

Assessing the tourism performance of a destination: Toward a new approach using Cuba as a case study

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1. Introduction

Across Europe many destinations (Barcelona, Cambridge, Dubrovnik, Florence, Oxford, Rome, Stratford-on-Avon, Venice, and York) are voicing (protests, graffiti and physical intimidation) their concern regarding the development of the tourism industry. These destinations under anti-tourist anger are already planning to monitor tourists and tourism more closely either by limiting the number of visitors; limiting cruise ships; introducing new tourism taxes and fines; having special patrols; encouraging tourists to visit other parts of the country that are less visited; restricting some places to tourists; ensuring that tourism is an enriching experience for visitors and hosts alike; encouraging tourists to visit beyond the central sights; diversifying tourist activities; reducing seasonality and addressing the needs of the local community (Coldwell, 2017; <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>; Tapper, 2017). The reasons for this rise on anti-tourism are due to the fact that the large number of tourists visiting some destinations is putting the UNESCO World Heritage status at risk; tourists are affecting the quality of life of locals and particularly killing neighbourhoods; putting at risk the sustainability of the tourism industry of the destination (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com>; Leadbeater, 2017); the tourists are not respecting the cities, history, arts and inhabitants by defacing the surroundings, dumping thrash, buying counterfeit goods, sitting anywhere and spending very

little money particularly day-trippers (Buckley, 2017; Leadbeater, 2017). For Tapper (2017), a tipping point has been reached. Despite the fact Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy are leading destinations in terms of number of visitors and income generated by the tourism industry, can they be considered as well performing destinations? In order to answer this question regarding the performance of destinations, we are going to choose Cuba as a case study.

After the Second World War, tourism became a major economic sector for the Caribbean (Espino, 2015 cited in Gayle & Goodrich, 2015). According to Rettinger and Wojtowicz (2014), the Caribbean region draws its unique selling proposition from its cultural characteristics and the most popular tourism destinations are the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Aruba, Jamaica, the Bahamas and Puerto Rico (also known as the 'Big 6'). When it comes to this part of the world most people think about sunny, white beach paradise islands, colourful cocktails and lively music (S raphin, 2011; Sheller, 2004). However, because the region is very diverse, not all the islands are vested in the branding and marketing of paradise (Sheller, 2004: 23). For instance, Haiti and the Dominican Republic have two different images. On the one hand, we have one of the most visited island of the Caribbean (The Dominican Republic), and on the other hand, Haiti, still branded as an unsecure destination (S raphin, 2011; Higate & Henry, 2009), and as a place where the worst is always likely to happen (Bonnet, 2010). As for

Cuba, the largest island in the Caribbean (Espino, 2015 cited in Gayle & Goodrich, 2015) and the second most visited one with 3.001.958 visitors (CTO, 2015), the years of socialist government and the US imposed trade embargo made the Cuban experience unique in the Caribbean (Espino, 2015 cited in Gayle & Goodrich, 2015). Ranked as second within the 'Big 6', and as the island receiving the highest number of visitors in the Caribbean (at least 1 million visitors per year according to Séraphin & Dosquet, 2016), it would seem that Cuba is a competitive tourism destination with good tourism performance. Competitiveness of the destination, in this case, is mainly explained by the number of visitors on the island and hence the ability of the destination to maintain its market position and share and/or improve upon them through time (d'Hautesserre 2000). However, it is worth noting that the competitiveness of a tourism destination is not solely determined by number of visitors and market positions. Models of destination competitiveness have shown that other factors are also important while determining the competitiveness of a destination. For instance, according to Hassan (2000), a destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitors is perceived as competitive with good tourism performance. Likewise, Dwyer and Kim (2003) propose that competitiveness of a destination is rather about the destination's ability to meet visitor needs on various aspects of

the tourism experience, or to deliver goods and services that perform better than other destinations on those aspects of the tourism experience considered to be important by tourists. Based on these observations, it may be argued that tourism performances have mostly been determined by testing competitiveness models. See for example, Dwyer and Kim (2003), Ritchie and Crouch (2003), Heath (2003), Crouch (2008), Gowreesunkar (2012) among others. In contrast, a tourism study conducted by Botti and Zaman (2015, cited in Séraphin & Dosquet, 2016) on some islands of the Caribbean (Barbados, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Haiti) showed that when applying the multi-criteria ELECTRE method, tourism performance and ranking can be different and may not necessarily reflect the reality, as shown by conventional competitiveness models. The multi-criteria ELECTRE method is one of the most cited models in tourism competitiveness studies. It is both an approach and a body of techniques designed to help people make choices in accordance with their values in cases characterized by multiple, non-commensurate and conflicting criteria (Bogetoft and Pruzan, 1991). The multi-criteria ELECTRE method works with a list of criteria developed by Ritchie & Crouch (2003 cited in Botti & Peypoch, 2013) and it integrates all relevant factors that might typify the competitiveness of a destination (Botti & Peypoch, 2013:108). Therefore, based on empirical evidences, and in particular on the work of Botti and Zaman (2015 cited in

S raphin & Dosquet), it is legitimate to investigate how Cuba is performing as a destination. With this as background, we propose the following research questions:

- (a) Based on a multi-criteria approach, can Cuba be considered as a competitive destination?
- (b) How can tourism performance be improved for the benefit of Cuba?

From a management point of view, the underpinning objective of this study is to start an investigation regarding the potential leadership of the ‘Big 6’ by Cuba, since the USA lifted their embargo on the country in 2016. Making assumptions on future trends regarding the production and consumption pattern in tourism is important. However, what seems to be more important is to understand how future trends may affect the management of tourism. In fact, there is a need to bring a degree of control and certainty to business management processes in tourism as well as providing desired returns for destinations (Cooper and Hall, 2008: 348). From an academic point of view, this Book chapter contributes to the body of meta-literature on tourism in Cuba which at the moment remains rather limited (table 1).

From a methodological point of view, this conceptual book chapter based on literature review adopts a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) approach. As a result, the Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) and particularly its

application to the tourism industry will be central in our research. The notion of ‘blind spots’ developed by Blakeley (2007) and applied to tourist destinations by Séraphin, Gowreesunkar and Ambaye (2016), will also be an important driver of this study. To address our research questions, the book chapter will be structured combining the findings of two research papers and a book chapter: Séraphin, Gowreesunkar and Ambaye (2016) on ‘blind spots’ in tourist destination; Botti and Peypoch (2013) on the application of MCDA in a tourism context; and a book chapter (Espino, 2015 cited in Gayle & Goodrich, 2015) on tourism development in Cuba. The first section will address the historical background; Cuba and its tourism industry; Cuba and the Caribbean tourism industry; the branding of the destination and finally academic research on the destination. This section will be followed by the *conceptual framework* that covers MCDA methods and tourism destination competitiveness. The *Methodology* section will focus on how the performance of Cuba will be assessed using a MCDA framework and the criteria chosen will also be explained. *Results and recommendations* will be drawn from the application of the methodology developed. The final section proposes a *conclusion* including areas of future research.

It is very important to highlight the fact that in this paper Cuba is just a case study.

The key point of this paper is the range of criteria that can be used to assess the

performance of a destination. This book chapter was motivated by raise of anti-tourism in many European destinations.

2. Contextual framework

2.1 Historical background

By 1957, tourism was the second most important sector of the Cuban economy (Espino, 2015). The destination accounted for over 21% of all tourist arrivals in the Caribbean (CTO, 2015). Between 1960 and 1975, international tourists stopped visiting Cuba as the revolutionary government of that prevailing time discouraged visitors, as they associated tourism with the capitalist economy. As a result, the tourism industry came to an end in Cuba in 1962, especially when the USA imposed a trade embargo on the island restraining travel to Cuba by US citizens and residents. Thus, no major investment was undertaken by the government between 1960s and 1970s. However, with the new government, the situation changed in the mid-1970s. The setting up of the Institute Nacional del Turismo (INTUR) in 1976, followed by Cubanacan in 1987, significantly changed the tourism landscape in Cuba; the mission was to develop national and international tourism (Espino, 2015 cited in Gayle & Goodrich, 2015).

2.2 The tourism industry in Cuba

To make up for the loss of the American tourists who account for the largest group of visitors to the Caribbean, Cuba has turned towards Canada and Western Europe. During the 1980s, international tourists to Cuba increased faster than the Caribbean area. The popularity of Cuba was partly due to its price advantage over other Caribbean destinations. During the 1980s, many hotels and tourist resorts were built in Cuba. This was partly due to the Law-Decree No 50 enacted in 1982, a joint-venture law that opened the door of the tourism industry to foreign capital. Up to 49% foreign ownership can operate in Cuba (Espino, 2015 cited in Gayle & Goodrich, 2015). A study conducted by Rettinger and Wojtowicz (2014) shows that tourism performance in Cuba is a debatable topic. The study states that one of the main challenges facing the development of the tourist sector in Cuba is sustainable tourism, which is arguably based on the environmental, the economic, the cultural, and the social sphere. The environmental area includes all issues associated with the protection of the natural environment. This is especially true of regions experiencing significant tourist traffic – regions such as Cuba's coastline. Controversial decisions in this area include the decision to expand Varadero's tourist at the expense of its coast and the construction of two causeways linking the Cuban mainland with Cayo Coco and Cayo Santa Maria. The economic condition is both directly and indirectly associated with the development of the Cuban tourist sector. Cuba is dependent on market conditions

in foreign countries and the creation of tourist enclaves with little potential for broader multiplier effects has not really benefitted the island. This includes cases such as Varadero, Cayo Coco, and Cayo Santa Maria. The cultural value, which serves as a key element in the tourism offer has a tendency to become commercialized and local identity is lost. Programs such as ‘Authentic Cuba’ in order to protect the island’s cultural heritage, has not been too helpful with mass tourism. The social aspect of Cuban tourism relates to growing disparities and conflicts within Cuban host community and society. This is also recurrent in many other island destinations and the exploitation of host community in island tourism has been reported in the studies of Jurowski and Gursoy (2003), Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, (2008) Gowreesunkar *et al* (2010) among others.

2.3 Cuba and its Destination Management Organisation (DMO) branding

Branding is basically all about the process by which messages are conveyed to the consumers and potential consumers (Park, 2014). The American Marketing Association (1960) proposed the following definition of a brand: “*A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors*”. According to a study conducted by Adeyinka-Ojo and Nair (2016), destination branding is a way of disseminating the uniqueness of a

destination identity through differentiable features from other competing locations and the name is relatively fixed by the actual geographic name of the place. A brand identity is made of three parts (Saint-Hilaire, 2005):

1. Name

The name is the core of the identity. In general, the brand name is kept for ever unless an exceptional change occurs or if at international level the name is not suitable

2. The logo

A logo is a key component of brand identity and provides instant recognition for a brand. Since logos visually represent what the brand is and what it stands for, they have the potential to serve as a focal point of connection for customers by communicating and reinforcing a brand's core values (Park et al, 2013). Logos can therefore be viewed as a form of visual communication to the customers and it transcends international boundaries and language barriers (Pittard, Ewin & Jevons, 2007). The logo should be able to communicate organisation's objective to its target market, be memorable and should easily be associated with the corporate or brand name (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2011; Marti, 2008). The logo should also embody the firm's uniqueness and value and should yield customer brand commitment and improve the firm performance, while contributing to favourable interaction between the firm and its customers (Park,

Eisingerich, Pol & Park, 2013; Wang, Hernandez, Minor and Wei, 2012). In a tourism context, Hem and Iversen (2004) argue that destination logos should match the organisation they represent, that is to say: Their identity; uniqueness; value, as well as essence and objective (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2011; Marti, 2008). It is all the more important in tourism as they can influence tourist's destination choice (Gallarza, Saura and Garcia, 2002). The design depends of the cultural context and might change each time the context changes (Saint-Hilaire, 2005).

3. Slogan / Catching phrase

Firms change their slogan / catching phrase regularly (every 5, 10 or 15 years) as it needs to reflect the positioning of the firm. For example, the Cuban DMO adopted the slogan: '*Autentica Cuba*' and the logo below (figure 1):



Figure 1: Cuba DMO logo

A study conducted by Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar and Bonnardel (2016) on the framework to determine the right color and design of a logo, revealed that the Haitian DMO logo is not very efficient, due to the logo and the slogan which are not telling the narrative of the destination. The same could be said about Cuba. That said, in terms of destination visibility, it seems that there are three kinds of strategies adopted by the Caribbean DMOs regarding the design of their logo: a) Some moved from an idiosyncratic identity based logo to a universal ‘sea-and-sun’ stereotyped one; b) Others took the opposite strategy; c) The third category has adopted a neutral and stylised logo that does not refer to identity or ‘sea-and-sun’ stereotype. The Cuba is in this third category of destinations. Regardless, further research is needed to identify the role of customers and their change of expectation, taste and behaviour as the main variables (Doyle, 2002; Quek, 2012) in the branding strategy of tourism organisations in Haiti (and in the Caribbean).

2.4 Analysis of number of visitors in Cuba (2003-2014)

Data from the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) 2003-2014, show that the number of visitors to Cuba increased almost steadily (figure 2).

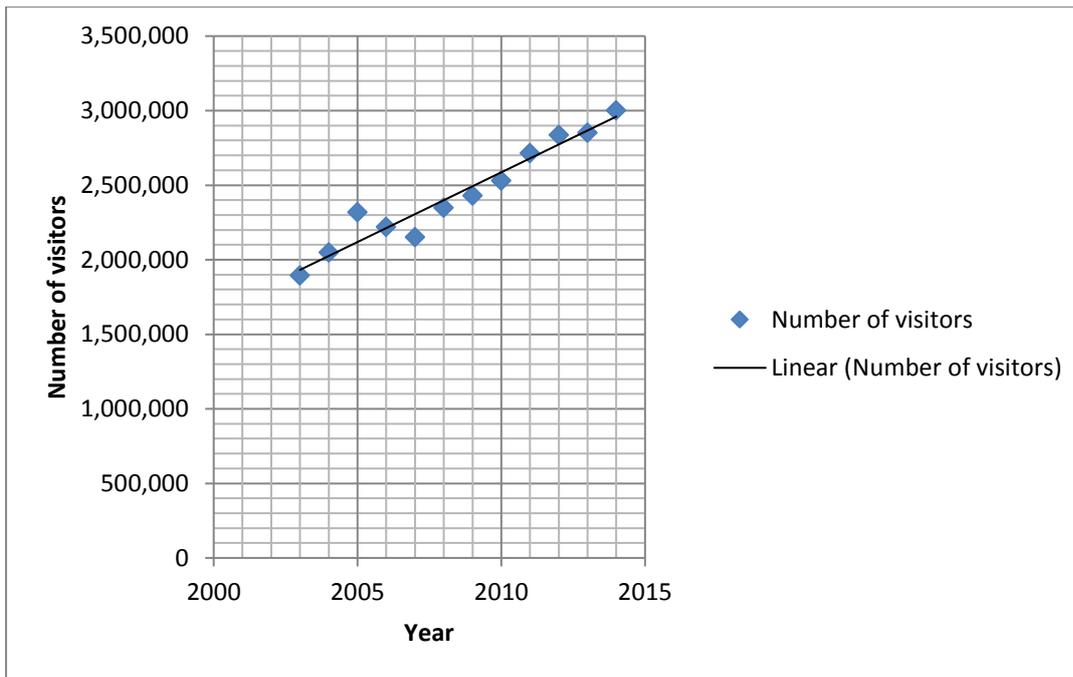


Figure 2: Number of visitors to Cuba (2013-2014)
 Source: The authors (data adapted from CTO)

The average number of visitors to Cuba per year between 2003 and 2014 was 2,446,092. According to Caribbean Tourism Organization (2016), the European market is one of the most important source market in Cuba. Cuba has 23.1% of the 5.2 million arrivals in the Caribbean. Of this market, 1.1 million arrivals are from the United Kingdom; representing 25.2% of the market for Cuba. As for the standard deviation over the same period, it equates to 348003.65 which shows a relatively steady evolution as explained earlier. Hence probably the reason why Cuba has since 2005 managed to sustain its position as the second most visited destination of the Caribbean (table 1).

Table 1: Ranking of Cuba as a tourist destination (2003-2014)

| Year | Number of visitors | Ranking in the Caribbean |
|------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 2003 | 1,894,746 | 3rd |
| 2004 | 2,048,572 | 3rd |
| 2005 | 2,319,334 | 2nd |
| 2006 | 2,220,567 | 2nd |
| 2007 | 2,152,221 | 2nd |
| 2008 | 2,348,340 | 2nd |
| 2009 | 2,429,809 | 2nd |
| 2010 | 2,531,745 | 2nd |
| 2011 | 2,716,317 | 2nd |
| 2012 | 2,838,169 | 2nd |
| 2013 | 2,851,330 | 2nd |
| 2014 | 3,001,958 | 2nd |

Source: The authors (data adapted from CTO)

The Dominican Republic is the most visited island of the Caribbean with 5,141,377 visitors in 2014 (CTO, 2015), followed by Cuba with 3,001,958 visitors (CTO, 2015). The difference in terms of number of visitors equates to 2,139,419. As for the third most visited island of the Caribbean, Jamaica, it received 2,080,181 visitors in 2014 (CTO, 2015), in other words, 921,777 less visitors than Cuba (table 2).

Table 2: 'Big 6' of the Caribbean (2014)

| DESTINATION | NUMBER OF VISITORS |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Dominican Republic | 5,141,377 |
| Cuba | 3,001,958 |
| Jamaica | 2,080,181 |
| Puerto Rico | 1,688,472 |
| Bahamas | 1,421,860 |
| Aruba | 1,072,082 |

Source: The authors (data adapted from CTO)

In terms of evolution rate (2003-2014), Cuba is the second best performing destination of the Caribbean way behind the Aruba, the new member of the leading destinations of the Caribbean (table 3).

Table 3: The 'Big 6' and the evolution rate of the number of visitors (2003-2014)

| | Destination | Evolution rate |
|---|--------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Dominican Republic | 57.32 |
| 2 | Cuba | 58.44 |
| 3 | Bahamas | -0.47 |
| 4 | Jamaica | 54.06 |
| 5 | Puerto Rico | 27.43 |
| 6 | Aruba | 67.02 |

Source: The authors (data adapted from CTO)

Based on the fact that: (1) the gap between Cuba and the Dominican Republic in terms of number of visitors in 2014 equated to 2.139.419 visitors (2) and that the difference in terms of evolution rate is 1.12% in favour of Cuba, it is likely that the Dominican Republic is going to retain its leadership for a few years.

3. Conceptual framework

3.1 MCDA

Botti and Peypoch (2013: 109) explain that ‘MCDA is a general term for methods providing a quantitative approach to support decision making in problems involving several criteria and choices’. Botti and Peypoch (2013:108) also explain that what tourists are doing when selecting a destination for their holidays: ‘Tourists who wish to enjoy a satisfying experience try to select one destination from a set of n possible alternatives and on the basis of m criteria’. A MCDA could be considered as a method falling under QCA.

Taking the example of countries economic performance, Vis, Woldendorp and Keman (2007) pointed out a few research gaps in the field of comparative analyses: First of all, they are very limited. Second, most comparative analyses research rely on a single case study. This approach is not rigorous as ‘studying single cases hardly help to discern best practices’ (Vis et al, 2007: 532). As a result, Vis et al (2007) are promoting the fuzzy-set theory combine with ideal type analysis as a potential solution to address the lack of good practice in terms of comparative analysis. ‘This approach provides more precise information on the case under investigation (...) and is easily interpretable (Vis et al, 2007: 537). As for Stokke (2007), he completes the list of advantages of using qualitative

comparative analysis (QCA) by adding the fact that this technique can help the investigator to consider more cases than he would usual do. For instance, Chang, Tseng and Woodside (2013) used this technique to analyse 645 self-administered questionnaires. For Ordanini, Parasuraman and Rubera (2014), QCA makes better sense of the data in research contexts. To the list of benefits of this method can be added achieving accuracy and generalisation (Woodside and Baxter, 2013), it is more informative and structured (Loane & McNaughton, 2006). Last but not least, this method can be applied to a variety of areas like education (Schneider, Bentrop & Paunescu, 2010); health (Chang, Tseng & Woodside, 2013); ICT (Loane & Bell, 2006); hospitality (Ordanini, Parasuraman and Rubera, 2014), in B2B context (Woodside & Baxter, 2013), countries economic performance (Vis et al, 2007), politics (Stokke, 2007) to name a few. If Ordanini, Parasuraman & Rubera (2014) introduced QCA into a luxury hotel context to investigate how customers' perceptions of new service attribute influence adoption intentions in order to evidence that QCA can help make better sense of the data in research contexts, it is however very important to highlight the fact, QCA is not the only research technique advocating the use of more than one source of information or data. The ELECTRE method developed by Ritchie and Crouch (2003) integrates all the relevant factors that might typify the competitiveness of a destination, namely: Core resources and attractors;

supporting factors and resources; destination management; destination policy, planning and development; qualifying and amplifying determinants. (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003 cited in Botti & Peypoch, 2013). This method is one of the most cited in academic research related to tourism (Botti & Peypoch, 2013). The ELECTRE method is part of a more general term for method providing support for decision making in problem involving several criteria and choices, namely Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (Botti & Peypoch, 2013). Still in a tourism marketing context, Séraphin, Gowreesunkar and Ambaye (2016) used the Blakeley Model (2007), a multi-criteria model to determine the blind spots of Haiti as a tourist destination. Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar and Bonnardel (2016) also developed a multi-criteria model for Destination Marketing Organisation to determine the right color for their logo. Woodside and Baxter (2013) in their quest to achieving accuracy and therefore the possibility to generalise results, pointed out that Case Study Research (CSR), degrees-of-freedom analysis (DFA), fs/QCA and decision system analysis (DSA) are tool helping to achieving excellence in the quality of results. It is legitimate to wonder whether MCDA can reach this level of accuracy. Woodside and Baxter (2013) used DSA in a context where manufacturers, distributors and customers were involved in the decision. In other words, many stakeholders involved in decision making. To some extent, this tool presents many similarities with MCDA. We

can also come to the conclusion that QCA, a method theorized by John Stuart Mill in 1843 and popularised by Ragin in 1987 (Kan, Adegbite, El Omari & Abdellatif, 2015) and used in many sectors opened the door to many other approaches, stream of thoughts and more importantly, accurate and precise research tool.

3.2 Tourism Destination Competitiveness (TDC)

Competitiveness in the tourism industry is a growing interest area. Research conducted by Botti and Peypoch (2013) showed that in 2002, 9 academic papers about destination competitiveness were published. In 2012, 42 papers were published in that field. In 2003, Ritchie and Crouch developed a well-established model that typifies the competitiveness of a destination (Andrades-Caldito, Sanchez-Rivero & Pulido-Fernandez, 2013 cited in Botti and Peypoch, 2013). The model is based on five competitive components as shown in the figure below (figure 3).

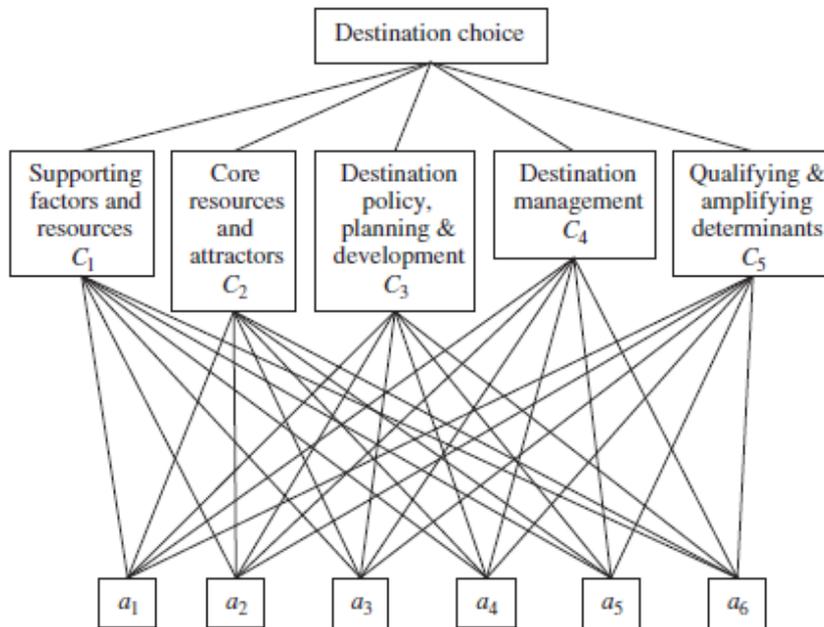


Figure 3: Tourist multi-criteria decision framework (5 criteria and 6 alternative destinations)
 Source: Botti & Peypoch (2013)

In the above figure (figure 3), ‘Cs’ are the criteria that contribute to the competitiveness of a destination and ‘a’ are the alternative destinations. We are going to adapt this approach to our research objectives.

3.3 Competitiveness Models

Emerging in the 1990s, tourism researchers began to consider how destination competitiveness ought to be understood and measured. The general models that have been developed indicate that there is an extensive list of determinants that are relevant. Considering the historical evolution of tourism destination, Crouch and Ritchie (1999) were the first researchers to study the nature and structure of

destination competitiveness. Their conceptual model (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) comprises factors of destination competitiveness clustered into five main groups and comprising 36 destination competitiveness attributes. Dwyer and Kim (2003) also proposed a general model of destination competitiveness, but their model considers national and firm competitiveness theory as well as the main elements of destination competitiveness and many of the variables and category headings identified by Crouch and Ritchie. (Dwyer et al., 2004). The latter directly relates to destination competitiveness and comprised certain generic characteristics borrowed from Porter's model. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) therefore argue that tourism destination competitiveness was determined by four components; core resources and attractors, supporting factors and resources, destination management and qualifying determinants. The core attractors and supporters relates to the attractions, the accommodation, the ancillary services, transportation and all facilities for tourism. The third component, destination management, focuses on activities that could influence the other components, first by enhancing the appeal of the core resources and attractors, secondly by reinforcing the quality and effectiveness of the supporting factors and lastly by adapting the constraints imposed by the fourth component which is the qualifying determinants. The authors also claimed that, in absolute terms, the most

competitive destination is one which brought about the greatest success; that is, the most well-being for its residents on a sustainable basis.

4. Methodology

Research into destination competitiveness has helped to build an understanding of its

4.1 Approach

Based on the different research methods and tools discussed so far in this book chapter, we can come to the conclusion that in this qualitative research, we are adopting a *bricolage* approach, making us *bricoleur*. The present study therefore borrows from this *bricoleur* philosophy, given that it deploys interconnected methods that are pieced together to produce the result. In the present case, it makes use of secondary data derived from literature review and selected case studies to arrive at its conclusion. A case study methodology allow for an exploration of the conceptual nature of the relationship between key destination competitiveness variables and a tourism destination's stage of development. This methodology seems to be workable in cases where competitiveness is studied (Wilde and Cox, 2008). This approach applies moving between disciplines and using different tools, methods and techniques to construct meaning out of data

(Hammond & Wellington, 2013). To be more explicit, we have deconstructed this approach into different stages:

- Stage 1: Identifying indicators

Table 6 (below) provides information about the criteria and indicators that will be used to assess the competitiveness of Cuba. As the basis for this present research, the criteria derived from the conceptual model of Crouch and Ritchie (2003) was employed for several reasons. The research upon which the model is based is the most extensively reported and cited in literature. The model was developed as a general model rather than as a situation-specific model. Thus the model was designed to be generally relevant to any destination and tourism market. The extensive articulation of the model reported in Ritchie and Crouch (2003) makes this conceptual model of destination competitiveness the most amenable to implementation by the tourism industry. Therefore, for each criterion, we provided some indicators using academic research on tourism in the Caribbean. Gay (2012) in his research provided a detailed list of indicators that contribute to the competitors of islands in the Caribbean. Séraphin, Gowreesunkar and Ambaye (2016), they provided a list of indicators that essential for the sustainable development of the tourism industry in post-colonial, post conflict and post disaster destinations. They used Haiti (an island in the Caribbean) as a case study. As for Laitamaki, Torres Hechavarria, Tada, Liu,

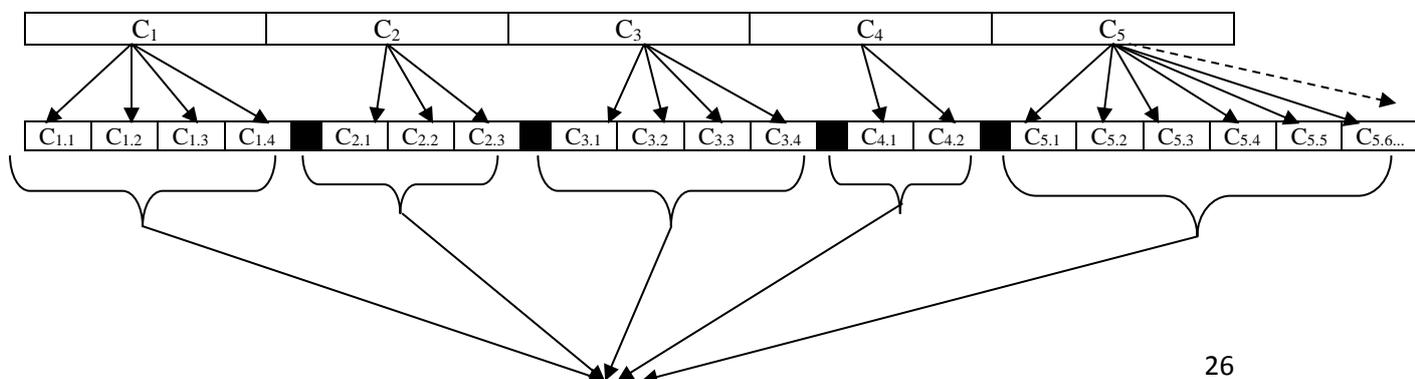
Setyady, Vatcharasontorn and Zeng (2016), they provided specific examples of indicators drawn from research based on Cuba. The assessment framework below is therefore perfectly suitable to assess the competitiveness of a Caribbean destination like Cuba (table 4).

Table 4: Multi criteria decision framework to assess the competitiveness of Cuba

| Ritchie and Crouch Model (2003) | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| CRITERIA | Supporting factors and resources (C ₁) | Core resources and attractors (C ₂) | Destination policy, planning & development (C ₃) | Destination management (C ₄) | Qualifying & amplifying determinants (C ₅) |
| Gay (2012) | | | | | |
| INDICATORS | Transportation infrastructure (quality airport/road network) (C _{1.1}) Reception of tourists is good (C _{1.2}) | Quality accommodation/excursions/restaurants (C _{2.1}) Nightlife infrastructures (C _{2.2}) Availability activities (C _{2.3}) | Qualified and motivated staff (C _{3.1}) | Large degree of economic and political autonomy (C _{4.1}) | Water supply (C _{5.1}) Sanitary conditions (C _{5.2}) Safety (C _{5.3}) Value for money: (accommodation/excursions/restaurants/ shopping) (C _{5.4}) Reasonable taxes (C _{5.5}) |
| Séraphin, Gowreesunkar & Ambaye (2016) | | | | | |
| INDICATORS | Education of tourists (C _{1.3}) | | Human needs met (C _{3.2}) Sense of community (C _{3.3}) | Suitable leadership (C _{4.2}) | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | |
| Laitamaki et al. (2016) | | | | | |
| INDICATORS | Education and training of tourism industry employees (C _{1.4}) | | Conservation of cultural assets and biodiversity (C _{3.4}) | | Waste management Food safety (C _{5.6}) Safety Plan for natural disasters and atmospheric conditions (C _{5.7}) Risk Management (C _{5.8}) |

The framework below (figure 4) summarises the research question and objective of this book chapter:



CUBA?

Figure 4: Identifying the competitive criteria and indicators of Cuba
Source: The authors

- Stage 2: Features of the destination

This second stage is based on literature review. This research approach ‘gives an overview of what has been written about a particular field or topic (...) Findings can be reported thematically with judicious use of sub-headers’ (Hammond & Wellington, 2013: 99-100). The findings will help us to identify which indicators are evidenced by Cuba (table 6; figure 6).

4.2 Literature review

- Holan and Phillips (1997)

This paper that dates back nearly 20 years highlights among other things the lack of skills of employees working in the industry as well as the lack of managerial skills, hence the reason why the government encourage international companies to build and manage hotels and other facilities in the country.

- Henthorne and Miller (2003)

Cuba has a very rich culture with its dance and music (Rumba, Mambo and Cha-cha). In terms of accommodation, the destination offers a range of options at a rather good standard. This was made possible thanks to the opening of the country to foreign investments. Autonomous state enterprises or parastatal enterprises appeared in the late 1980s. Internal infrastructures are also fairly good. The country has many international airports and one of the best highway systems of the Caribbean. One of the greatest resources of Cuba for tourism is the quality of its human capital. Cuba's population is one of the most literate and educated in the developing world. The Cuban health care system is also excellent. However, the country is short of some equipment like casinos. Also, the biggest competitive obstacle facing Cuba is the lack of shopping opportunities. The latest two indicators are very important to attract American tourists. As some other destinations in the Caribbean, Cuba is perceived by American tourists as a dangerous destination.

- Miller, Henthorne and George (2008)

This research paper completes the previous by adding that the current political context is also an asset for the development of the tourism industry, as the current leader of the country is quite in favour of entrepreneurship and liberalisation of the economy. Hence the development of training programmes in the tourism industry, research programs, industry strategy and economic policy in place. This

article also indicates developable beaches, architecture, vintage automobiles, Cuban art and craftsmanship, knowledge of history as part of the assets of the country.

- Padilla and McElroy (2007)

The tourism industry in Cuba has also created a form of segregation between locals and tourists as a tourism policy prohibits Cubans from frequenting the resorts. Also, the tourism industry triggered the development of prostitution.

- Sanchez and Adams (2008)

The authors highlighted in their paper the paradox between the political system in Cuba (socialism) and the development of a capitalistic activity (tourism). One of the consequences of the development of the tourism industry in Cuba is the increase of economic inequality between the citizens.

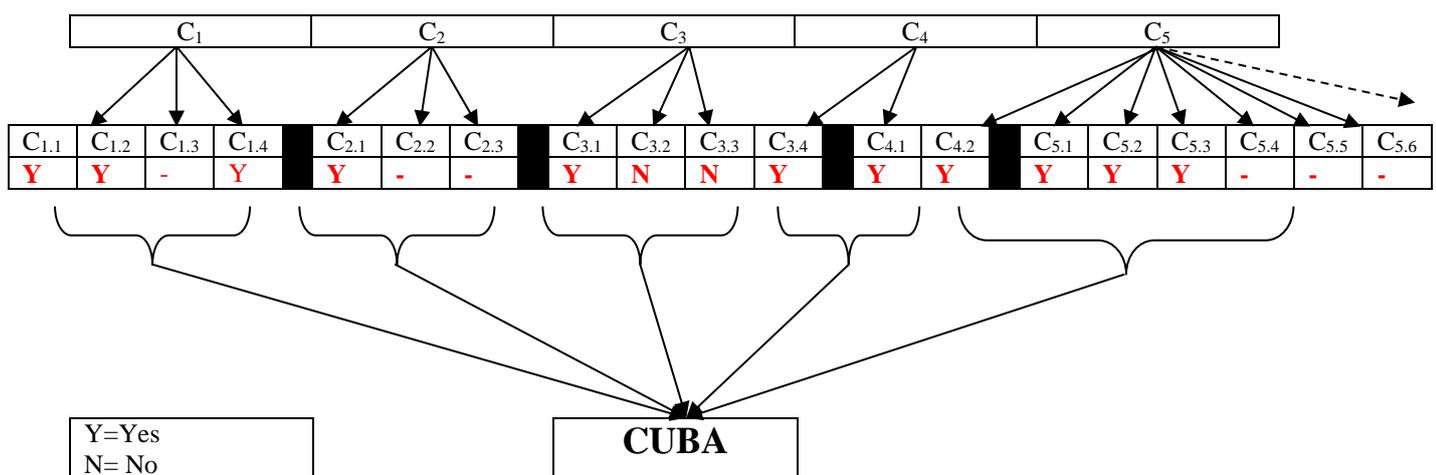
- Romeu (2014)

Due to opening of Cuba tourism to United States citizens, Romeu (2014) stated that "the market will need to find a new equilibrium, as the largest consumer of tourism services in the region meets for the first time in nearly fifty years the region's largest potential producer" (P.). The consequences of this opening are: Caribbean vacations will be repriced, and new tourism

consumption patterns will emerge across all destinations and visitor countries. Cuba-US bilateral tourism would increase overall arrivals to the Caribbean. This flow will likely drive tourism in Cuba to full capacity although much is unknown about short-run supply constraints. Visitors currently vacationing in Cuba would be redirected toward neighbouring countries.

4.3 Stage 3: Feeding the framework using the results of the literature review

The literature review on the development of the tourism industry in Cuba clearly shows that this industry is going from strength to strength. If the destination is quite competitive in some areas like equipments and staff education and training in other areas like positive social and economic impacts on the local population, there is room for improvement (figure 5).



5. Findings, discussions, limitations and recommendations

5.1 Findings

Overall, Cuba is performing rather well:

- The destination is doing rather well when it comes to C_1 and C_4 .
- The destination is average for $C_2 / C_3 / C_5$

The overall good performance of Cuba revealed after using this MCDA approach need to be associated with what we already know about the destination good performance in terms of number visitors. Qualitatively and quantitatively the destination is performing well overall. However, in terms of limitations, our research could not address all the criteria of our MCDA approach due to a lack of academic research on Cuba as a tourist destination, hence the gaps in figure 5. That said, in the areas where Cuba is not performing that well, it would be interesting to identify the ‘blind spot’ that impediment the performance of the destination.

5.2 The ‘Blind spot’ and the Blakeley Model

The Blakeley Model was applied in research to address the question of how people learn or resist learning when their organisations go through change

(Blakeley, 2007: 23). In so doing, two companies which were going through intensive culture change programmes were used as case studies. According to the Model, learning seems to constitute paying attention to a cue and changing behaviour (Blakeley, 2007: 27). If there is no change in the pattern, this is when blind spot is developed (Blakeley, 2007: 28). 'Blind spots' are areas where we resist learning and prevent us from adapting learning (Blakeley, 2007: 22). The Model suggests that learning often emerged through a stop-start process (Blakeley, 2007: 35) and proposed four main drivers of people's attention and learning:

- Self esteem (preserving, protecting and enhancing self esteem);
- Psychological comfort (the drive to achieve emotional well-being and psychological
- Comfort. This also includes the drive to meet my underlying needs such as being liked; gaining influence; helping others. It is when we are meeting our underlying needs that we feel most fulfilled and comfortable);
- Goals (achieving my goals)
- Values (affirming and protecting my values in the world)

The Blakeley model is particularly relevant for situations that have stagnated for a long time and where changes are required. There is a general consensus that stagnation occurs when there is resistance to learn in the event of changes and

people defend themselves against learning when the content of that learning is in some way uncomfortable or threatening to the self. Research has shown that prolonged experiences of poverty or powerlessness tends to generate learned helplessness which in turn leads to a cessation in the exploration of the environment or engaging in learning related behaviour (Mal, Jain & Yadav, 1990; Teodorescu & Erev, 2014). According to the Blakeley Model, failure to learn then results in blind spots which can be defined as ‘a regular tendency to repress, distort, dismiss or fail to notice information, views or ideas in a particular area that results in...[failure] to learn, change or grow in responses to changes in that area’ (Blakeley, 2007: 6).

There are many barriers to learning in any given economic system, some of which are systemic (e.g. lack of opportunity, a culture that does not support learning, lack of exposure to environmental change). When an individual (or system) fails to learn, representations and understandings of reality no longer function effectively as changes that have taken place in the environment fail to be incorporated into the learner’s mental representations of the world (Barr, Stimpert & Huff, 1992). In order to understand how to overcome blind spots, it is important to appreciate the process of learning as a holistic, embedded and contextual experience (rather than limiting it to something specific such as the process of acquiring information or the acquisition of a skill). Learning, according to this

model, comprises four key processes: paying attention to a cue, experiencing emotions, sense-making and generating behaviours in a way that results in new or changed beliefs, behaviours or emotional orientations (such as increased self-confidence or openness to change). This is not a linear process: for example it is not unlikely that emotions can be experienced first which trigger a change in behaviour and it is only afterwards that one makes sense of the event and only then that one consciously notices the original cue. Furthermore, noticing a cue, experiencing emotions, making sense and generating behaviour in response to the cue need not involve learning – indeed, these mechanisms simply describe the ongoing information processing characteristic of all human consciousness. Learning only results when the individual notices new and different cues, or makes sense of cues in a way that generates new constructs, beliefs, emotions or behaviours.

When individuals pay attention to familiar cues, experience customary emotions, make sense and take action in ways that involve no change then they are in the comfort zone, drawing on existing knowledge and skills in order to survive and achieve goals within the environment. When they pay attention to new cues, learn new emotions in relation to cues (e.g. increasing self-confidence in relation to a skill), make sense in ways that expand understanding and change behaviour, they step outside of the comfort zone and into the learning zone; here they start to

experience a range of emotions, depending on how novel the learning or how threatening to the self. Emotions associated with the learning zone include excitement, anxiety, frustration, anticipation, optimism, disappointment, hope, joy and fear. If people do not step outside the comfort zone and engage with these emotions however, they do not learn; consequently one of the most important skills of learning is the effective handling of the emotions. The greater the ability to do this, the greater the learning that takes place; this then contributes towards the expansion of cognitive, emotional and behavioural resources that fit learners for the complex, changing world in which they live. Application of the Blakeley Model allows the identification of blind spots, that is, areas where people or organisations resist learning and prevent them from adapting learning (Blakeley, 2007: 22). The Blakeley model also offers a participative approach to find solution to the blind spots using a stop-start process (Blakeley, 2007: 35). The Blakeley model is quite flexible.

5.3 The Blakeley Model applied to the tourism sector in Haiti and Cuba

After applying the Blakeley Model to the Haitian tourism context, Séraphin, Gowreesunkar and Ambaye (2016) came to the conclusion that, in Haiti, the problem of the tourism industry goes beyond tourism management skills (figure 7: Destinations' Blind Spots). It is first of all a human issue that needs to be addressed (the primary needs of the locals need to be met); the human aspect

needs to be fixed (a sense of community needs to be developed and the locals need to be able to dream); and finally, Haiti needs visionary leaders (the right context needs to be put in place and the ‘yes, we can spirit’ encouraged). It is the improvement of the well-being of Haitians that is going to lead to the improvement of the performance of Haiti as a destination. Subsequently, micro-businesses and SMEs in the industry will have an impact on the national economy. It is a one way relationship. In poor countries like Haiti it is important to address the human condition first.

At this point, a valid question would be whether or not the above results could be applied to Cuba. In other words, can the results be generalised to a different destination? Hammond and Wellington (2013: 81-82) explain that despite the fact ‘there is less agreement on the extent to which generalisations can be offered (...) a study becomes relatable when there is enough background detail, appropriately presented, to enable the practitioner and/or fellow researcher to recognise a case as similar to their own’. Thus, Gowreesunkar, Van der Sterren and Séraphin (2015) provided evidence that despite the geographical distance, Haiti and Mauritius have many similar issues regarding entrepreneurship in their respective tourism sector. As for Séraphin and Butler (2013), they provided evidence that Haiti and Kenya have many common issues regarding the management of the

tourism industry partly due to the impact of slavery. And finally, Séraphin, Butler, and Gowreesunkar (2013) established a connection between Haiti, Kenya and Mauritius in terms of issues faced by their tourism industry. Based on the above, we can come to the conclusion that post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations are facing similar issues for the development of their tourism industry and very often suffer from a deficit of image (Séraphin, Butcher & Korstanje, 2016).

6. Conclusion

This study utilized the Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) method to assess the performance of tourism in Cuba. The main objective was to understand whether Cuba, as the second most visited destination of the Caribbean, could be considered as a well performing destination beyond what we already know about the destination in terms of number of visitors. Unlike previous competitiveness studies which made use of conventional models to determine performance of tourism, the present study took a somewhat different approach and utilised the multi-criteria method. The overall result reveals that Cuba is performing rather well as a tourism destination and this positive result could be attributed to supporting factors and resources (represented by C1) and destination management (represented by C4) of the model. Ultimately, the application of the

MCDA helped to develop new insights on the performance of Cuba, as a tourism destination. To the list of criteria used in this book chapter to assess the performance of a destination (table 4) could be added: the preservation of the lifestyle of locals; and the interaction locals/visitors. Future research could look at how an ambidextrous management of tourism could contribute to improve the performance of destinations.

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