Sustainable Tourism Development Frameworks and Best Practices: Implications for the Cuban Tourism Industry

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The purpose of this study is to identify best practices that can help the Cuban tourism industry in implementing a comprehensive sustainable tourism strategy. The study addresses the important research problem of how to improve sustainable tourism development in a specific country. The objective of this study is to provide practical recommendations to the Cuban tourism industry on how to learn from the suggested best practices and how to implement them effectively. The study conducts a comparative literature review that contributes to the subject area by addressing sustainable tourism development best practices in the context of the Cuban tourism industry. The study concludes that although the Cuban tourism industry has addressed several sustainable tourism development areas, there is room for improvement in each of the areas based on a more integrated development approach. This paper addresses limitations of the study and suggests areas of future research including a comprehensive study of sustainable tourism development standards in Cuba and other Caribbean countries.

Key Words: best practices, Cuban tourism industry, sustainable tourism
jel Classification: q56 and z32

Introduction

The importance of sustainable development was recognized with the release of 'Our Common Future,' i.e., The Brundtland Report, in 1987 which defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This definition was the foundation for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, and for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

Tourism is a major economic driver and employment producer in Cuba where it accounted for 10.4 percent of GDP and 9.6 percent of employment in 2014 with expected significant growth through 2024 including a 4.6 percent increase in total contribution to GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council 2015). The Cuban government has implemented several sustainable tourism initiatives since 1992 by incorporating areas of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy (CSTP) Frameworks into the Tourism Development Plan under the National Program of Environment and Development.

This study reviews the existing literature of sustainable tourism development with a focus on frameworks and best practices. The purpose of this research is to improve sustainable tourism development in Cuba by comparing its tourism industry initiatives with best practices found in the literature. The objective of this research is to identify the current state of sustainable tourism in Cuba and to provide recommendations for future development based on best practices.

The study concluded that the Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy (CSTP) Framework was the most appropriate for Cuba because (1) it is designed specifically for the 32 Caribbean member states, including Cuba, (2) it encompasses the principles outlined by UNWTO's policy framework, and (3) it is a product of collaborative research efforts that included three years of research, destination experimental implementation and Caribbean stakeholder consultation. This study contributes to the existing literature by suggesting that Cultural Heritage and Biosphere Reserves should be designated as a standalone policy theme based on their significant role in the sustainable future of several tourism nations, particularly Cuba, which has the most UNESCO World Heritage sites and biospheres in the Caribbean.

This research paper identifies limitations of the study as well as areas of future research that can contribute to sustainable tourism development in Cuba and in the Caribbean.

Research Methodology

This study addresses the important research problem of how to improve sustainable tourism development in a specific country. The study was based on analysis of sustainable tourism development literature on global frameworks and best practices with additional focus on the Caribbean and other island nations. The first objective of the literature review was to answer the following two research questions:

1. What sustainable tourism development frameworks are prevalent in the tourism industry literature? And, therefore,
2. Which sustainable tourism development framework is the most appropriate for Cuba and based on what criteria?

As stated in the introduction, this study concluded that the Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy (CSTP) Framework was the most appropriate for Cuba. After selecting this tourism development framework, researchers interviewed experts before conducting a detailed literature review of sustainable tourism development best practices based on the six CSTP Framework areas with the addition of cultural heritage and biospheres. Individuals were identified as experts based on their experience with sustainable tourism development frameworks and best practices, their affiliation to leading sustainable tourism councils, and their experience in the Cuban tourism industry. An interview with sustainable tourism expert Eric Ricaurte of Greenview Consulting served as a starting point to assess national tourism policies that are based on an integrated framework and measurable goals in sustainability. Dr. Edward Manning of Tourisk and Kathleen Pessolano of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council provided direction on sustainable tourism frameworks and indicator research. Danilo Bonilla of Mountain Travel Sobek and Juan Tamargo of The Center for Cuban Studies contributed to research on Cuba's tourism industry and current sustainable tourism practices. Co-researcher professor Lisandra Torres Hechavarría and her colleague professor Tony Diaz-Medina from the University of Havana Tourism Faculty provided expertise in sustainable tourism development in Cuba. Based on the expert interviews and the preliminary literature review, the following research questions were chosen to guide the com-

parative literature review of best practices in sustainable tourism development:

1. What countries exhibit integrated planning and governance of their tourism industry especially in the area of sustainable tourism development?
2. What countries have received recognition from the tourism industry by exhibiting best practices in the six CSTP framework areas as well as in cultural heritage and biospheres?

Literature Review

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN AND OTHER ISLAND NATIONS

As mentioned in the introduction, sustainable development gained momentum with the release of 'Our Common Future,' after which the report's definition of sustainable development served as a foundation for landmark conferences on the subject. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has summarized the philosophy and the principles of sustainable tourism as follows: 'Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability' (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization 2005). At its core function, according to the United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization (2005), sustainable tourism considers the needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the environment and a destination's host communities while accounting for current and future economic, social and environmental impacts.

According to Buckley (2012), sustainable tourism research has evolved from the study of basic frameworks of tourism, economics and environmental management to a number of reconceptualizations and critiques. According to Bramwell and Lane (1993), who are among the first researchers in this field, sustainable tourism has moved away from being a reactive response to (negative) tourism issues to becoming a solution creating positive change.

Zolfani et al. (2015) conducted a comprehensive review of research in sustainable tourism, concluding that the literature can be divided into 14 application areas, some of which are: paradigm, sustainable tourism development, market research and economics, policy-making, and infras-

tructure. The authors also found 19 research studies published on sustainable tourism development between 1993 and 2013, most of which focused on Caribbean countries or other island nations and their respective development indicators and techniques. This study aims to contribute to sustainable tourism development with some implications to policy-making.

Harrison et al. (2003) addressed practical challenges of sustainable tourism development in the Caribbean, which has one of the highest percentages of employment and GDP derived from tourism. The authors found that more integrated planning was needed between tourism practitioners, government tourism officials and academics. Furthermore, a common vision and understanding is needed in terms of what tourism product a country wishes to promote and what type of tourists it aims to attract. Harrison et al. (2003) also suggested the need to evaluate best practices on a global level in order to tailor a sustainable plan relevant to the Caribbean.

Kennett-Hensel et al. (2010) assessed feedback from professional managers in Jamaica on the country's ten-year master plan of sustainable tourism development. This plan sought to diversify the nation's tourism product to promote cultural heritage and conserve biodiversity. The authors found that improvements in infrastructure were needed and that citizens were not incentivized to support the tourism industry. Kennett-Hensel et al. (2010) also found that a major challenge lies in the highly-centralized government structure that results in weakened local representation and a low level of community participation.

Nicholas and Thapa (2010) focused on visitor perspectives on sustainable tourism development as they related to the Pitons UNESCO World Heritage Site in St. Lucia. The authors found that visitors supported sustainable tourism development by buying local goods, hence, reducing leakages. They also posit that tourists are more inclined to donate to local conservation initiatives if they are educated about the area. Notably, visitors were largely unaware of the UNESCO status of the Piton Mountains.

Sinclair and Jayawardena (2003) researched sustainable tourism development in the Guianas, which were looking to expand on tourism given their rich inventory of biodiversity and cultural heritage. The authors found that a comprehensive legislative plan was needed in order to manage land use, local community participation and indicators to measure compliance. The authors also found that entrepreneurial capabilities must be assessed on a village-by-village basis in addition to researching carrying capacity.

In other island nations, Fortuny et al. (2008) addressed the technical aspects of sustainable tourism development in the Balearic Islands, a destination that had reached maturity and was facing the need to manage an abundance of mass tourism by diversifying its products. The study found that improving country inns using sustainable measures would be advantageous both environmentally and economically. The authors found that each enterprise would need to evaluate the areas of water management, energy and waste management in addition to, like the Guianas, determining rural carrying capacity.

Regarding sustainable tourism development indicators, Miller (2001) conducted a Delphi Survey of tourism researchers in order to gain insights on indicators used to measure sustainable tourism development. Participants agreed that industry must take the lead on developing a plan, specifically looking to national government for leadership and for initial guidance that involves all stakeholders. Miller suggests that, given the lack of a common definition on sustainable tourism, it is necessary to evaluate appropriate indicators on a location-specific basis while also assessing global examples common to tourism.

Zolfani et al. (2015) found a total of 13 sustainable tourism policy-making related studies including a study by Clayton (2003), which addressed policy coherence and sustainable tourism development in the Caribbean. The author discusses the importance of environmental and social interests when constructing long-term economic plans for a country. He found that fiscal policy plays a crucial role in the success or failure of a sustainable tourism plan, for example, the extent of state ownership, tax reform and subsidies. He also found that social inclusion is critical to a sustainable tourism product since it contributes to the overall health of society, reducing crime and social conflict. Ultimately, a flexible integrated plan that includes macro, sectoral and micro interests will allow for Caribbean nations to develop long-term economic strategies, not governed by short-term gains, that will also preserve resources, both natural and social.

In summary, the above literature raises several important issues that need further investigation including the need to evaluate global best practices of sustainable tourism development (Harrison et al. 2003). Due to the absence of a common theory, this study will focus on established sustainable tourism development frameworks for the purpose of selecting the most appropriate framework for benchmarking best practices and drawing implications for the Cuban tourism industry.

Based on the literature review this study found the following three comprehensive sustainable tourism development frameworks: *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers* (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization 2005), 'Action for a More Sustainable European Tourism' (The European Commission Tourism Sustainability Group 2007), and 'Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework' (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008). These frameworks exhibited logical and comprehensive structures organized into clear areas and policies from which a recommended framework could be drawn for Cuba. Notably, the frameworks from the European Commission and Caribbean Tourism Organization draw influence from the aims presented in the sustainable tourism goals endorsed by the UNWTO. The study concluded that the most appropriate sustainable tourism development framework for Cuba is the Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy (CSTP) Framework because (1) it is designed specifically for the 32 Caribbean member states including Cuba, (2) it encompasses the principles outlined by UNWTO's policy framework, and (3) it is a product of collaborative research efforts that included three years of research, destination experimental implementation and Caribbean stakeholder consultation. Given the position of Cuba as a CTO member state and the suggestion posited by CSTP that its policy framework was developed with the intention for Caribbean states to adapt themes based on their respective priorities, it was determined that these factors were best suited for the Cuban Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) to consider when crafting a sustainable tourism framework for Cuba. The CSTP Framework is composed of one overarching vision, ten principles, six development goals and six corresponding integrated policy areas which are: (1) tourism management capacity, (2) marketing, (3) transportation, (4) environment, (5) linkages and (6) health, safety and security issues which are outlined in a following section. As previously mentioned, this study concluded that the suggested CSTP framework should be amended to seven policy themes, designating Cultural Heritage and Biospheres Reserves as a stand-alone policy rather than having previously been embedded in the environment section.

While projected Cuban tourism growth will provide increased opportunities for development, it also presents challenges in managing potentially negative cultural and environmental impacts, a scenario that will

require an integrated sustainable tourism strategy for the island nation. Sustainable tourism development in Cuba is driven by strong political will that is enforced by the Cuban Constitution, Environmental Laws and the National Program of Environment and Development. This program served as the foundation for the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA) and the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) when developing guidelines for sustainable tourism destination development in 2003, and subsequent revisions in 2008. However, the challenge with these guidelines is that they are not based on an integrated framework that considers global sustainable tourism frameworks and best practices that integrates key social, economic and environmental factors and stakeholders.

The next section of best practices consists of a literature review, expert interview findings and case studies organized by the amended seven CSTP policy areas. Each section begins with an introduction to a particular policy area followed by analysis of best practices and their implications for the Cuban tourism industry in the context of Cuba's current initiatives of sustainable tourism development.

Tourism Management Capacity: Costa Rica's Best Practices

The CSTP Framework's Tourism Management Capacity policy objectives are related to good governance, public awareness, human resource development, tourism research and development and Information Communication Technology (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008).

Costa Rica is a popular destination for eco-tourists, recognized as one of the leading countries in conservation throughout the world (Stem et al. 2003; Calvo 2010). Tourism in Costa Rica is a leading example of integrating educational, economic and social sustainability aspects into the tourism industry by striving for conservation and community development, including rural areas (Stem et al. 2003). The Costa Rican government has invested in infrastructure for educational programs since the 1990s from which they established the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program (Blum 2008). The CST program consists of external auditor teams that assess hotel performance to ensure that a property meets the criteria of environmental management (Rivera and De Leon 2005). Costa Rica added the CST-TO for tour operations in 2005, which required tour operators to only use hotels that obtained the CST (Haaland and Aas 2010). With some programs regulated by law, such as educational programs in schools (Blum 2008), or by the government,

such as tour guides since 1976 (Calvo 2010), the ultimate goal was to protect the negative social, environmental and economic impact to the country (Stem et al. 2003). Due to a high level of concern in the government, Costa Rica implemented a plan toward sustainable environmental, cultural and economic interests to include local communities and protect biodiversity (Matarrita et al. 2010).

Implications for Cuban Tourism Management Capacity

Cuba is the second most popular destination in the Caribbean after the Dominican Republic with 3,016,655 tourist arrivals in 2014 (Perelló 2014). The Cuban tourism sector is driven by a centralized economy which has allowed the development of private sector participation in tourism since 1993. Due to this centralized economy, tourism policy strategies are top-down rather than case specific to local destinations. FORMATUR (Formación de Trabajadores para el Turismo – Education for the Tourism Industry Workers) oversees the training of professionals in the tourism sector while bachelor degree programs are available at universities. However, a gap remains between research and development in the Cuban tourism sector, especially in the areas of technology and management.

Cuban tourism policies encourage sustainable practices in the tourism sector. Although CITMA has an environmental certification program for tourism companies, participation is not highly encouraged. The Cuban Ministry of Education could incorporate sustainability in the curriculum from pre-school to the university level. The Certificate of Sustainability could also be implemented in the hotel and tour operator industries by MINTUR who should enforce participation. MINTUR could also develop a high-end sustainable tourism product focusing on premium tourist markets that generate more revenue with higher economic benefits and lower social and cultural negative impact.

Marketing: Costa Rica's Best Practices

The Caribbean Tourism Organization's goal for tourism marketing is to continuously improve the sustainability of the marketing mix in light of emerging global market trends and increasing competition (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008). Key objectives outline the need to capture and analyze market intelligence data, provide an enabling environment for investment in the tourism product and ensure that international standards are achieved and maintained in all tourism sub-sectors (Caribbean

Tourism Organization 2008). Costa Rica's tourism marketing has followed similar objectives.

The phrase *Pura Vida* is synonymous with the spirit of Costa Rica itself; literally translated to 'Pure Life,' it is the unofficial motto of the country (see http://puravida.com/costa-rica-facts-inf/). Not only used many times throughout the day as a greeting (Mitchell 1999), it symbolizes both a way of life and a philosophy for the Ticos (Allen 2011; Goehl 1996), the colloquial term for the Costa Rican people (see http://puravida.com/costa-rica-facts-inf/). *Pura Vida* encapsulates the pervading ideology of living in peace; it is this entrenchment in the Costa Rican culture that represents its international message rather than solely serving as a traditional destination marketing campaign. It is the essence of Costa Rica as a country and its tourism brand that encapsulates the lifestyle and culture in a way that is easily understood by visitors.

Implications for Cuban Tourism Industry Marketing

Auténtica Cuba (Authentic Cuba) is the tagline for the Cuban tourism industry's umbrella marketing campaign that showcases different Cuban tourism products such as nature, culture, sea, sun and sand, among others. In addition, foreign hotel chains and tour operators carry out their own marketing campaigns for Cuban tourism products.

Cuba has many advantages that can attract visitors, from its environment and culture to its public safety, however, there is a need for a unified marketing message that showcases the country's competitive advantages over its Caribbean neighbors. The differing images presented in the seven international Cuban tourism board websites should be unified in their branding approach. Costa Rica was chosen as a best practice for its *Pura Vida* campaign as it successfully unifies the country's strengths and advantages into one cohesive brand identity. In order to emulate *Pura Vida,* rather than launching a new marketing campaign, *Auténtica Cuba* can be refined and re-launched to highlight Cuba's competitive advantages in its cultural heritage, biosphere reserves, and natural assets.

Transportation: New Zealand's Best Practices

The goal of the Caribbean Tourism Organization's transportation policy is to develop efficient and cost effective air, marine and ground transportation options to facilitate a sustainable level of destination accessibility. The two main themes that arise are a public transport network to and

from tourist attractions, and the means to reduce emissions emitted from motor vehicles (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008).

The New Zealand government has prioritized NMT (Non-Motorized) transportation, specifically walking and cycling, into its national transportation plan (Ministry of Tourism, Tourism New Zealand, and Tourism Industry Association New Zealand 2015). Bicycle sharing programs were first launched in Amsterdam in 1965, and today, over 855 cities around the world now offer the option (Richter 2015). The benefits of bike-sharing are environmental, social and transportation-related, with the ultimate goal of bike-sharing being 'to expand and integrate cycling into transportation systems, so that it can more readily become a daily transportation mode' (Shaheen, Guzman, and Zhang 2010). Shaheen, Guzman, and Zhang (2010) outline several types of providers and business models for running a bicycle-sharing program, notably the option to create non-profit, government-owned, Public Transport-owned or for-profit set ups, such as New York City's Citi Bike program.

Implications for Cuban Transportation Sector

State owned public transportation in the Cuban tourism sector relies on more modern cars and buses than the private sector, which relies on retrofitted American cars from the 1940s and 1950s. Notwithstanding the popularity of these well-preserved and maintained cars as an attraction in destinations such as Havana, they are not a sustainable form of transportation given the pollution generated by emissions. Furthermore, Cuban airplanes are mainly Soviet manufactured planes from the 1980s with poor energy efficiency and unsustainable carbon footprint.

The Cuban government and MINTUR should explore more sustainable public and private sector transportation both on the ground and in the air. They could learn from New Zealand's NMT transportation best practices by adopting viable transportation alternatives for both tourists and residents. The Cuban government can also explore further steps in the implementation of a sustainable transportation plan to reduce emissions by incentivizing the use of NMT, as well as by upgrading existing transportation infrastructures to more energy-efficient standards.

Environment: Ecuador's and Aruba's Best Practices

According to the CSTP objectives, it is crucial to use an integrated approach for effective and efficient planning, management and monitoring of natural resources, involving stakeholders from tourism, conservation,

communities, NGOS and government (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008). It is also vital for Caribbean destinations to implement mitigation strategies to reduce vulnerability to climate change (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008).

Ecuador is one of the most popular nature tourism destinations in Latin America due to the Galapagos Islands, a UNESCO World Heritage site. While the Ministry of Tourism has embarked on a strategy to diversify Ecuador's tourism products and alleviate impacts on the Galapagos, the country has also promoted a strategy called *Buen Vivir,* or 'Good Living,' a social movement that promotes a holistic relationship between nature and people (Moya 2013; Gudynas, 2011).

Green Gateway Aruba, a vision of infrastructure investment, launched in 2009 to transform Aruba into a knowledge-based, entrepreneurial and environmentally sustainable economy. One pillar of the vision is to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy solutions, capitalizing on the island's favorable wind and solar resources. Another pillar is to increase capital for infrastructure by attracting international investors to own and operate wind farms, as well as the projected solar farm and waste-to-energy projects, through long term Purchased Power Agreements (PPAS). In 2012, the Government of Aruba, the Carbon War Room and the New America Foundation filed a commitment with the United Nations to transition the island to 100 percent renewable power supply by 2020 (*Caribbean News Now* 2013; Leisure and Travel 2013).

Implications for Cuban Tourism Industry Environment

The Cuban government has supported the preservation of the environment through several laws and regulations, however these parameters are not strongly enforced. However, since 2004, supported by the Energy Preservation Program of the Ministry of Education, the government has enforced a strong campaign to save electricity by changing dated equipment. The education curriculum includes environmental preservation from primary to university level.

MINTUR and CITMA could jointly establish a monitoring system with sanctions for the purpose of enforcing current environmental sustainability regulations. The monitoring system should involve government, local stakeholders and third party agencies. Sustainable tourism would not exist without focusing on local community benefits, and thus, local stakeholders can be engaged by creating incentive based policies. Partnering with the private sector will lessen the financial burden for MINTUR,

while non-profit partnerships may encourage more public participation.

Although Cuba has made progress in increasing energy use efficiency, the practices can improve by examining Aruba, and generating and selling energy locally by cooperative efforts. However, this process requires strong technological and financial support, which can be obtained from the private sector, joint ventures or international funding from NGOS.

Health, Safety, and Security Issues: Jordan's Best Practices

Health, safety and security issues are critical for the sustainability of tourism in the Caribbean. Key objectives in the CSTP framework are improving the health and safety of citizens and visitors to the Caribbean, reinforcing the reputation as a secure destination, reducing the vulnerability of the tourism sector to natural and man-made hazards and enhancing communication and coordination mechanisms (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008).

The tourism development plan in Jordan has identified food handling and safety in the hospitality industry as a priority, training university students and professionals. The Jordan Tourism Development Project, which followed the codes of ethics in tourism endorsed by the UNWTO, launched a nationwide safe food handling and hygiene campaign that spread awareness and improved skills among chefs, caterers, restaurant owners and hospitality trainers (Jordan Economic and Commerce Bureau 2015). In the National Tourism Strategy, the Jordanian government has recognized the crucial importance of safety for its visitors, ensuring that tourists will continue to feel comfortable traveling to the region, will enjoy food and hygiene at international standards, and will have confidence in capable medical services (Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities 2015).

Implications for Cuban Health, Safety, and Security Issues

Cuba has a strong health system and low crime rates relative to other Caribbean nations. However, problems persist with the quality of drinking water, waste management and food safety, particularly with street vendors. Cuba has a National Defense Plan for addressing natural disasters such as severe storms and hurricanes. This plan is taught in schools starting at the primary level and every company has a plan to guarantee the safety of employees and tourists.

The Cuban government should continue monitoring and improving health, safety and security issues in addition to enforcing cleaner pro-

duction and better waste management. Partnering with the international private sector could provide updated technology or increased investment, allowing Cuba to manage air and water pollution issues more effectively. The Cuban government could also strengthen food safety regulations for restaurants and other food service outlets. Although there are general food regulation policies already in place in Cuba, it is important to focus specifically in the regulation of private restaurants and street vendors that can be difficult to monitor and enforce.

Linkages: The Sandals Group's Farmers Program Best Practices

The linkages policy focuses on the economic linkages of tourism to other economic sectors as well as to the local communities. The local communities can capture tourist spending through employment and by providing products and services, creating the 'multiplier effect.' The CSTP policy objectives are two-fold: to provide an enabling political and economic environment that promotes and maximizes inter-sectorial linkages, and to ensure that local communities are directly involved and are able to benefit from linkages to tourism. Some of the critical challenges and issues with respect to linkages include a weak institutional capacity, competition between import and export industries, linkages to communities, and leakages (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008). For example, food purchases constitute a large part of hospitality industry expenditure, however, food is often not sourced locally for a variety of reasons including inadequate quality, reliability, volume of produce, exacerbated by poor transport and lack of communication and information between supplier and purchaser (Ashley, Goodwin, and Mcnab 2005a).

The Sandals Group, one of the largest employers in the Caribbean, is a large all-inclusive resort chain with properties in Jamaica, Bahamas, St. Lucia and Antigua. Sandals Resorts Farmer Program in Jamaica began in 1996 when the hotel forged a partnership with the state-run Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) with the aim of developing good working relationships between farmers and hotels by improving the quality of produce, developing proper pricing arrangements, and improving communications between farmers and hotels (Ashley, Goodwin, and Mcnab 2005b). The Farmers Program by the Sandals Group is engaged in (1) channeling and creating demand for local products among its staff and customers, (2) supporting the supply side to deliver quality and quantity required, and (3) establishing transparent and workable communication structures between supply and demand. The benefits for the Sandals Group for investing in local linkages are: increased staff morale, market

reputation and brand marketing, local recognition, and consistent quality food supply from local farmers.

Implications for Cuban Tourism Industry Linkages

Although the majority of the tourism industry in Cuba is owned by the state, the role of the private sector is growing. While current policies encourage tourism companies to buy locally in order to develop the internal markets that benefit communities more directly, Cuban tourism suppliers need to improve the quality of their products to international standards. Cuba has joint ventures with international hotel chains and tour operators, which are beneficial for gaining expertise but create leakages for the tourism industry. It has been proven in many countries around the world that foreign direct investments (FDI) bring to the host nation many benefits including world-class management expertise, new technologies, international product and process standards, and sustained product innovation (Feinberg 2012). Former senior executive of Cuban Export-Import Corporation (CIMEX, the largest commercial corporation in Cuba), Emilio Morales, asserted the contribution of joint ventures cannot be underestimated; responsible for training personnel in accounting, finance, management, human resources, information technology, marketing and related fields. Some employees have been trained in Cuba and many have studied abroad (Feinberg 2012).

Cuba can upgrade its tourism product offerings and services and adopt new strategies that attract more environmentally and socially responsible markets in addition to the low-cost packaged mass tourism (Elliot and Neirotti 2008). Medical tourism has high utilization of local goods and services from other economic sectors and capitalizes on Cuba's comparative advantages and resources, including highly skilled medical professionals and quality hospitals. The Cuban government can explore joint venture opportunities similar to those with hotels to bring much needed capital investment to the healthcare industry and prioritize medical tourism as a strategic growth market. Other niche tourism products to explore are eco- and music tourism.

A sharing economy is a good example of an economic model that enforces linkages and reduced leakages. Sharing economy started in Cuba in 1993 when the government allowed entrepreneurs to operate bed and breakfasts (*casas particulares*) and private restaurants (*paladares*). It is recommended that the Cuban government promote the growth of these private enterprises in order to generate more economic benefits to local communities.

Cultural Heritage and Biosphere Reserves: The Azores' Best Practices

This study suggests adding a new policy theme of cultural heritage and biosphere reserves based on the significance of Cuba's cultural heritage assets, both tangible and intangible, and its UNESCO Biosphere Reserve inventory that collectively form the foundation of the country's sustainable tourism product. The objective is to adapt a more integrated planning process between cultural heritage sites and the biospheres, to include more local communities in a balanced plan encompassing the entire country, assessing and monitoring the world heritage inventory and fostering a more sustainable relationship between people and nature (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2008).

The Azores, the world's first platinum level sustainable tourism destination, is rich in cultural heritage and biospheres, including the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of the city of Angra, the wine landscapes of Pico Island and three UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (Carvalho 2015; Rokou 2014). With the support of the National Strategic Plan for Tourism driven by Portugal's national government, the Azores has implemented a successful sustainable tourism strategy that includes private enterprise development in urban and rural areas in addition to the improvement of rural infrastructure that minimizes environmental impact and preserves architectural heritage and local traditions (Luis and Norberto 2013; Carvalho 2015). The Azores has also leveraged biosphere geothermal landscapes to create sustainable tourism models like the GeoPark Project, recognized as one of the leading examples of best practices in sustainable tourism. Geotourism has raised awareness of the environmental richness of the islands while also promoting rural tourism and increasing socio-economic benefits for remote communities (Carvahlo 2015).

The European Coastal and Marine Union (EUCC) has considered the Azores to be the greatest example of sustainable tourism in Europe, focusing on high quality local and regional products to promote and benefit cultural heritage (Carvalho 2015).

Implications for Cuban Cultural Heritage and Biosphere Reserves

Cuba has nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites, seven of which are cultural, and six Biosphere Reserves. Restoration of these sites has been driven by the reinvestment of tourism revenue in addition to foreign in-

vestment. The best examples are Las Terrazas and Old Havana. According to the experts interviewed, the use of UNESCO Cultural Heritage and Biosphere Reserve sites as tourist attractions has proved to be very beneficial for their preservation (Diaz-Medina 2015).

Cuban People to People tours offered to Americans since the early 1990s are a prime example of cultural heritage with a focus on educational experiences and appreciation of local customs and hospitality. MINTUR could examine communities that are rich in cultural heritage inventory, for example, food heritage, and that are also geographically located near the country's array of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, with the goal of reproducing the models of Old Havana and Las Terrazas based on a comprehensive destination plan that benefits local communities. Discussions with Cuba tour operators highlighted the fact that current cultural heritage and biosphere tourism is heavily concentrated in the western areas of the island nearer to Havana. A long-term strategy, in tandem with infrastructure and transportation improvement, would encompass key UNESCO sites and biospheres in central and eastern Cuba, such as Camaguey, Baracoa and Santiago de Cuba, spreading the cultural heritage and natural resource tourism product to communities throughout the island and alleviating tourism impacts in the west.

Discussion

As seen in the summary of key findings regarding sustainable tourism development in the Caribbean and other island nations (see table 1), each country and local government implemented sustainable tourism development based on an integrated planning process involving relevant stakeholders while considering specific circumstances of the country or region regarding areas for improvement. In order to achieve a similar integrated approach in Cuba, the government should engage all stakeholders from local communities and government officials to academia. The Cuban government and MINTUR should also firmly enforce laws and regulations directed towards environmental and cultural preservation, and measure progress based on specific indicators. Cuba is in the position to leverage its uniquely preserved cultural heritage by developing a destination image that attracts visitors with social and environmental interests. Its rich inventory of UNESCO cultural and natural sites makes it possible for Cuba to raise international funds and expand conservation and preservation beyond current projects, such as Old Havana.

As seen from the summary of key findings regarding best practices

TABLE 1   Summary of Key Findings Regarding Sustainable Tourism Development
in the Caribbean and Other Island Nations

Case Study	Findings	Implications for Cuba
Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Development (CSTP) Framework	Government, tourism and academic partnerships. Clear tourism message and evaluation of best practices	More integrated planning between stakeholders based on global best practices and with clear tourism message
Jamaica's 10-Year Master Plan	Top-down planning – needs more local participation	Foster local partnerships and entrepreneurship as part of an integrated planning process
Piton Management Area UNESCO World Heritage	Tourists support local businesses and heritage sites	Leverage UNESCO assets for cultivating tourist interest and conservation support
Sustainable tourism in the Guianas	Foster local entrepreneurship and assess carrying capacity	Evaluate new cultural heritage areas to develop and improve carrying capacity and training accordingly
Sustainable Tourism Development: Balearic Islands	Sustainable rural tourism is economically and environmentally viable	Diversify tourism products based on rural tourism and private enterprise development
Caribbean tourism indicators	Requires national leadership and enforcement	Develop indicators for Cuba and enforce them on national/local level
Policy coherence in the Caribbean	Long-term strategy must have environmental and social inclusion	Avoid short-term gains and plan for long-term development that results in societal improvements

of sustainable tourism development (see table 2), stakeholder involvement in the planning process and a dynamic private sector are critical in ensuring the success of sustainable tourism development initiatives. All seven sustainable tourism development areas are important for the Cuban tourism industry, however the priority should be given to preservation of cultural heritage and biospheres, tourism management capacity and improvement of linkages with local economies. Cuba can address these areas by increasing foreign investment, private sector initiatives and the use of local resources. While Cuba is already practicing commendable sustainable strategies e.g., the restoration of Old Havana and the develop-

TABLE 2   Summary of Key Findings Regarding Best Practices of Sustainable Tourism Development

CSTP Policy	Best Practices	Implications for Cuba
Tourism Management Capacity	Costa Rica – Government certification programs	Technology, management and tour operator certification
Marketing	Costa Rica – *Pura Vida* as a lifestyle	*Autentica Cuba* communication based on Cuba's unique cultural and natural heritage
Transportation	New Zealand – Non-Motorized Transportation NMT	Adapt NMT for popular tourist destinations such as Havana
Environment	Ecuador and Aruba – Mitigate environmental impact	Environmental impact management and renewable energy
Linkages	Sandals Group Farmers Program	Similar program with cooperatives and entrepreneurs, sharing economy
Health, Safety and Security	Jordan – Food safety training	Food safety training programs and enforcement
Cultural Heritage and Bio-spheres	Azores – Rural tourism and cultural heritage development	UNESCO Heritage and Biosphere site development and rural tourism

ment of rural tourism in western Cuba, there is still a need to create an integrated plan that encompasses sustainable tourism development for the country in its entirety with strong stakeholder participation at all levels. Cuba's tourism industry should assess key cultural heritage sites for development in order to improve carrying capacity and infrastructure, and to cultivate community entrepreneurship and reduce leakages. This study suggests that Cuba must first define what type of tourism and tourist they seek to attract, and subsequently target relevant markets with communication that differentiates Cuba from other destinations. This study concludes that Cuba's extensive and unique cultural and natural heritage can become the heart and soul of this communication.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this study include the range of stakeholder interviews and access to information on MINTUR's current strategies and future goals.

In order to obtain a more specific account of Cuba's tourism strategies and current practices, research should include discussions with representatives from MINTUR and with stakeholders on government and local levels. Future research suggestions include reviews of current sustainable tourism development practices using MINTUR information, research into cultural heritage tourism opportunities and tourism product development, as well as the growth of the cruise industry and projected impacts on the island. Future research should closely assess Cuban tourism systems for the purpose of developing comprehensive and harmonized sustainable tourism development standards that Cuba and other Caribbean nations could implement.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the revised CSTP Framework provides the foundation on which Cuba can develop an effective and efficient sustainable tourism development plan that encourages relevant stakeholder participation. Cuba is a member of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and thus, Cuban tourism officials are familiar with the CSTP Framework which can be further adapted to the Cuban tourism industry. Cuba has taken significant steps toward sustainable tourism development, however more can be done. While the sun, sea and sand tourism product currently dominates the industry, Cuba is in the position to formulate a sustainable tourism development strategy that presents and preserves the country's rich cultural and natural heritage, attracts visitors in search of meaningful experiences and creates a high-end tourism product that benefits local communities and conserves cultural and natural resources.

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