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Governmental Strategies and Policies in the Projection of Smart Tourist Destination: An Approach to the Conceptual and Theoretical Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract: This study aimed to carry out an approach for a conceptual and theoretical analysis of governmental strategies and policies to project whether a tourist destination is smart or intelligent. Governments, those responsible for planning the development of a country, have been looking for new mechanisms for the development of the tourism sector after the uncertainty caused by the global health crisis. From the theoretical perspective, the Smart Tourist Destination (STD) concept could be a mechanism or strategy that strengthens the development of tourism in its different typologies in each tourist region. The COVID-19 pandemic generated discouraging scenarios in destinations where tourism is the main activity; however, at the same time, it highlighted important aspects to consider in order to prevent this type of situation. Local governance, which acts as a catalytic instrument in promoting tourism, is a central factor in diversifying tourism from a sustainable perspective, in which local actors can be involved to satisfy the demand of tourists or visitors to the destination. The methodology used was qualitatively based on the technique of content analysis of thematic literature review using databases, scientific journals, books, book chapters, websites, Web of Science (WoS), Scopus databases, among others. The main results of the research show that there are different strategies and government policies that have served as the basis for the promotion of smart tourist destinations in other tourist regions of the world, and where interconnected collaboration in networks using technology is the basis of this intelligence in action to offer the tourism products of destinations.

Keywords: government strategies and policies; smart tourist destination; governance



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1. Introduction

The development of tourism worldwide has been configured as one of the strategies of government policies to plan their economies. Moreover, tourism as a socioeconomic and environmental phenomenon leads to positive and negative impacts that require meticulous analyses for its implementation and development since, even though it generates economic growth and boosts the economy among the sectors within a given territory, it also generates negative impacts in terms of the different environments in which it is developed.

This means that tourism development is promoted in different economies as a strategy for achieving economic development and remedying deficits. Therefore, government policies have advocated tourism as a central axis to structure development between economic activities, but at the same time, as one of the elements or factors of environmental protection since its effective implementation can prevent negative aspects, such as degradation and even the loss of natural ecosystems, as with those caused by the traditional activities of the agriculture sector [1–3].

In this sense, tourist destinations in this new millennium are being pushed to make a change that allows them uninterrupted connectivity through digitization and AI; that is, the concept of intelligence alludes to the support that technology provides destinations so

that they can automatically respond to the tourists of this millennium, which tend to be eminently digital [4].

Therefore, it will be necessary to ask: What are the government policies required to create an STD? Or, what are the government strategies and policies that have been applied in other regions of the world to create an STD? Finally, does a traditional tourist destination require AI support to be intelligent?

These questions led to the search for examples of locations where these mechanisms are already built and where these STDs have been able to grow and develop, generating positive impacts in the communities or tourist regions to which they belong. From this perspective, this research tries to reveal the guidelines and actions of the governments embodied in the strategies and policies that have been used in the construction and projection of STDs and that have effectively responded to the needs of destinations through technological innovation [5].

Tourism, as already mentioned, is one of the main economic sectors worldwide, creating many jobs and generating wealth through tourism activities [6]. However, this activity was paralyzed when the pandemic began due to the measures adopted by governments in order to protect against the global emergency. Trips were interrupted due to the closure of airports, many recreational centers were closed, and people were afraid of being in crowded places. Current tourism trends, under the sanitation protocols after the pandemic, seek to offer complete and genuine experiences that make the heritage, identity, and culture of the destination known [1,7,8].

Additionally, although this was discouraging for tourism and the destinations that depend on this activity, the health emergency left lessons that should be the basis for speculating on new ways of promoting tourism, leaving aside mass tourism, and looking for valuable alternatives for the end user, that is, the tourist. As stated by a researcher, we are facing the birth of a new era in tourism, a change comparable to that generated after the attacks of 11 September 2001, wherein tourism changed toward a new order and a new way of traveling was born, with stricter security protocols and biometric controls, among others [8]. Similarly, after 11 March 2020, the day that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism entered a new phase of change, and for which those countries with the capacity to react faster to this new order would be the ones who could gain an advantage.

Faced with this situation, society entered a stage of rapid evolution and adaptation, where tourism went from being a vehicle of commercial exchange to a showcase for social and environmental involvement and from being only considered only an economic activity to a strategic element that impacts local development.

A concept that helps to analyze this rapid evolution is that of the STD since it seeks to promote competitiveness in the global tourism market through innovation and attention to a segment identified as the hyperconnected “new tourist” [9]. At the same time, STDs have been identified as innovative management, allowing tourist destinations to adapt to new social, economic, and technological realities based on sustainability, information, new technologies, and governance since these are the key elements for STDs to face the scenario left by the COVID-19 crisis [10,11].

The success of STDs goes beyond just managing abundant, connected data; it is more about delivering public services in a different way. The ideas are based on social and citizen perspectives, using technological strategies as a link between the common territory.

Another aspect to consider for intelligent tourist destinations is the power to facilitate innovative solutions for tourists. Consequently, the STD must provide intelligence to the infrastructure of the destination to promote efficient and sustainable development and increase the quality of life of the residents; therefore, STDs are linked to increased competitiveness between destinations and improved tourist experiences [12,13].

Congruently, the implementation processes of STD management systems have been shown to be tools for the application of public policies that favor local development in municipalities. STDs represent cities oriented toward improving the quality of life, human

development, and investment through the formulation and implementation of policies that include different methodologies and technological mechanisms in sustainable, participatory, and collaborative ways [14].

In this work, the results obtained suggest that the government must follow through with its strategies and policies, serving as the bases for tourist destinations to project themselves as intelligent. These policies are as follows: (a) establishing cooperation networks between the actors that converge in the destination, (b) developing information platforms accessible to tourists, and (c) developing a joint vision in which the local population is involved. Likewise, this research has economic implications because providing information that helps tourist destinations project themselves as intelligent will generate greater regional economic benefits in the future, and this will have a social implication for the local population of the destinations since it will generate employment and increase the quality of life, and in the same way, it has a political implication by providing data with findings that are useful for decision making regarding the planning of destinations.

Thus, the government plays a fundamental role when it comes to projecting tourist destinations as smart since they must establish strategies and policies that help these regions work as an interconnected system in which all actors are participants, and in that all resources are used in the most optimal way, thus supporting a sustainable horizon. Therefore, the objective of the present investigation is to outline an approach for the conceptual and theoretical analysis of the strategies and government policies that have supported the construction and projection of STDs.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Background

There are some research works related to STDs that can serve as a background, such as “Smart Destinations or intelligent territories? Study of cases in Spain”, wherein the researchers discussed the interpretation and application of the same term (intelligence) in territorial and tourism development. A bibliographic review of the treated terminology is presented, mainly with Territorial Intelligence and Smart Tourist Destinations (STDs), to establish comparisons between them. In addition, the results obtained from the analysis of the implementation of various STD projects are presented. It is concluded in the analysis that the application of “intelligent” to territorial development does not seem to be in accordance with what is understood in the field of tourism, identifying the latter with the process based mainly on technological innovation [13].

Another work that serves as a reference for the development of this research is entitled Smart Tourist Destinations (STD) in a Context of Crisis: main Challenges at the Business and Destination Level, where it was raised as a solution to the implementation of STDs in the face of the COVID-19 health crisis since they are a helpful tool for coping with the new normality and achieving development in economic, social, and environmental issues. In the same way, the importance of cooperation and participation between all of the actors involved in the tourism destination was highlighted since only the union of such actors can overcome the current challenges [15].

It is also important to emphasize governance and how it influences the development of STDs, as well as the target audience of the STD, the tourist and not the citizen, as proposed by various authors and definitions. It was also pointed out that STDs do not necessarily adhere to geographical limits since they can constitute more than one municipality. It was pointed out that the main axes of STDs are governance, innovation, and sustainability [15,16].

The research work, Smart Tourist Destinations. An Alert to the Host Communities, exposed a critical point of view related to how intelligence is applied to tourism. In addition, intelligence was proposed as a fundamental axis to the host communities, particularly their inhabitants. In addition to this, it was mentioned that applied intelligence is simplified for commercial purposes, overlooking its true essence [17].

One of the main conclusions concerning the concept of STDs is that they can be nothing more than traditional forms of tourism, in which their main objective is to produce profits and be competitive, imperatively seeking the satisfaction of the tourist, placing these considerations above anything else, including the well-being and the quality of life of its inhabitants. Likewise, it was recognized that the concept of STDs and Territorial Intelligence have more to offer, but they must be treated from a holistic perspective, managing them from an integrated approach to achieve all the benefits that both terms offer [17].

Other research work that can serve as a reference is “Systematic Literature Review Analysing Smart Tourism Destinations in Context of Sustainable Development: Current Applications and Future Directions” which focuses on the fact that STDs should adopt sustainable tourism development, being more precise to opt for more radical alternatives, such as moving in the search for balance or degrowth situations. In other words, it emphasizes that the principles of sustainable development should be the guide for the development of STDs, and therefore, the tourism products of these STDs should be sustainable. And this can only be achieved by prioritizing environmental protection, economic sustainability, social equity, community participation, intergenerational equity, among other aspects, and that these STDs can be developed with the intention of achieving benefits for all: stakeholders, local communities, visitors and the environment itself [18].

In relation to the events experienced in recent years regarding health crises, the research work: “Proposal of New Strategies for Smart Tourism Destinations in the Challenging New Reality: A Commitment to the Technology-Sustainability Binomial”, sets significant precedents by mentioning that, although it seems that in a common way the scholars of these STDs mention that there is confusion in the concept, these STDs must be formalized, since this model contains many elements that represent an alternative to the conventional one [19]. But at the same time, the work indicates that this model has allowed a marketing and certification methodology through the institutional management of Spanish agencies such as AENOR (Spanish Association for Standardization and Certification which complies with the certification standards: UNE 178501 [20] and UNE 178502 [21].

In addition, the research work: “Building Sustainable Smart Destinations: An Approach Based on the Development of Spanish Smart Tourism Plans” serves our investigative pretensions, since the study focuses on characterizing and classifying the Spanish STDs according to their potential for the promotion of their technological solutions, in the field of tourism, and applied under the sustainability approach; the information for the research was collected from the analysis of different STD pilot projects and other smart city projects developed by cities that belong to the Spanish smart city network and that include actions in tourism [22]. It is important to emphasize that the work presents an x-ray of the urban sustainability actions carried out, so the objective set by the author of the work was to be able to distinguish the different models of sustainable cities, as well as to detect whether the process of transformation to STDs contributes to the improvement of urban sustainability, an aspect that is directly related to the objective of our work.

With the intention of having a broader overview of the theories that have been studied regarding the existence of destination governance, it is necessary to refer the work: “A process-based perspective of smart tourism destination governance” in which these authors [23], make a critical review of the governance positions that have been applied to tourism destinations, and based on this, to develop new governance processes for STDs, since this smart framework can inform the planning and execution of smart development objectives, and at the same time, how the principles, tools and methods of intelligence can be applied to increase the sustainable competitiveness of destinations beyond the mere technological dimension, emphasizing collaborative structures, user-oriented services, social innovation and local community participation [23]. These approaches, from the theoretical and practical aspect, both for private managers and public policy makers, thus allowing the creation of a space for collaboration and harmonization between local actors who seek to improve the quality of life.

2.2. Conceptual Approach

The concept of intelligent as an adjective has been increasing in recent years since its adherence to a noun impregnates a message with significant emphasis, largely alluding to the promptness of the response, which both institutions and companies create as solutions to the problems that each sector has, and which can be undertaken through the use of technological means or Information and communication technologies (ICT), which are the fundamental tools that support the important decision making required to achieve this task; providing this general perspective, it is necessary to remark on the said adjectival or coupled concept compared to everyday slang words used in society [5].

With the increasing use of ICT and a new scenario in which urban areas overlap rural areas in terms of population volume, new needs emerge, and with them arise new urban and economic models, such as Smart Cities (SCs), Smart Destinations (SDs), or Smart Tourism (ST) [24,25].

During the beginning of the 21st century, various concepts and terminologies arose to define new or changing territorial models as a result of the needs of human beings to relocate and reside in urban environments and integrate ICT into their daily life [24,26], such the terms Smart or Intelligent when applied to territorial spaces, not only with the intention of approaching the way in which ICT impacts it, but modeling sustainable, accessible, inclusive, and connected cities or municipalities that advocate transparency, the participation of different social entities, and local development, which are necessary elements for good governance, one of the pillars considered essential in intelligent territories [24,27].

Urban territories are facing a new reality influencing the development of their structure, and that requires a review of their fundamental pillars to promote the balance and well-being of their populations. Thus, some urban territories have begun to call themselves SCs with the aim of increasing the quality of life of their inhabitants and promoting the efficiency of the services provided by both public and private entities [24].

This has led to the use of functional, innovative concepts that produce favorable results to provide relevance and a sense of prosperity in each of the economic areas, and it seems that connectivity networks enabled through technology are an example of this since the adaptation of the concept of SCs to the STD has become the objective to be achieved by these Tourist Destinations (TDs) at the global level, seeking a better and more agile position in the market and supported by Artificial Intelligence (AI), which provides tourists with a premium experience that makes them feel different [5,28].

Additionally, the concept of STDs or SDs has emerged as a principle of innovation and competitiveness in global tourism markets, with the vision of developed countries based on another concept, SCs [9,29].

An STD is an innovative space consolidated based on the territory and cutting-edge technological infrastructure. It is a territory committed to the environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic factors of its habitat, equipped with an intelligence system that captures information procedurally, analyzes and understands events in real time, in order to facilitate visitor interaction with the environment and the decision making of destination managers, increasing their efficiency and substantially improving the quality of tourist experiences [30,31].

Any location can be an STD if it has the two pillars: (a) Soft Intelligence (which contains organizational skills and modalities, including collaborations and partnerships, innovation, and leadership) and (b) Hard Intelligence (referring to the entire technological infrastructure) [32].

Additionally, the link between intelligence and sustainability is expressed in two complementary levels: (A) The destination strategy and (B) The application of technologies for a more effective management of the environment [33]. STDs are committed to integrating technology into the tourism ecosystem, but Little is known about the potential synergies between smartness and urban sustainability. Therefore, it is important to analyse technology programmed actions as solutions addressed to foster urban sustainability which can create different urban models [22].

The objective of STDs is to promote and encourage the transformation of destinations to achieve sustainable development in terms of tourism, ensuring higher quality for tourists and, in addition, improving the quality of life of the local population [34,35]. STDs must be based on a model informed by governance, innovation, technology, sustainability, and accessibility in order to guarantee the future of tourist activity, and this same model must be worked on in collaboration with the Tourism Secretary Office (TSO) of Mexico to promote Mexican STDs [16,36].

Likewise, an STD is an innovative region that is consolidated in a delimited territory that contains infrastructure designed for that purpose. It is a territory committed to the sustainable, cultural, and socioeconomic issues of its area and which, in turn, is endowed with intelligence and technology to achieve established goals. Given the complexity of the term, it is important that all of the actors involved participate jointly and in a coordinated manner to design strategies and action plans to project and maintain itself as an STD [11,30].

For the proper functioning of an STD in this globalized world, development management entities are required to enable its insertion into the global market, in this perspective it is necessary to consider what is mentioned in the research work: "Faced with an increasingly globalized and competitive scenario, it is up to management and promotion entities of tourist destinations, known as DMO (Destination Management Organization), the development of sustainable, creative and innovative strategies, so as to generate unforgettable experiences for tourists, improve the quality of life of the population, and facilitate the attainment of competitive advantages over time" [37].

In this way we can define a SD, from the perspective of tourism management, as the tourist space that thanks to an efficient application of ICTs, and to an appropriate use of data and its transformation into key information, is able to carry out intelligent decisions and offer its visitors improved experiences. STDs base their operation on collaborative and dynamic decision-making and on the continuous interaction between the different stakeholders by taking advantage of the possibilities offered by new technologies [38]. Therefore, the SDs can be considered as a multidimensional ecosystem, complex to develop due to the different facets that compose it and the different stakeholders involved (e.g., local governments, businesses, citizens, tourism planning experts, etc.) [39].

On the other hand, there are some authors that allude to the existence of two relevant factors that need to be considered when talking about Tourism Destinations (TDs), which are as follows: (a) the governance that the territory adopts and (b) the type of technology it has, since both contribute to ensuring that the destination is directed toward the inclusion of all its actors and sustainability [40].

In this sense, the government plays a fundamental role in terms of tourism issues since it is in charge of designing and providing public policies and strategies and can make decisions aimed at the sustainability and growth of TDs [41]. For this task, a high degree of knowledge is required to define and establish public policies; thus, experts involved in this task are required, such as those who seek to reduce the existing gap between all of the actors involved [39,42].

Therefore, the distinction that must be made between government and governance is important since the former is characterized by the presence of a power (State) organized through hierarchical public powers, while governance is distinguished as the birth of a new and more complex relational system, in which actors external to politics are included, representing an alternative form of public management [7].

2.3. Theoretical Aspects

The study of STD has been based mainly on theories belonging to the field of administrative discipline, especially in relation to the management of resources, intellectual property, the cost-benefit of transactions carried out at the destination, the work networks implicit in the production of tourism services, the collaboration of stakeholders in the development of TD, as well as other theoretical postulates belonging to the economics of the organization from the industrial aspect [23].

The above leads to specify that these theoretical currents allude to: (a) Resource-Based Theory and Industrial Organization Economics; (b) Property Rights and Agency Theories, (c) Transaction Cost Theory, (d) Network Theory, (e) Collaboration Theory and, (f) Stakeholder Theory, this has made it possible to monitor each of the stages of an STD and to clearly establish the governance of the destination, the implications of which require collaboration, participation and partnership among all stakeholders in the development of the STD [23].

Under this framework of thought, TDs function as a system in which all of the actors involved make up an elementary piece that must work properly to achieve the objective pursued by the system itself. Thus, in light of the theory, the foregoing is based on the General Theory of Systems (GTS). The first notion of this theory was postulated by the biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, who asserted that the theory constituted an integration mechanism between social and natural sciences. In addition to the above, the GTS is characterized by its method of comprehensive analysis, where the main thing to be considered is the relationships generated by the interactions of the parts of the system. Primarily, the objectives of this GTS are to promote the development of general terminology to describe the systems in general, to build applicable legal bases for these terms, and to promote formalization in this legislation [43].

A system, according to Bertalanffy, is a set of factors that join efforts and collaborate and interact in a coordinated and constant way with the purpose of achieving common objectives. A system is identified by a delimiting boundary and operates in an environment in which a close relationship is formed. Each element of a system can be a less complex system called a subsystem [44].

The GTS is a tool that helps large-scale applications in a versatile way through a comprehensive and global vision. In addition, a great advantage of this postulate is its interdisciplinary application since it can be used in any area; moreover, it is considered from an interdisciplinary perspective, which aims to approach and represent the real world in a comprehensive way [44].

Therefore, under this theory, TDs are seen as systems delimited by a territory with actors that interact with each other to achieve a common goal, obtaining the maximum benefit and development possible and, most importantly, always conserving the resources of the territory.

For this reason, the premise proposed for this work is also based on the Development Theory for its conception, specifically in aspects such as the Dependency Theory initiated by Paul Baran; this view argues that no economy can reach its maximum development depending on another and coexisting in its periphery; for this reason, unification is sought to reduce inequality and obtain social welfare [45].

Under the same proposition, other authors have stated that Dependency Theory tries to explain the inequalities between developed economies and emerging economies, a product of economic exchange. In such a way, different economies maintain unequal exchanges in a system that concentrates resources and efforts in a certain region, while the periphery only remains as suppliers of labor and cheap inputs [46], as observed in emerging economies or local economies that depend to a large total extent on tourism. For this reason, it is considered pertinent that in TDs, all of the actors involved are considered, promoting a broad perspective in which all of the variables are considered, and unified decisions are made and directed toward the same end.

In the same way, from a Neoclassical point of view of the Development Theory with respect to what was exposed, in order for economies to maintain prolonged growth over time, it is necessary that they respond to technological change and adapt to the necessary exogenous factors [45]. This is why it is vital that STDs always seek to be connected to global trends so that they can adapt and stay current, an element that also responds to monitoring trends in international and national legislation. This argument is linked to the last aspect of Development Theory, Globalization Theory, which starts from the emphasis on economic

transactions and the existing links of a political and financial nature. Furthermore, the success of the economies that adopt and develop these elements is highlighted [45].

Therefore, seeing TDs as systems that work with the parts that make up the whole and that interact as exogenous elements, the integration of all of their parts is sought to achieve maximum development and, in turn, minimize the inequalities that usually occur in regions with a high degree of dependence on tourism, which is achieved through the implementation of government policies and strategies.

The emerging theories of governance are a reconceptualization of theories related to governments since they represent a search for the collective interest not only through public institutions but also through different agreements that go beyond the public sphere by incorporating mechanisms to resolve the conflicts of interest that arise in the processes of economic and social management [47].

The term governance refers largely to the action of the government to lead or take the reins of the development of territory at different levels, from the national to the regional and local, as well as the involvement of other individual and collective actors that operate in the local sphere, and that their involvement is essential for the achievement of such development, especially in the field of tourism [3].

3. Materials and Methods

For answering the three research questions of our work: What are the government policies required to create an STD? Or, what are the government strategies and policies that have been applied in other regions of the world to create an STD? Finally, we ask whether a traditional tourism destination requires the support of AI to be smart. These questions imply the approach of the research under the qualitative approach, since it is based on evidence that is oriented more towards the deep description of the phenomenon in order to understand and explain it through the application of methods and techniques derived from its conceptions and epistemic foundations, such as hermeneutics, phenomenology and the inductive method [48].

Since tourism is a phenomenon, and STD is a new contemporary trend with important implications in the different spaces in which this phenomenon is developed in an “intelligent” way, it is of substantial interest to have access to the scientific production related to this topic, and which is housed in the different spaces or digital media that include scientific journals integrated into databases and accessible in the cloud.

In this situation, and as previously mentioned, the methodological perspective is qualitative, based on the technique of content analysis of thematic literature review, which consists of a six-stage procedure (Figure 1): (first) Selection of a communication model; (Second) Pre-analysis; (third) Definition of analysis units; (fourth) Establishment of analysis rules and classification codes; (fifth) Development of categories and (sixth) Final integration of the findings [49,50].

The above, led from the first moment of the research to the conceptual theoretical approach that would lead to being able to construct an object of research concerning the questions already alluded to beforehand, and in this way to approach the methodological way that would make possible its concretion, raising this research from the qualitative approach and under the technique of content analysis regarding the different contributions made in relation to the STD from its conception and its contemporary evolution, as well as some of its shortcomings in the development of tourism.

Once the methodological position was determined, the second stage consisted of an Internet search using thematic databases, scientific journals, books, book chapters, websites, Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases to identify works related to STD from different perspectives, in order to meet the objectives of this stage in relation to the collection of documents or corpus of contents, formulate guidelines for the analysis work and establish indicators that account for issues present in the analyzed material [51].

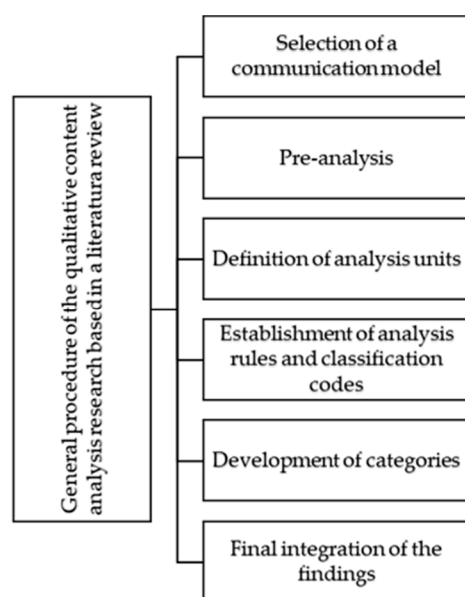


Figure 1. General procedure of the qualitative content analysis research based in a thematic literature review. Source: own elaboration based on [49,50].

Subsequently, that is, the third stage, the units of analysis of the object of research were defined through key words and phrases referring to STD, governmental strategies and policies, governance, tourism, among others. These aspects made it possible to give meaning and congruence to the research in order to subsequently make textual inferences [49].

Consequently, in the fourth stage already referred to, rules of analysis and classification codes were established to give validity and reliability to the research, through the categorization of the research works compiled and related to the central theme on STD, governmental strategies and policies, as well as governance, resulting in obtaining relevant and significant information for the study and, at the same time, the discrimination of documents irrelevant to the study or unrelated to it [52].

In the fifth stage, the three main categories of the research were developed with respect to government strategies and policies, STD and governance, with the aim of grouping the texts based on similarity, congruence and relationship to facilitate the analysis work proposed from the beginning of the research. It is important to emphasize that this development of categories makes it possible to order and classify the texts in a definitive manner [49].

Finally, in the sixth stage, the findings or results of the research were integrated through the content analysis of the thematic literature review, regarding the strategies and governmental policies required to integrate an STD, as well as the strategies and governmental policies that have been applied in other regions of the world, and at the same time answering the question of whether a traditional TD requires AI to be intelligent.

4. Analysis of Results

According to the following research questions present in the work: what are the government policies required to create an STD? Or, what are the government strategies and policies that have been applied in other regions of the world to create an STD? Lastly, the question of whether a traditional tourist destination requires AI support to be intelligent.

The literature review on tourism management has shown a growing interest in developing the STD initiative, integrating technology in tourist regions to enrich the tourist experience and a commitment to sustainability [53].

An STD is defined as an innovative tourist destination consolidated in a technological structure that promotes sustainable development and is accessible to all, facilitating the integration of the tourist with the environment and increasing their quality of experience

and the quality of life of the resident [42]. Its goal is to provide stakeholders with technology based solutions and improve the quality of life of the local population, and this is achieved with the support of AI [54].

In the Spanish conception, an STD integrates aspects related to sustainability, accessibility, knowledge, and technological innovation, placing the tourist at the center of attention in the construction of systems that allow the integration and interaction of the latter with the environment, enhancing the experience [9].

In addition, another aspect required to implement any STD management model is that there must previously be a jurisdictionally delimited territory, which must be active as a destination and have the legal and political frameworks to establish strategies to project itself as an STD [14]. The concept of an STD must be adapted to each specific reality, first determining what the intended purposes are based on the actors involved and later defining what would be the most appropriate methods or instruments based on the achievement of these.

In this sense, an STD seeks to integrate the application of technology with advanced infrastructures, focusing on innovative services for tourists. However, these infrastructures must be provided by the government and will depend on its ability to innovate and adapt [55]. An STD can become ineffective without the proper structure of government-generated policies. The coordination and integration of the actors involved in the governance of the destination must be guaranteed [53].

In the same way, an STD is an innovative region that is consolidated in a delimited territory and an infrastructure designed for that purpose. It is a territory committed to the sustainable, cultural, and socioeconomic issues of its area and which, in turn, is endowed with intelligence and technology to achieve the established goals. Given the complexity of the term, it is important that all of the actors involved participate jointly and in a coordinated manner in order to design strategies and action plans to project and maintain itself as an STD [30,54].

In this order of ideas, the important aspects of the role that the government plays with respect to governance were identified since it is the action or effect of governing with the objective of achieving economic, social, and institutional sustainability in the long term in order to obtain a balance between the state, society, and the economy, such as in the words of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language [56]. Several authors, such as [40–42,57], postulate the key role played by the government in the development of planning and public policies as an essential condition for the progression of a TD to an STD since they serve as a means to achieving the goals proposed concerning issues related to development and sustainability, among others.

The configuration of an STD must respond to the needs presented by each destination; the simple adoption and use of ICT do not make a destination intelligent; it is also necessary that this configuration be accompanied by a process of change in all spheres; it is not simply a continuation of the same procedures with the use of technological platforms [9]. New frameworks for interactions between the entities involved must be established to achieve a new mode of tourism management. Additionally, despite the fact that ICT is changing the way of doing things, STDs are more than the implementation of technology; they must respond to five strategic axes: governance, innovation, technology, accessibility, and sustainability [58].

Therefore, it should not be forgotten that the use of technology without a good purpose is useless; cities are only really smart when they place people at their center, trying to improve the quality of life across the different communities within the territory; therefore, an STD must be accessible to everyone; otherwise, such a space will be technological but not intelligent [12].

In this way, the need to create the necessary government strategies to regulate the use and accessibility of the technologies and platforms that are implemented in a TD to achieve its projection as Intelligent is also highlighted.

When a TD decides to become an STD, a strategy must be established to revalue the destination and promote its competitiveness, in addition to taking care of the use of its natural and cultural attractions and promoting sustainable development, the use of ICT, and universal accessibility [58]. The application of technology in STDs aims to increase the added value to their population and tourists [6].

The process of transforming a TD into an intelligent one offers a series of benefits, such as improved tourism management, the promotion of sustainable development, and increased competitiveness [31].

Thus, the creation of an STD implies designing strategies and public policies in which all of the actors involved intervene in order to carry out correct tourist management, always seeking to safeguard the quality of the destination and the generation of value [9]. Transversality must be addressed since, in TDs, some actors, both public and private, interact, and the cooperation of all these parties must be sought for the activities in which the tourist is involved. Thus, thanks to this cooperation, more sectors in the destination will benefit, considering the transversality [58].

The collaboration of multiple actors in the management of an STD should be sought, and a role for collaborative structures, user-oriented services, social innovation, and the participation of the local community should be sought [53,55].

To achieve this task, as previously mentioned, five lines of action must be addressed; each of these lines has a comprehensive perspective in terms of the destination, and all management areas must be considered in the configuration of each axis [31]:

(A) The first line of action is governance; it proposes a public and private cooperation strategy to guarantee efficient management.

(B) Innovation is the second axis to consider since it must be applied to all the processes, systems, and resources within the destination.

(C) For its part, the third axis is the technology to implement and adapt the strategies that are developed to the new information and communication platforms.

(D) The fourth line of action is accessibility. In order to achieve better integration between the destination and the tourist, the orientation of public policies toward universal accessibility in terms of products, services, and resources must be guaranteed.

(E) The last axis is sustainability; the tourism management developed by an STD must ensure sustainability in the cultural, economic, and environmental aspects.

In addition, the methodological process for a destination to become an STD is divided into two parts [31]:

(Part 1) Diagnosis and planning: a diagnostic evaluation must be carried out by the responsible entity, and an action plan based on the five axes previously explained must be developed.

(Part 2) Execution and monitoring: the pertinent actions must be undertaken to carry out the action plan and achieve the distinction of being an STD. Subsequently, the results must be evaluated, and constant improvement must be sought.

Therefore, all actions must be focused on promoting the sustainable development of the destination across three aspects: economic, environmental, and cultural. Consequently, improving the quality of life of residents and the quality of the tourist's stay [30].

Without a doubt, governance is a fundamental factor in the configuration of an STD since it must be guaranteed that the decisions made are open and transparent in order to achieve the objectives that are set [9].

Following this scheme of thought, for a TD to be projected as smart, a plan must be developed in which actions must be followed with determined times and wherein managers and resources are indicated, in addition to considering the indicators that can monitor, control, and evaluate the results, these plans are translated into government strategies that are carried out through public policies and programs [58].

Without a doubt, tourism is a very important sector worldwide and can be an excellent pathway to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda; particularly, tourism can directly or indirectly contribute to goals 8, 12, and 14, with reference to

inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production, and the sustainable use of the oceans and marine resources, respectively [11]. For this reason, more and more countries are focusing their efforts on developing strategies and policies that allow tourism to move toward a more sustainable future, generating benefits without compromising on resources.

In an international framework, Spain was the first country to develop the concept of STDs and, likewise, it was the first country to apply policies and strategies for their configuration [59]. Under this conception, the term governance is extremely important since it allows us to reflect on local participation in public policies related to tourism, making it necessary to incorporate this concept into tourism studies. This concept determines how all of the actors should be involved in tourism management and planning; that is, the three pillars of destinations: the government–the private sector–citizens.

Thus, public policies are action plans and information flows related to democratically defined public objectives that are developed by the public sector and, ideally, with the participation of the private sector and citizens. A quality public policy will include orientations or contents, instruments or mechanisms, definitions or institutional modifications, and the forecast of its results [59]. Generally, public policies are aided by public programs for their implementation. A program is a government action in a certain social sector or in a geographical space.

It has been observed that, in the case of Spain, the pioneer and main developer of the STD concept, establishing cooperation networks between the actors that converge in the destination has been fundamental since this allowed for harmonious and unified efforts toward achieving a collective goal.

In the same way, in the international context, Dubai has positioned itself as an emerging STD and has adopted measures to consolidate itself as such, and a framework of Intelligent Tourism Dynamic Response System was proposed to improve the participation of its actors and the experience of their tourists [54].

In Mexico, the regulatory body for tourism at the national level is the Ministry of Tourism or the Secretary of Tourism (SECTUR), which oversees planning and coordinating public policies for the development of tourism. The National Fund for Tourism Promotion (FONATUR) and the Tourism Promotion Council of Mexico help with two parastatal entities [36].

Furthermore, regarding the previous dependencies, the Executive Tourism Commission (CET) was also created, which oversees incorporating the proposals of the tourist service providers at the three levels of government. The Mexican government recognized tourism as a fundamental element of development in the National Development Plan 2001–2006, and for this reason, it is considered to be a priority of the Mexican State [36].

The national tourism policy is framed by four guiding principles: (1) that tourism is a national priority; (2) that tourists are totally satisfied; (3) that the destinations are sustainable; and (4) that companies are competitive. To achieve its execution, the Mexican tourism policy adheres to six programs (“Agenda 21 for Mexican Tourism”, “Country Hosting”, “México Limpio y Querido”, “Hygienic Food Management”, “Certification of Competence Labor”, and “Modernization for Micro, Small and Medium Tourism Companies”), which are aimed at serving tourist communities, promoting the quality of companies that provide tourist services, and improving the image of Mexico as a destination for international tourism. In addition to the above, SECTUR manages eight regional programs that aim to integrate the country’s regions to develop attractive, thematic, and differentiated tourism products [36,60].

One of the political strategies at the national level to promote tourism is the Magic Town Program, which aims to project communities as tourist destinations through their cultural richness. For which the importance of cooperation between the government, companies, and society was recognized. However, problems have arisen due to a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each actor involved [60,61].

An important aspect to continue on from the governmental initiative of the Magic Town Program is the important emphasis it placed on sustainability in each community that entered the program since the tourism success achieved depends to a large extent on this concept [60,61].

The Secretary of Tourism (SECTUR) works together with the Spanish Secretary of State for Tourism under the STD program, promoting the implementation of a management model based on the transversality of tourist activity and the characteristics of each destination. It starts from a diagnostic methodology and generates a system of recommendations in an action plan and, in addition, provides a monitoring system that allows for the continuous improvement of destination management. Likewise, this program allows the consolidated destination to interact with other STDs to enable synergies and knowledge transfer [62].

The Mexican municipality of Tequila is a benchmark in the configuration of STDs worldwide. For this municipality to be the first destination in America to achieve the STD distinction, a plan was designed that aimed to meet measurable indicators, such as those expressed in the SEGITTUR model. Both the public and private spheres were involved in the planning, which made it possible to carry out projects that strengthened connectivity in the town [34].

Tequila was the second destination outside of Spain that was interested in developing an action program capable of turning it into a smart destination. Tequila has been incorporated into the Magic Town Program since 2003 and is also considered to be the first geotourism destination in Mexico. Likewise, the entire tequila region was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2006. Much of its success is due to the exemplary public–private collaboration, with the private sector being the main driver behind the conversion of Tequila into an STD [63].

Particularly in Tequila, developing information platforms accessible to tourists to publicize all of the tourism experiences offered by the destination has been a key benchmark element for STDs worldwide; moreover, thanks to this, the integration of tourists with the destination has been achieved. In addition to this, an important factor that is also characteristic of the destination is its capability to become an accessible destination for all types of tourists.

Therefore, TDs that seek to project themselves as intelligent must develop a joint vision in which the local population, government, and business sector are involved, producing an informed perspective concerning the best alternatives for the region, and, with this panorama, designing strategies that satisfy their needs and enhance all or their resources without compromising them in the future, guaranteeing that all points of view are considered to achieve a destination based on governance, which is a key element for sustainability.

5. Notes and Final Conclusions

Through the analysis carried out, it was possible to identify strategies and policies that different tourist regions have adopted to project themselves as intelligent, within which it is possible to observe the establishment of cooperation networks between the actors that converge in the destination so that they all work in harmony with united efforts toward a collective goal that benefits all; develop information platforms accessible to tourists to publicize all the tourist experiences offered by the destination, generating a fuller experience; and develop a joint vision of the destination in which the local population is involved.

Furthermore, it can be stated that the government plays a very important role in achieving development in any region since it has the decision-making power conferred by its governors; however, in tourist destinations, it is not the only actor required to achieve real development; the joint work of the government, companies, institutions, and the population should be sought, generating a concept of governance with clear lines to follow to plan for sustainable development, and where said lines will be translated into strategies

and public policies that will bring benefits in the medium and long term, which will allow for the future conversion of TDs to STDs [3].

Additionally, there are two relevant factors that must be considered when talking about TDs, these are the governance that the territory adopts and the type of technology it has since both contribute to directing the destination toward the inclusion of all its actors and sustainability and where the preponderant role is played by the government for the development of tourism since it is in charge of designing and providing public policies and strategies that allow making decisions aimed at sustainability and growth [47].

From the point of view of governance, it must have an approach based on networks and a socio-centric system; its main objective is coordination, self-governance, and decentralization, which minimize hierarchies and follow a specific structure, a horizontal structure, wherein the agreements and decisions are the result of consensus among all of the actors involved in the development of tourism in the STDs [2,3,47].

In addition, STDs must have a good governance system, and to achieve this, a culture of cooperation is necessary on the local scale and on the regional, national, and global levels, where all actors have similar approaches to long-term economic, social, and environmental sustainability, working together in pursuit of a common goal that benefits everyone; therefore, governance must be smart.

Without a doubt, governance and technology are fundamental factors for Tourist Destinations. Public policies are guides to follow on the path toward the proposed objectives of sustainability. Therefore, the necessary government strategies and public policies must be established to achieve the projection of tourist destinations as intelligent from a governance perspective based on cooperation and a joint vision of the government, companies, and society and, in this way, attending to the model of the helices, starting with the three, and following its evolution up to N-helices, as required for intelligent tourist destinations.

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