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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism is an interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that should contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences.

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Key Factors to Promote a Vulnerable Region as a Competitive Tourist Destination

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Abstract:

The aim of this research was to identify the key factors to promote a vulnerable region as a competitive tourist destination. Using Dwyer and Kim's model as a reference, this was an exploratory research based on a confirmatory factor analysis. The results show that created resources, tourist destination management, situational conditions, competitive performance related to visitors, and competitive performance related to governmental support are determining factors to promote the region as a competitive tourist destination. From the theoretical point of view, it contributes to demonstrate that, although the competitiveness of tourist destinations is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, it is possible to define a reduced number of factors on which competitiveness performance falls. From the practical point of view, this work offers a relevant input to direct public policies in matters of tourism in a vulnerable region. This research is an exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis.

Keywords: tourism; competitive tourist destination; competitive tourism factors; competitive factors; regional competitiveness.

JEL Classification: D63; D71; E22; E61; H75; I31; L83.

Introduction

The competitiveness of tourist destinations is a complex concept and difficult to measure. This research has assessed factors that determine the competitiveness of a tourist destination; however, it is impossible to establish a single universally applicable model and there are many models that represent particular conditions of the regions.

This research seeks to shed light on competitive tourist destinations in a developing country like Colombia and, specifically, to verify if the Integrated Destination Competitiveness Model of Dwyer and Kim is replicable and applicable in the context of the municipality of Muzo. (Boyacá, Colombia). Research question is: What are the key factors that make this municipality a competitive tourist destination? The municipality was chosen because, despite having natural resources such as emeralds, it has been vulnerable to poverty and violence. Therefore, alternatives for socioeconomic development (tourism) are required.

The results describe the factors for boosting tourism in terms of resources, situational conditions, and destination management. These results challenge those competitiveness approaches that assume the attributes of a tourist destination as common across locations, as these vary from one region to another according to their

particularities. This research provides new evidence about the main drivers of competitiveness of a tourist destination, moderated to the reality of a particular region and serves as input to promote public policies and governmental actions in tourism.

1. Literature Review

The competitiveness of tourist destinations is a complex and multidimensional concept (Cracolici and Nijkamp 2009; Abreu, Ruhanen, and Arcodia 2018), and that has been widely discussed in the academic literature; but multiple factors make it difficult to measure (Salinas-Fernández *et al.* 2020). Since the pioneering work of Crouch and Ritchie (1999) and Dwyer and Kim (2003), various investigations have been carried out to evaluate the factors that determine the competitiveness of a tourist destination and provide models that reflect the reality of specific regions and places (Ferreira and Perks 2020). Even though each model offers universal elements for analyzing the competitiveness of tourist destinations, influential factors must be identified, moderated, and validated in order to design a guiding local scheme (Luštický and Bednářová 2018). This is the result of a transition from mass tourism to an era in which tourism requires a personalized approach to the specific attitudes and needs of tourists (Cracolici, Nijkamp, and Rietveld 2008).

As Dwyer, Cvelbar, Mihalič, and Koman (2014) suggest, destination competitiveness has attracted the attention of researchers over the last two decades. The Integrated Destination Competitiveness Model (Dwyer and Kim 2003) has been used in many contexts (e.g., Australia, Korea, Slovenia, Serbia, among others) to assess destination competitiveness. Given its popularity among tourism researchers and its application in destination competitiveness studies around the world, these authors highlight the importance of rigorously testing the destination competitiveness attributes identified in this model and ascertaining their validity.

As mentioned by Aguinis *et al.* (2020), Latin America is a region with particularities that serves as a natural laboratory for formulating and testing theories and researching new phenomena that go beyond the implicit assumptions of theories developed in developed countries. In line with Enright and Newton (2004), results challenge those approaches to competitiveness that assume the attributes of a tourist destination as common to all places, since these vary from one region to another according to their particularities; the promote public policies and governmental actions in tourism has been shown to be a global need (Kubickova 2019; Mutana and Mukwada 2020).

Competitiveness of tourist destinations has remained an important research topic based on Porter's initial propositions (Hong 2009). However, considering that tourism is a service-driven sector, researchers have made different adjustments to the measurement models to fit the local and phenomenological realities of the objects of study (Abreu, Ruhanen, and Arcodia 2018).

For a tourist destination to be attractive, it is necessary to develop attributes that guarantee its competitiveness and sustainability over time (Camisón 2020) while promoting their preservation over their exploitation (Fethi and Senyucel, 2021; Wu *et al.* 2021). To this end, destination management is fundamental to articulate all the elements that attract tourists to a particular region and is key to identify which of those are representative and determinants of its competitiveness (Salinas-Fernández *et al.* 2020). It is no longer enough for a region to have natural comparative advantages; it must also develop competitive advantages that guarantee its permanence as a tourist destination, to the benefit of the prosperity and quality of life of its residents (Crouch and Ritchie 1999).

Pechlaner, Pichler, and Hemtrei (2012) state that destinations are integrated into a competitive environment so that quality and service alone do not satisfy customers and are no longer useful for differentiation. Experiences are now gaining importance in destination management as a source of value for customers (Li *et al.* 2021). Thus, destinations are forced to offer emotional experiences throughout the entire tourism service chain so that tourists focus their attention on those attributes that exceed their consumption expectation (Ryglová *et al.* 2018; Zainuddin *et al.* 2017).

From this perspective, the competitiveness of a tourist destination is understood as the ability to add value and satisfy tourists with better and differentiated tourism products and services, compared to those of other destinations (Neto *et al.* 2020) and do it over and over again (Rather *et al.* 2022). Consequently, for Hassan (2000), the development of a tourist destination should be established in competitive terms. It is therefore relevant to define the products or services characteristic of the region that seeks to consolidate itself as a tourist destination, since this will allow it to differentiate itself as a means of attracting tourists and encourages him to return to visit him (Abbasi *et al.* 2021; Rather *et al.* 2022).

Several studies show the importance of competitively promoting tourist destinations for the regions. Neto *et al.* (2020) point out that, although previous studies consider destination competitiveness as a static concept,

more recent studies (adopting a demand perspective) find that competitiveness is dynamic according to the niche. Hence, tourism is an outstanding activity in the world economy thanks to its economic impact and its social and environmental implications (Camisón 2020; Gössling and Higham 2021). Authors such as Shariffuddin, Zain, and Azinuddin (2020) recognize that competitiveness is important for improving the overall performance of tourist destinations, with emphasis on the strategic management of their development. Boroomand, Kazemi, and Ranjbarian (2019) show that an appropriate framework for the sustainable development of tourism and, in particular, for its sustainable competitiveness, requires considering both the economic, sociocultural, and ecological dimensions, as well as the actors involved in the tourism process. Knežević, Dwyer, Koman, and Mihalič (2016) explain that tourism-specific factors, such as tourism infrastructure and destination management, are the main drivers of competitiveness in developing countries. Finally, Lee and King (2006) state that the competitiveness of a destination is achieved through the adoption of policies and strategies aligned with market opportunities, taking advantage of the unique or distinctive tourism features it offers.

In this scenario, the groups that manage the tourist destination face a challenge that involves: i) identifying the factors that boost the tourist destination; ii) focusing efforts on those that are considered key to the region's tourism success; and iii) developing strategies to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourist destination (Dwyer *et al.* 2004).

In a global and changing context, the competitiveness of tourist destinations is paramount, so tourism managers, industry actors, and competitive strategies constitute critical elements for each destination to stay ahead of other competitors (Marais, du Plessis, and Saayman 2017). Therefore, those who manage destinations with the interest of developing their regions from tourism need to be clear about the drivers and the measurement of their competitiveness (Knežević *et al.* 2016). Authors such as Abreu-Novais, Ruhanen, and Arcodia (2016) confirm this idea by describing the growing interest in measuring destination competitiveness and identifying the variables that help improve the competitive position of tourism regions.

Although there is a broad set of indicators or factors to classify a region as a competitive tourist destination, it is necessary to identify and prioritize those that are key to boost or improve it. While Dwyer and Kim's model has been widely applied in research works, Dwyer *et al.* (2014) state that, despite its popularity and application to destination competitiveness studies worldwide, rigorously testing the attributes identified in such model, their validity, and the accessibility of the indicators is necessary to assess the validity of the competitiveness attributes of the different destinations.

In this regard, several studies have demonstrated that the competitiveness factors of a tourist destination may be particular to the conditions of each region, so their identification and measurement may be different (Marais, du Plessis, and Saayman 2017). For example: Wang *et al.* (2012) find that competitiveness of tourist destinations consists of the underlying dimensions of destination management, tourism resources, tourism superstructure and infrastructure, and destination-supporting factors. Knežević *et al.* (2016) explain that tourism-specific factors, such as tourism infrastructure and destination management, are the main drivers of competitiveness in developing countries, while in developed countries it depends on broader economic conditions (such as general infrastructure, macro-environment, and business environment). Goffi and Cucculelli (2014) identify as key competitiveness indicators those elements related to the destination sustainability that affect tourism policymaking and destination management processes. Reisinger, Michael, and Hayes (2019) report that destination infrastructure, support services, and resources have the major effect on tourism competitiveness, according to tourists' perception. Blanco-Cerradelo, Gueimonde-Canto, Fraiz-Brea, and Diéguez-Castrillón (2018) suggest that the tourism competitiveness of protected areas lies in the ability to attract visitors, ensure the social and economic well-being of the local community, preserve nature, and create a sense of community. Lastly, Aji, Aviandro, Hakim, and Djabrail (2020) state that factors such as society, culture, economy, geography, infrastructure, competition, and resources are the main drivers of destination competitiveness because they use nature and local value.

Furthermore, some authors agree that tourism performance is a significant indicator of destination competitiveness (Hanafiah, Hemdi, and Ahmad 2016; Hanafiah and Zulkifly 2019); others point out that environmental components also have a significant influence on the competitiveness of a tourist destination (Chee-Hua *et al.* 2016; Wardana *et al.* 2019; Goffi, Cucculelli, and Masiero, 2019; Khanra *et al.* 2021). It is also necessary to consider the aspects that influence the image of the destination, including the interaction between residents and tourists (Marques *et al.* 2021; Tse and Tung, 2022a; Tse and Tung, 2022b; Li *et al.* 2021; Styliadis, 2022; Styliadis *et al.* 2022).

It follows from the above that there is not a universal structure of determining factors of a competitive tourist destination. Each region is different and has specific economic, social, environmental, cultural, and

demographic characteristics. It is therefore important to analyze and contextualize the models used to measure the competitiveness of a tourist destination and to identify those factors that play a key and determining role in the competitive boost. As exposed by Abreu *et al.* (2018), the literature on destination competitiveness, although well established, is full of inconsistencies about its definition, measurement, and legitimacy as a research topic.

2. Methodology

Authors are encouraged to have their contribution checked for grammar. The text is to be typeset in 11 pt Arial Narrow, single spaced, align justify, First line Indentation at 1cm).

This was an exploratory research based on a confirmatory factor analysis that aimed at identifying the key factors to promote the region of Muzo as a competitive tourist destination, following the methodological process of similar studies (Armenski, Dwyer, and Pavluković 2018; Wang, Hsu, and Swanson 2012).

The study focused on the municipality of Muzo because this is a vulnerable region that struggles with poverty and violence and that faces major socioeconomic development challenges. The resources of this region are based on its vegetation, climate, and flora and fauna; moreover, it is renowned as the world's emerald capital. These aspects make it an attractive international tourist destination.

Although the scientific literature provides different theoretical and methodological models for evaluating a region as a competitive tourist destination (e.g., Crouch and Ritchie 1999; Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto 2005; Hong 2009), the model developed by Dwyer and Kim (2003) was chosen in this study because of its systemic nature and because it gathers, synthesizes, and integrates the most relevant variables.

The information was collected directly in the municipality of Muzo, using a nomothetic approach similar to that used in causal mapping, which allows the interviewee to choose from a predefined set of concepts that are supposed to represent a reality (Goodhew, Cammock and Hamilton 2005).

The systematization and validation of the information was carried out using a multivariate technique (Hair *et al.* 2019), conducting an exploratory factor analysis of principal components and Varimax rotation, and running SPSS software. Once the underlying factors were obtained, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed using the maximum likelihood procedure based on the covariance matrix, using EQS 6.1 software (Bentler 2006). The measurement model was sensitized seeking to determine the goodness of fit, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, through the scale composite reliability –SCR–(Bagozzi and Yi 1988) and the average variance extracted –AVE– (Fornell and Larcker 1981). This analysis made it possible to consolidate a construct with the key competitive success factors to boost this region as a tourist destination.

This study took as its unit of analysis the inhabitants of the urban and surrounding rural area of the municipality of Muzo, who have been affected by mining development. As in other research works (Armenski, Dwyer, and Pavluković 2018; Wang, Hsu, and Swanson 2012), this study resorted to the convenience non-probability sampling method, especially for safety reasons and because of the characteristics of the region. This process was supported by leaders of the region, who coordinated the information gathering. Table 1 shows the distribution of the final sample that comprised 262 people.

Table 1. Sample

No.	Occupation	Women	Men	Total
1	Homemaker	11	0	11
2	Freelancer	15	11	26
3	Trader	74	31	105
4	Miner	39	45	84
5	Other	19	17	36
Total		158	204	262

Source: authors

One of the questionnaires received was eliminated because it had several missing values, which resulted in a total effective sample of 261 respondents.

Only a small number of questions were not answered by the sample. To maintain data completeness, missing values were replaced by the mean of the resolved values, based on the imputation method (Hair *et al.* 2019).

3. Results

3.1. Refinement and Unidimensionality Test

The refinement analysis, which involved verifying whether all the items were relevant for the conformation of the additive scale (Fuentes-Blasco *et al.* 2010; Hair *et al.* 2019), was carried out. This procedure was based on an exploratory factor analysis of principal components. The results obtained through the SPSS software are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Commonalities, KMO, Bartlett's sphericity, and total variance explained

	Initial	Extraction
P1	1.000	.660
P2	1.000	.805
P3	1.000	.562
P4	1.000	.588
P5	1.000	.726
P6	1.000	.634
P7	1.000	.629
P8	1.000	.664
P10	1.000	.668
P11	1.000	.721
P12	1.000	.701
P13	1.000	.640
P14	1.000	.658
P15	1.000	.580
P16	1.000	.703
P17	1.000	.726
P18	1.000	.638
P19	1.000	.529
P21	1.000	.602
P22	1.000	.450
P23	1.000	.529
P24	1.000	.647
P25	1.000	.600
P26	1.000	.680
P27	1.000	.711
P28	1.000	.676
P29	1.000	.614
P31	1.000	.540
P32	1.000	.709
P33	1.000	.698
P34	1.000	.638
P35	1.000	.761
P36	1.000	.661
P37	1.000	.736
P38	1.000	.634
P39	1.000	.688
P40	1.000	.630
P41	1.000	.536
P42	1.000	.664
P43	1.000	.717
P44	1.000	.778
P45	1.000	.755
P46	1.000	.601
P47	1.000	.703
P48	1.000	.676
P49	1.000	.748
P50	1.000	.833
P51	1.000	.726

	Initial	Extraction
P52	1.000	.672
P53	1.000	.846
P54	1.000	.807
P55	1.000	.782
KMO = .90 Barlett X ² (1485) = 9613.99; p < .05 Total variance explained = 67.82		

Source: authors

Based on the result obtained and in order to refine the scales, questions 19, 22, 23, 31, and 41 were removed because their commonality was less than 0.55, according to the recommendations by Hair *et al.* (1998). The KMO test was equal to 0.90, close to 1, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating the feasibility of the factor analysis.

Table 3. Refinement and unidimensionality analysis

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
P1	.813					
P3	.708					
P8		.640				
P9		.782				
P10		.827				
P11		.748				
P12		.728				
P13		.729				
P14		.622				
P15		.782				
P16		.780				
P26			.605			
P27			.747			
P29			.756			
P30			.779			
P32			.811			
P33			.781			
P34			.844			
P35				.644		
P36				.800		
P37				.650		
P39				.776		
P40				.816		
P42				.781		
P44				.756		
P45				.704		
P46					.691	
P47					.822	
P48					.735	
P49			.629			
P50			.847			
P51			.850			
P52			.797			
P53						.703
P54						.734
P55						.752
KMO = .899 Bartlett X ² (1225) = 6398.93; p < .05 Total variance explained = 66.66						

Source: authors

The purpose of the unidimensionality test was to determine whether the items were strongly associated with each other in a common construct (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). The test was carried out through a factor analysis with varimax rotation, using the criterium of eigenvalues greater than 1 (Hair *et al.* 2009).

The result allowed the identification of the structure of unidimensionality with those questions that produced factor loadings greater than 0.6. Thus, questions 2, 4 to 7, 17 to 25, 28, 38, and 43 were removed. With the result presented in Table 3, it was possible to obtain six factors with 36 questions as follows:

- First factor = 2 questions
- Second factor = 9 questions
- Third factor = 11 questions
- Fourth factor = 8 questions
- Fifth factor = 3 questions
- Sixth factor = 3 questions

The construct obtained underwent a confirmatory factor analysis to produce the measurement model and assess its internal consistency and validity (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Firstly, the measurement model was checked so that it was overidentified and ensure that there was more information in the data matrix than parameters to be estimated (Byrne 2006; Hair *et al.* 2019). The results showed positive values in the degrees of freedom, which determined the condition of overidentification.

3.2. Convergent Validity

Once obtained the results from the exploratory factor analysis, the convergent validity was assessed. It estimates the level in which the attempts to measure a same concept accord with each other (Hair *et al.* 2019).

To establish the convergent validity, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed by estimating the maximum likelihood based on the covariance matrix, using EQS 6.1 software (Bentler 2006). To measure the convergent condition in unidimensional factors, the scores should be high; values above 0.5 are acceptable (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981). To assess the goodness of fit, different indicators suggested in the literature were used (Byrne 2006; Hair *et al.* 2019).

Table 4 shows the results with the dimensions arranged according to Dwyer and Kim's theoretical approach.

Although the chi-square $X^2(579) = 1470.82$, $p < 0.05$, did not produce a significant result, which is common when processing samples of more than 150 cases (Martínez-López, Gázquez-Abad, and Sousa 2013), the $-X^2/df = 2.5$ (> 2) and the indicators from the maximum likelihood method turned out to be CFI = 0.9, IFI = 0.9, RMSEA = 0.077 [0.072 – 0.082], showing that the model has an acceptable fit (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen 2008). The standardized solution generated scores higher than 0.5 in all the dimensions, together with the significant values for maximum likelihood t ($p < .05$). In consequence, the convergent validity of the model was verified.

Table 4. Final assessment of the measurement model

	Standardized loading	<i>t-value</i>
INHERENT RESOURCES		
Proper weather for tourism	0.603	.a
Flora and fauna	0.547	3.99*
CREATED RESOURCES		
Accommodation conditions	0.564	.a
Guiding information for tourists	0.747	8.97*
Water activities	0.832	9.53*
Activities in nature	0.686	8.51*
Adventure activities	0.738	8.90*
Recreational facilities	0.753	9.01*
Products to buy	0.585	7.64*
Prices of products to buy	0.724	8.80*
Amusement places	0.812	9.41*
TOURIST DESTINATION MANAGEMENT		
Residents' kindness towards tourists	0.599	.a
Residents' support for the tourism industry	0.693	9.25*
Geographic location of destination	0.686	9.19*

	Standardized loading	t-value
Reputation of destination	0.744	9.74*
Tourism development together with agricultural development	0.790	10.14*
List of the most significant attractions	0.715	9.47*
Commitment of the public sector to tourism	0.825	10.43*
Visitor expenditure	0.701	9.33*
Profit generated by tourism	0.870	10.79*
Contribution of tourism to the economy of the region	0.877	10.84*
Contribution of tourism to employment	0.834	10.50*
SITUATIONAL CONDITIONS		
Tourism training programs	0.690	..a
Existence of environmental protection laws	0.757	11.28*
Ethical provision of tourism services	0.614	9.27*
Political stability	0.706	10.57*
Legislation on tourism	0.796	11.81*
Investment projects for tourism development	0.823	12.18*
Price of package tours	0.803	11.91*
Price of tourist destination versus that of competing destinations	0.756	11.27*
COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE / VISITORS		
Level of security for visitors	0.652	..a
Number of visitors	0.905	11.20*
Increase in the number of visitors	0.815	11.86*
COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE / GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT		
Public budget to support the tourism of the region	0.819	..a
Support for transport infrastructure	0.925	17.72*
Support programs for the tourism industry	0.862	16.46*
$\chi^2_{(579)} = 1470.82, p < .05; \chi^2/df = 2.5$ CFI = 0.9; IFI = 0.9; NNFI = 0.9; RMSEA = 0.07 [0.07 – 0.08]. * $p < .05$..a fixed parameters		

Source: authors

3.3. Internal consistency

Internal consistency establishes the reliability of a scale by controlling the errors made by the people who responded the questionnaire and verifies that the scales are measuring the same construct. This consistency is obtained using Cronbach's alpha (α) in the exploratory factor analysis and through the SCR and the AVE in the confirmatory factor analysis (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981). According to Hair *et al.* (2009), the general agreement on the lower limit for Cronbach's alpha and SCR is 0.70, although it can go down to 0.60 in the exploratory research; for AVE, it is 0.5. Cronbach's alpha was obtained using SPSS software; the SCR and AVE indicators were found with the data obtained from the measurement model using EQS software.

The results included in Table 5 show that the inherent resources factor (F1) did not present internal consistency; therefore, it is not considered in the result. The other factors (F2 to F6) show α and SCR values higher than 0.6 (lower limit suggested in the exploratory research). For its part, AVE values are higher than the lower limit suggested of 0.5. Consequently, scale internal consistency is also confirmed.

Table 5. Internal consistency

Factor	α	SCR	AVE
F1 = Inherent resources	0.50	0.50	0.33
F2 = Created resources	0.91	0.91	0.52
F3 = Tourist destination management	0.94	0.94	0.58
F4 = Situational conditions	0.91	0.91	0.56
F5 = Competitive performance / visitors	0.82	0.84	0.64
F6 = Competitive performance / governmental support	0.90	0.90	0.76

Source: authors

3.4. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity indicates that each factor corresponds to a different dimension, since it represents the degree in which the theoretically similar concepts differ from each other (Hair *et al.* 2019). For its measurement, it is taken into account that the AVE is greater than the square correlation among the constructs (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). To not square all the correlations, the square root of the AVE is usually taken as an equivalent value (Cegarra-Navarro, Sánchez-Vidal and Cegarra-Leiva 2011).

Table 6 introduces the intercorrelations and the square root of the AVE into the main diagonal, which made it possible to verify that it is greater in all cases, thus proving the discriminant validity.

Table 6. Measurements, standard deviations, and correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Created resources	4.14	0.80	<i>0.72</i>				
Tourist destination management	3.79	0.97	0.05	<i>0.76</i>			
Situational conditions	2.46	0.98	0.32*	0.24*	<i>0.75</i>		
Competitive performance / visitors	3.54	1.06	0.22*	0.50*	0.39*	<i>0.80</i>	
Competitive performance / governmental support	2.26	1.21	0.32*	-0.01	0.58*	0.27*	<i>0.87</i>
N = 261 p < .01 Main diagonal values (in italics) correspond to the square root of the AVE.							

Source: authors

3.5. Final Construct of Key Factors

Once collected the information about the target population and carried out the corresponding processing and analysis, this research reached a final construct that shows the key factors that can strengthen a region as a competitive tourist destination, in this case, adjusted to the conditions of the municipality of Muzo. The construct was based on the Dwyer and Kim's theoretical approach and it was adjusted according to the perspectives assessed in the population studied.

Contextualized in the region, this construct proves that, in tourism, competitive performance begins with the management of the tourist destination in terms of the resources created with the support of the respective situational factors. Table 7 introduces each constitutive dimensions and indicators, including 5 factors and 34 variables inherent to competitive performance.

Table 7. Key factors of the competitive tourist destination

Key factors
CREATED RESOURCES
Accommodation conditions
Guiding information for tourists
Water activities
Activities in nature
Adventure activities
Recreational facilities
Products to buy
Prices of products to buy
Amusement places
TOURIST DESTINATION MANAGEMENT
Residents' kindness towards tourists
Residents' support for the tourism industry
Geographic location of destination
Reputation of destination
Tourism development together with agricultural development
List of the most significant attractions
Commitment of the public sector to tourism
Visitor expenditure
Profit generated by tourism
Contribution of tourism to the economy of the region
Contribution of tourism to employment

Key factors
SITUATIONAL CONDITIONS
Tourism training programs
Existence of environmental protection laws
Ethical provision of tourism services
Political stability
Legislation on tourism
Investment projects for tourism development
Price of package tours
Price of tourist destination versus that of competing destinations
COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE / VISITORS
Level of security for visitors
Number of visitors
Increase in the number of visitors
COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE / GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT
Public budget to support the tourism of the region
Support for transport infrastructure
Support programs for the tourism industry

Source: authors

5. Discussion

Based on the model by Dwyer and Kim (2003), the results of the confirmatory factor analysis show that the population assessed in the municipality of Muzo agree on recognizing that there are five key factors that can boost this region as a competitive tourist destination: created resources, tourist destination management, situational conditions, competitive performance related to visitors, and competitive performance related to governmental support.

Regarding created resources, they encompass a set of elements that are developed in this municipality in order to establish it as a tourist attraction. They are necessary to achieve the integration of tourism in the region and, although their existence does not ensure competitive success, their absence does hinder it. Accommodation conditions, guiding information for tourists, water activities, activities in nature, and adventure activities are created resources that stand out.

As for destination management, it entails the facilitating dimension of the tourist activity by acting as the essential leverage to revitalize its competitiveness. Having a set of tourist resources is worthless if they are not promoted and reinforced with strategic actions. Therefore, political will is indispensable to recognize a region as a tourist destination and boost it with promotion and development plans. In the study, the highest quantity of factors obtained in the confirmatory factor analysis corresponded to this dimension, with factor loadings greater than the minimum established. This highest quantity demonstrates their significance for the target population studied. In this sense, the main elements to consider include residents' kindness towards tourists, residents' support for the tourism industry, geographic location of destination, reputation of destination, tourism development together with agricultural development, list of the most significant attractions, commitment of the public sector to tourism, visitor expenditure, profit generated by tourism, contribution of tourism to the economy of the region, and contribution of tourism to employment.

Concerning situational conditions, they involve exogenous events or existing externalities in the destination environment or context, which have clear power to influence the tourist activity and over which there is little control. They represent contingency factors of assessment and monitoring that can promote or reduce competitiveness. They include tourism training programs, existence of environmental protection laws, ethical provision of tourism services, political stability, legislation on tourism, investment projects for tourism development, price of package tours, and price of tourist destination versus that of competing destinations.

Finally, destination competitiveness comprises a series of market performance indicators. This includes the expected results to measure the competitiveness of tourist destinations and project its sustainability based on actions for improvement. Two competitive performance dimensions were found: those related to visitors and those related to governmental support.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this research was to identify key factors to strengthen the vulnerable region of Muzo as a competitive tourist destination. Although the study of competitiveness of tourist destinations has been prolific, it is

worth highlighting within this framework the existence of several factors that can be used to obtain profits, without disregarding their preservation and protection from possible damages caused by their exploitation. Thus, the identification of critical competitive factors is decisive to define a region in terms of its potentialities as tourist destination ensuring its competitiveness.

This study, based on Dwyer and Kim's model, took the main dimensions to assess the competitiveness of a tourist destination were chosen. These dimensions were integrated into a construct that was applied to the population of the municipality of Muzo. With the information gathered, the respective validity tests were performed and, by means of a confirmatory factor analysis, the final construct of factors was obtained, which needs to be considered to strengthen this region as a tourist destination.

This work carries two important implications. From the theoretical point of view, it contributes to demonstrate that, although the competitiveness of tourist destinations is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, it is possible to define a reduced number of factors on which competitiveness performance falls. From the practical point of view, this work offers a relevant input to direct public policies in matters of tourism in the municipality of Muzo, especially by showing that the provision of resources, support factors, and destination management are essential elements to enable a better implementation of the area as a tourist destination, with the purpose of overcoming the lacks that make it a vulnerable territory.

This work had some limitations that could be seen as future possibilities for research.

The literature has showed that inherent and created resources are decisive for the tourist destination. However, in this study, many of the elements that make them up were removed in the factor analysis and a few were left as representative. This can be the result of various externalities such as the population's need for promotion and institutional support, the negative impact of the conflict and the current situation of mining development in the region, and the need of associations and tourism-related production chains. These could be research alternatives in the future.

As its main goal, this study proposed to identify the key factors to boost the municipality of Muzo as a tourist destination, based on values obtained from different population groups, which were integrated in the analyses. Although the statistical tests used did not show differences, the specific data of each group could indicate different behaviors. Future research could take microdata per each unit of the sample and conduct more specific descriptive or cluster-like analyses that could deliver particularized information and lead to a differentiated public policy on tourism in the region.

The information was gathered through a nomothetic questionnaire that did not favor the collection of more qualitative data. Future research could replicate this work and include a triangulation technique with interviews or focus groups to make the results more universal.

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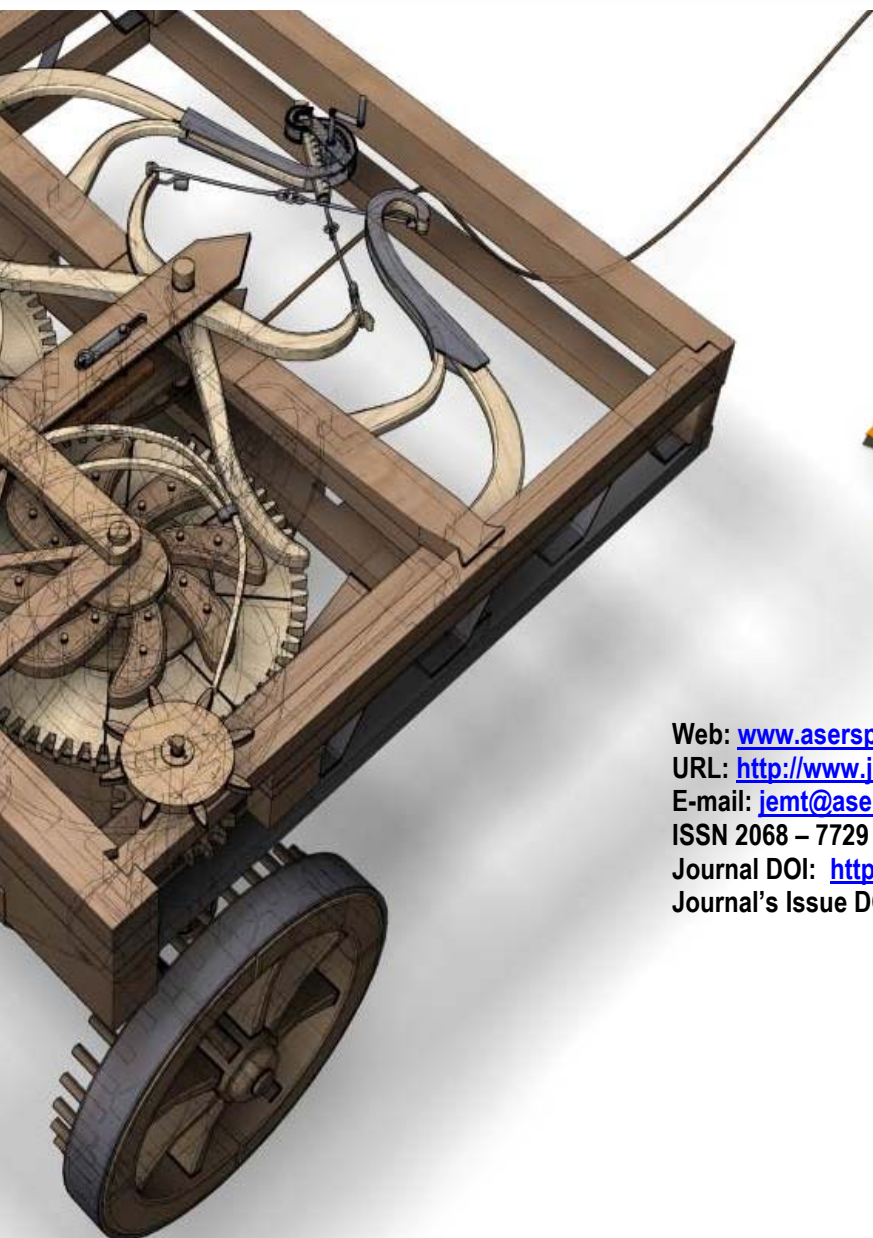
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