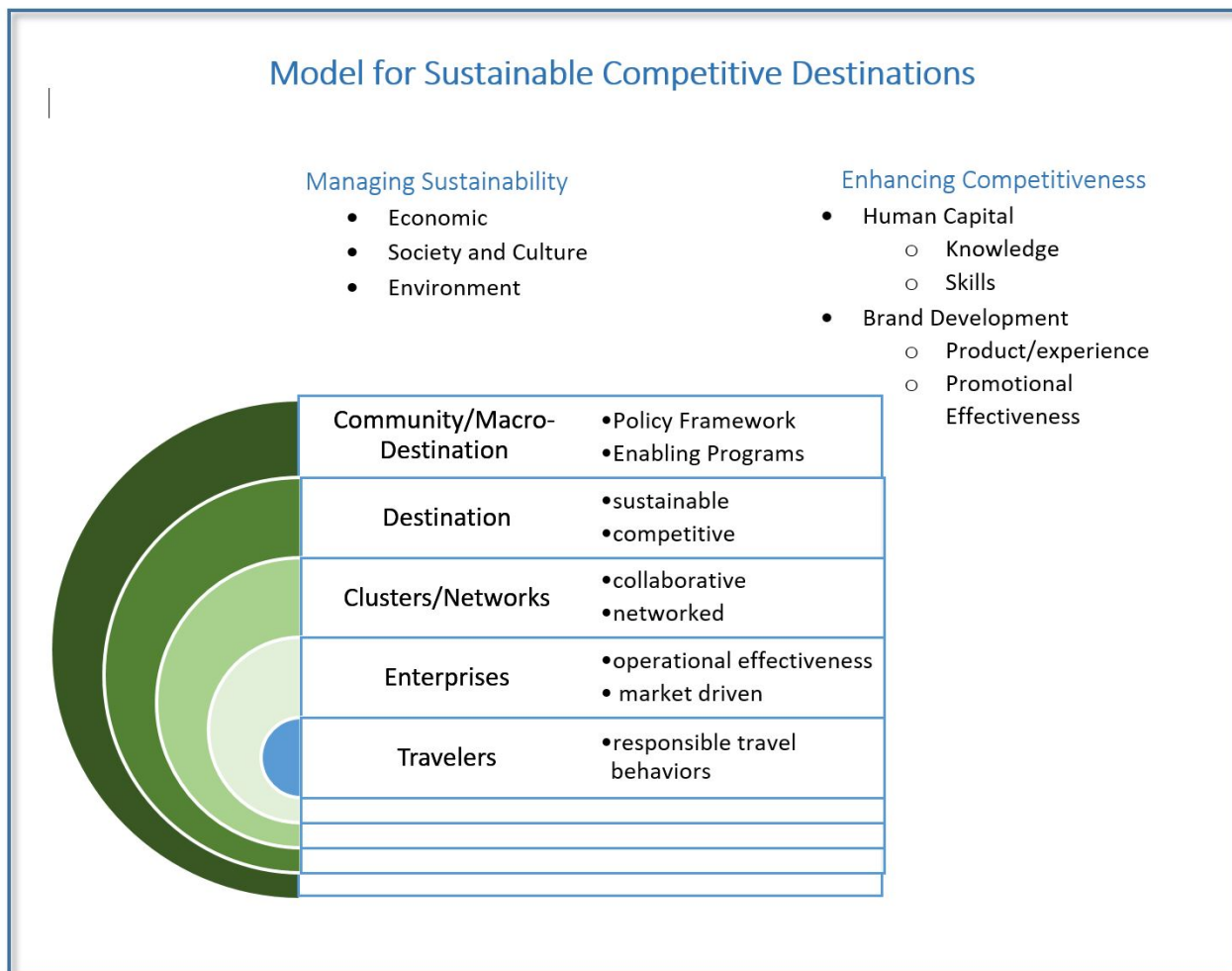

Figure 4: Model for Sustainable and Competitive Destinations

5. COMMUNITY/MACRO-DESTINATION FACTORS

Tourism takes place within the broader social /political system. Factors of sustainability and competitiveness are determined by organizations beyond the core tourism-related organizations.

5.1. Competitive Factors

At a national level, tourism competitiveness is determined on a set of factors that include destination attractiveness and infrastructure. The World Economic Forum (Schwab, Snabe, Elde, & Blanke, 2015) identifies the components of destination competiveness include:

- (Tourism) Enabling Environment
  - Business environment
  - Safety and security
  - Health and Hygiene
  - Human Resources and Labor markets
  - ICT Readiness
- T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions
  - Prioritization of Travel and Tourism
  - International Openness
  - Price Competiveness
  - Environmental Sustainability
- Infrastructure
  - Air transportation
  - Ground and Port Infrastructure
  - Tourism service infrastructure
- Natural and Cultural Resources
  - Natural resources
  - Cultural resources
  - Business travel

Colombia is currently (2015) ranked 68th of 141 countries. It ranks lowest on "infrastructure" and while this ranking is a national result, it is reasonable to acknowledge that infrastructure development lags in the Orinoquia. Tourism development in the Orinoquia will be greatly influenced by other plans for the region including infrastructure and development.

Strategies to improve destination competiveness in the Orinoquia may include:

- Policies and Support for tourism: Policies that recognize the importance of tourism to the economy are critical to sustained development. Support – including financial support - from key community leaders is critical. DMO's must ensure government leaders are aware of tourism and its contribution to community well-being and economic development.

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- Infrastructure: The development of infrastructure – including ICT and transportation is critical to destination development. Tourism is impacted by infrastructure issues in a variety of ways = for instance, signage is an important element of the visitor experience. DMOs may also be actively involved in advocating for greater air capacity to their destination.
- Education and Capacity Building: Workforce development is a critical action to ensure the benefits of tourism reach the local community. These strategies are critical to ensure that tourism provides more than entry level and low paying operational positions. Training and capacity building should provide support for the development of managerial positions in tourism as well as support for entrepreneurial activities targeting tourism.

5.2. Sustainability Factors

Sustainable tourism is also impacted by factors in the larger community/macro destination system. Factors contributing to the effectiveness of sustainable tourism include a policy framework that enables sustainable tourism and community based programs that support sustainable tourism activities.

The policy framework that supports sustainable tourism development includes legislation/policies and/or regulations ensuring:
- Building and town planning
- Safety and Security
- Environment
- Environmental and Cultural Asset Protection
- Employment and Anti-exploitation
- Accessibility and Inclusion
- Property Rights.

Community programs that facilitate sustainable tourism development include:
- Environmental programs (water waste reductions, recycling, energy conservation)
- Workforce development and education programs
- Tourism policing
- Cultural and heritage programs.

6. THE DESTINATION SYSTEM FACTORS

6.1. Relationships between destinations and enterprises

Destination systems should be considered both as a whole and as a portfolio of tourism enterprises. The sustainability of a destination is ultimately determined by the collective efforts of each

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of the system members. Colombia recognizes the need to manage destinations at both a system and product level. For example, Colombia has one of the most progressive sustainability program that require a wide range of tourism products to assess their sustainability practices. In addition to this product level focus on sustainability, Colombia is rolling out a destination certification program.

It is important to remember that destination competitiveness is determined, at least to a degree, by the competitiveness of the organizations within the destination.

The ability of these independent operators to achieve high levels of performance – and to work together to deliver superiors results for the whole destination - is an ideal each destination should strive to achieve. Competitive, sustainable destination teams lead to competitive, sustainable destinations.
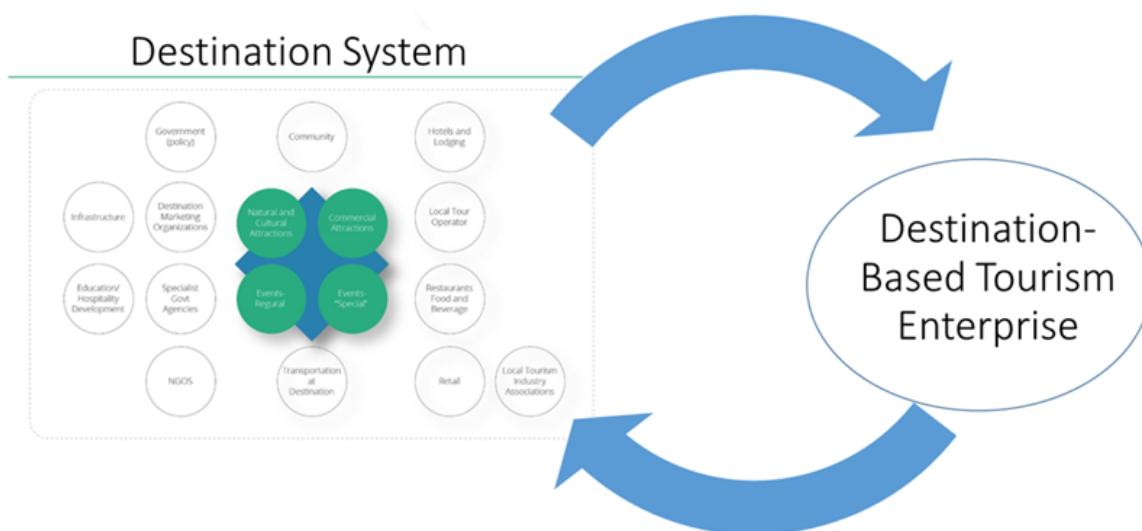
Figure 5: Mutually Supportive Destination -Enterprise Interconnectivity

Tourism takes place in destinations and the ability of destinations to successfully attract visitors and manage the tourism process in a sustainable manner is critical to achieve long term benefits.

6.2. Competitive Tourism Destinations

Destination can increase their competitiveness by enhancing a set of assets with the destination system. These assets are important factors of production for tourism and include:
- Human Resources Assets: The capacity of the people of the destination to meet the growing needs of tourism in the destination.
- Physical and Cultural Assets: The tangible and intangible environmental and cultural assets of the region.

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- Knowledge assets: Knowledge assets represent the actionable information that resides in the destination. This includes not only skills and capacities, but customer-based knowledge (supply chain relationships, sales contacts).
- Brand/Image: The reputation of the region as a tourism destination. The development of the perceptions of the region is the result of both promotional activity (advertising, public relations, web-based marketing, sales) and user experience in the destination. The user experience is determined by destination place-building, and enterprise level product development.
- Capital/Financial Resources. Micro and small tourism businesses have significant challenges in accessing financial resources for growth and development. Progressive destinations will seek funding for these organizations. Public/private partnerships can be significant catalysts for growth and support tourism development.

Destinations can develop these assets and enhance their competitiveness by developing strategies designed to build both the destination brand and the destination network/team.

Destinations are recognizing that destination brand building includes not only the positioning the destination through promotional activities, like advertising and public relations, but managing the user experience at the destination. Using this approach to brand building, DMO management must focus on product development – both of the destination as a whole and supporting product development of their constituent products.

Destinations also increase their competiveness by building the capacity of the destination team. This includes adopting knowledge management strategies to ensure each team member has the best information to act effectively. It also requires systems of training and coaching to raise the skill level of destination level members to meet the needs of their marketplace.
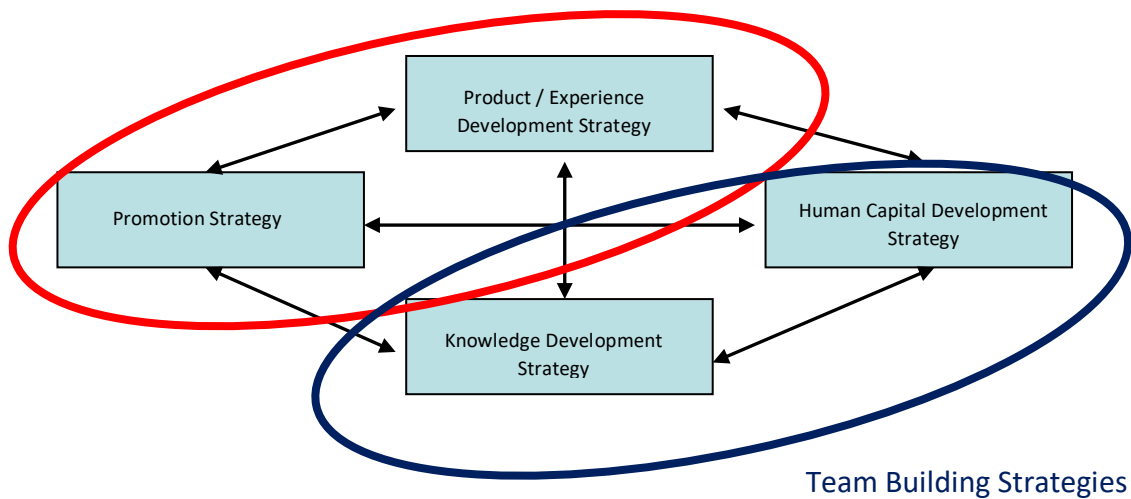
Destination Brand Building Strategies

Figure 6: Strategies for Competitive Destinations

6.3. Sustainable Tourism Destinations

As noted previously, many of the sustainable criteria – both by at a destination level and an enterprise level – take place in the course of everyday operations. Marketing plans are produced, businesses recycle etc. While these actions are beneficial they do not represent a comprehensive management approach to achieve specific sustainability outcomes. Sustainable tourism management requires the core functions of management – planning, organizing, leading and controlling – to meet the criteria required to achieve sustainable tourism goals.

Sustainable Tourism Management requires mastery of some important management concepts:
- Change Management: Implementing change within systems – whether business practices or personal behavior change – is difficult.
- System Management: As noted – tourism systems are complex and require action by a wide variety of actors – some of which don't even consider themselves in tourism. Tourism systems do not have a hierarchy where one person or organization is in control – but rely on collaboration and cooperation. Traditional strategic planning models often fail as they assume "command and control" – new models of managing in systems are often required.
- Strategic Management: Sustainable tourism management is a strategic activity – it requires long term commitment. Ensuring all actors in the process maintain motivation and commitment through the process requires deliberate actions over the long term.
- Continuous Improvement or "Kaizen": Like the quality movement of the 1980s, sustainable tourism management is based on the principle of "continuous improvement. As goals are achieved, new goals are set to further improve performance. As such – sustainable tourism management should be considered a process – not a project.

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Sustainable tourism criteria outline a set of activities that should be undertaken by destinations. These actions include:

- Planning for destination growth and development
- Monitoring sustainability criteria and system performance
- Developing a Policy and regulatory framework to support sustainability goals
- Destination Marketing
- Infrastructure Development and Government services to increase competitiveness
- Managing benefits from destination assets – Cultural and Natural

Destination "Management" Plans - Best practices in destination management recommendations, including the GSTC criteria, require destinations have a strategic plan. GSTC provide a set of specific elements that destinations should be planning for:

- Promotion and marketing
- Seasonality
- Climate change
    - adaptation
    - mitigation GHG monitoring
- Sustainability standards
- Crisis and emergency management

While plans like these are typically coordinated by DMOs, they are the work of a wide range of stakeholders in the destination system.

Workforce Development and Capacity Building - The development of tourism requires workforce development strategies to ensure necessary workers possess necessary skills and knowledge to take advantage of new opportunities. These skills range from foundational hospitality skills suitable for entry level workers to higher level management skills. Ensuring a full range of training and educational opportunities are important to ensure that local workers are able to access higher paying senior roles within the industry.

Supply Chain Development - The economic benefits of tourism extend beyond the money spent directly with the hotels, attractions and restaurants. Beyond the direct income generated by tourism, indirect and induced benefits are created as money from tourism moves through local economies. Developing strategies that increase the amount of money that stays in the local economy – by encouraging local production for tourism – can substantially improve the positive impacts of tourism. **Supply chain analysis**, and **value chain analysis**, will be undertaken to ensure each destination maximizes the potential benefits. Details of this approach can be found the discussion of clusters and enterprise incubation.

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7. DESTINATION CLUSTERS

As destinations are considered systems, so within destinations it is common for sub-groups or clusters to form. Michael Porter, a leading expert on strategy, popularized the role of clusters in the developing competitive industry sectors (Porter, 1990). In tourism, clusters have become a driving force in the destination development. Across the Orinoquia, MinCIT and DNO are working with clusters to stimulate the development of tourism.

Destination clusters are group of individuals representing key stakeholders in the destination – including hoteliers, tour operators, attraction management, guides and others, all working to the develop the destination. These operator recognize their collective action is more effective and generates benefits not only for the destination as a whole, but their businesses as well. It is important to remember that clusters are loose structures with voluntary membership.

As critical networks in the development of destinations, the maintenance and ongoing support for cluster governance should be managed. Development of skills in collaboration in networks and techniques for strategy building in loosely aligned networks are a critical success factor for the long term success of these groups.

8. TOURISM ENTERPRISES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

8.1. Competitive Tourism Enterprises

Business competiveness can be defined as a business' ability to provide products as efficiently and effectively as competitors. Tourism businesses in the Orinoquia strive to ensure they are competitive with businesses in their region and around the world. In order to achieve competiveness, businesses in the Orinoquia should focus on both business development and marketing effectiveness – particularly product development and promotion. Capacity building – including the development of tools, training programs and coaching support for small businesses is recommended to assist these businesses attain competiveness in the marketplace.

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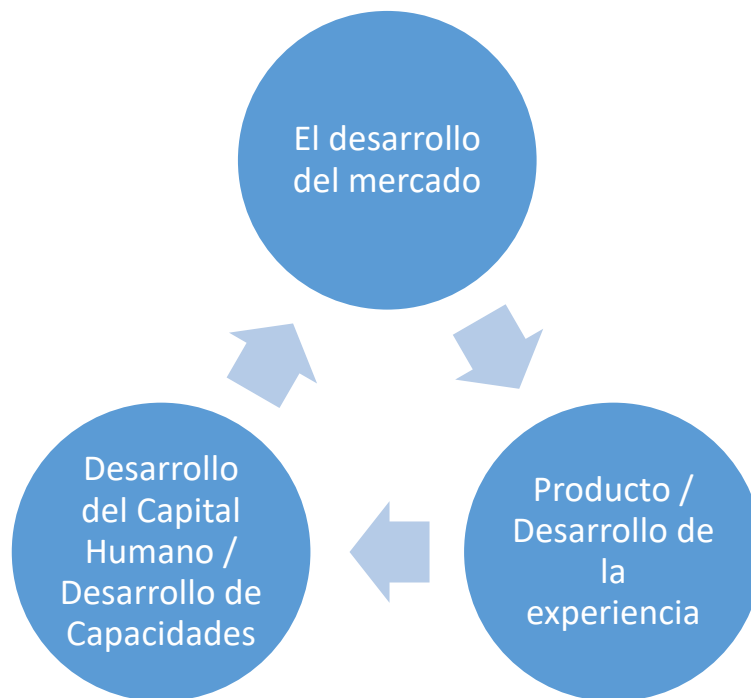
Figure 7: Enterprise Competitiveness

As demand for tourism within the Orinoquia increases, the growth of the tourism industry in this region will be driven by businesses responding to the demand with new product offerings. The development of tourism in the Orinoquia incorporates a number of business models including **micro/small businesses**, **community based tourism** enterprises and **socially entrepreneurial** businesses. Each these business models should be incorporated into planning for growth in the region. With the Orinoquia tourism system flexibility in accommodating a variety of business models will ensure the benefits of tourism are distributed throughout the community. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.2.4.2

The "incubation' of micro/small/medium sized enterprises in Orinoquia is an important task. The provision of capacity development/training, mentoring, market access and (micro) financing will support the development of these businesses.

8.2. Sustainable Tourism Enterprises

The performance of the system is the sum of the activities of each of the actors within the system. So, while it is helpful to have destination commitment to sustainability and competitiveness, it is important that each business also undertakes actions designed to maximize the benefits from tourism – for themselves and the destination. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) principles for industry support and reinforce destination criteria. These criteria are organized:

A. Demonstrate Effective Sustainable **Management**

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B. Maximize **economic benefits** for the host community and minimize negative impacts

C. Maximize benefits to communities, visitors, and **culture**; minimize negative impacts

D. Maximize benefits to the **environment** and minimize negative impacts

These general principles are incorporated into the industry standards for sustainability implemented by Colombia and required for inclusion in the national register of tourism products.

Managing for sustainability - Sustainable tourism management requires tourism enterprises to undertake a set of sustainability related activities and to actively manage their ongoing performance. The GSTC criteria for areas of action include management of the following:

- Implementation of a Sustainability Management System
- Legal Compliance with established laws/policies
- Reporting and Communication to sustainability to key stakeholders including staff
- Staff Engagement in the sustainability process
- Ongoing management of Customer Experience
- Accurate Promotion
- Maintaining Buildings and Infrastructure to meet sustainability criteria
- Ongoing adoption of sustainable practices and materials
- Ensuring access by local people to tourism assets
- Recognition of land, water and property rights
- Engagement with the larger Destination

Economic Benefits - Tourism enterprises, including hotels and attractions, have the ability to use their purchasing power and supply chain decisions to support sustainable tourism.

- Community support
- Local employment
- Local purchasing
- Local entrepreneurs

Tourism enterprises should also model social responsibility by:

- Eliminating exploitation and harassment
- Providing Equal opportunity in the workforce
- Providing Decent work

The criteria also encourages tourism enterprises should show their corporate responsibility through community service.

Tourism organizations should work to ensure their operations do not hinder local livelihoods.

Cultural - Tourism enterprises also play an important role in preserving local culture/heritage. GSTC criteria require:

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- Adoption of best practices for cultural interactions with indigenous cultures and culturally sensitive sites
- Contribute to protecting cultural heritage
- Presenting culture and heritage – both traditional and contemporary – in authentic ways.
- Ensuring historical/archaeological artefacts are not sold – unless permitted by law.

Environment - Environmental actions include the management of energy, water and waste and protection of local natural spaces/ecosystems. These criteria are organized by GSTC as follows:

Conserving resources
- o Environmentally preferable purchasing
- o Efficient purchasing
- o Energy conservation

Reducing Pollution
- o Reducing GHG
- o Transport
- o Wastewater
- o Solid waste
- o Harmful substances
- o Minimize pollution

Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes. Specific actions include:
- o Biodiversity conservation
- o Invasive species
- o Visits to natural sites
- o Wildlife interactions
- o Animal welfare
- o Wildlife harvesting and trade

Continuous Improvement - The Colombian government, through MinCIT has established the guidelines for sustainable tourism operations. These standards should be considered tools for assisting business to improve their sustainability outcomes through the commitment to continuous improvement.

9. SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS AND THE TOURISM SYSTEM

The tourism system allows for the successful delivery of tourism experiences, many based in destination systems, to consumers (travelers). Beyond the destination, intermediaries connect travelers with both information and the ability to purchase travel experiences. Many of these intermediaries create significant value by aggregating (packaging) products in ways that appeal to

consumers. Travel providers, including airlines and tour operators, provide critical services to destinations.

From a DMO perspective, the role of these members of the tourism system is critical. In order to meet sustainability goals, destinations must target intermediaries that will support destination goals.
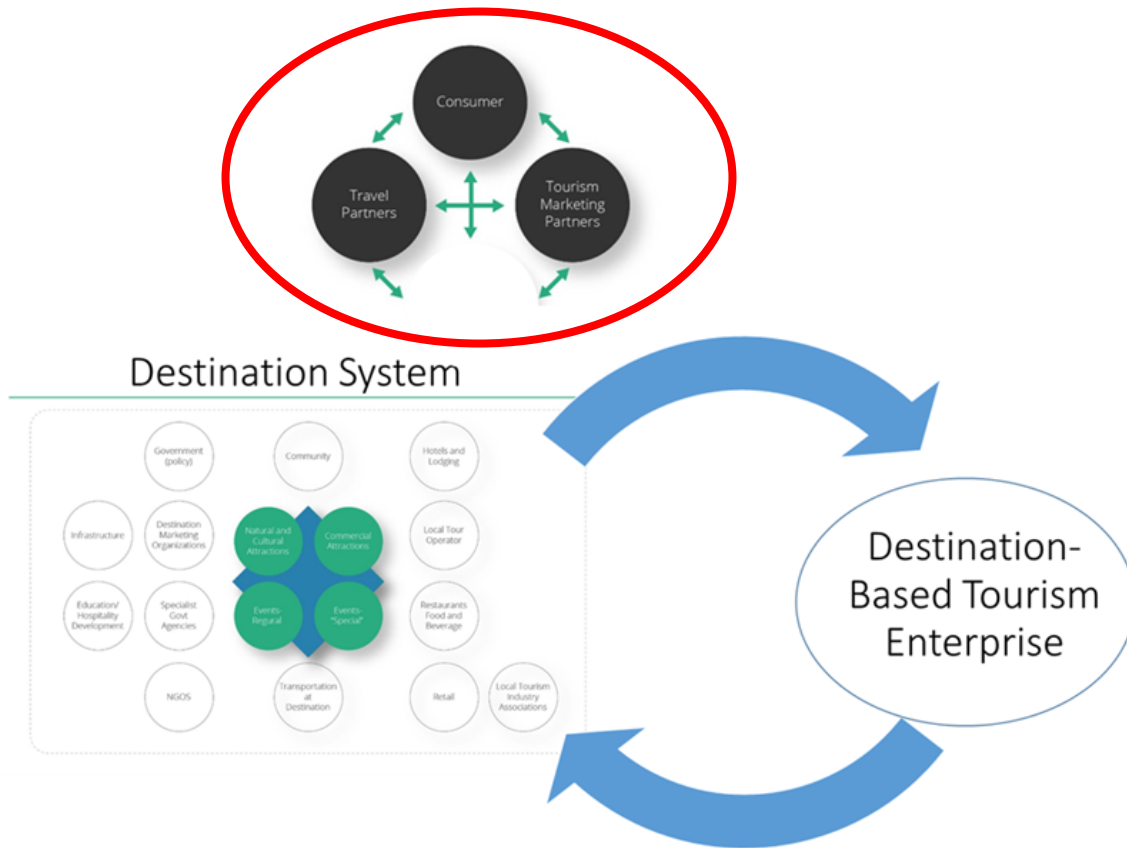

Figure 8: Tourism System : Beyond the Destination

9.1. Travelers and the Target Market

Colombia Domestic Travel Market - The domestic Colombian market has experienced significant growth in recent years – growing from 13.235 million visitor in 2010 to 20.106 million visitors in 2016 (OECD). It is expected to continue to grow at high rates. While there is evidence of "pent-up" demand, effective marketing to Colombians of the Orinoquia will be critical. Profiling the Colombian market for travel to the Orinoquia is a critical step in developing effective and efficient marketing programs for the region.

International Visitor Markets - The United States is Colombia's largest source market for international visitors and Colombia is attracting attention as an emerging international market. Anecdotal evidence suggest that European markets – most notably Spain and Germany – may be important international

markets for the region. The Orinoquia regions must leverage this interest with travelers that are "early adopters" of new destinations.

Responsible Travelers - Competitive, sustainable destinations must target clients that will support destination goals. Target markets should respect the cultural values of the destination and be able to contribute to the economic goals of the destination. Destination development should take into account not only destination stakeholders but the needs of target markets.

At the same time, destinations should be proactive in guiding tourists on the values of the destination and appropriate behaviors. Markets that demonstrate their commitment to responsible travel should be the identified and targeted by destinations seeking to maximize the benefits of tourism.

Destination system members across the Orinoquia expressed concerns that visitors should be educated to respect local values including preservation of natural spaces and respect for local culture.

9.2. Travel Intermediaries

The development of the Orinoquia will require the development of a network of travel intermediaries actively supporting the growth of the region. The travel distribution network is complex. Tourism companies typically use a multi-channel approach that includes both direct purchase (typically direct purchase via the internet) and indirect models. Distribution channels may include online travel agencies (OTAs). The importance of trip advisor to the many of the products in the Orinoquia is testament to the power of this channel.

In the domestic Colombian market, traditional distribution channels include travel agents and tour wholesalers/operators. Members of the distribution network are currently unfamiliar with the products and destinations of the Orinoquia. Even when product is available, product training will be required to ensure effective sales of this niche destination.

Internationally, tour operators are in the early stage of building distribution networks. Specialty operators, like sports fishing guides, have sufficient international distribution to meet current levels of capacity. More broadly, individual tour operators/wholesale companies have had early successes in developing relationships. International sales calls, participation in conferences and familiarizations of international wholesalers to regions in the Orinoquia have all contributed to the early development of new international business opportunities. The choice of distribution channel partners is a strategic choice and tour operators in the region will need to target international distribution partners in specific markets. The development of these relationships is a long term process based on mutual trust and will require deliberate strategies to ensure the best outcomes.

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