CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF A TOURIST DESTINATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a model of the Critical Success Factors of a tourist destination located in the Caribbean area, where there are other destinations, some already well-established and others emerging. In this context, this research will be of value not only for understanding the attractions of the destination as a tourism offer from the customers' perspective, but also for the design of the most effective strategies and policies to ensure the sustainability of the destination, the competitiveness of the companies providing tourist services, etc., and for encouraging management chains to invest and participate in the area, and particularly in the destination studied. The methodology employed is that of Fuzzy Cognitive Maps based on a content analysis as a tool of strategic diagnosis; this is the principal contribution of the study. This approach has enabled us to reach important conclusions on the central elements to be strengthened in formulating differentiation strategies that would allow an integrated outcome for the destination, through those factors that should ensure its success.

KEYWORDS

Strategic Analysis, Tourist Destination, Critical Success Factors, Fuzzy Cognitive Maps, Caribbean.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960's Ronald Daniel argued that "in most industries there are usually three to six factors that determine success; these key jobs must be done exceedingly well for a company to be successful". In 1979, J. Rockart defined these factors, critical success factors (CSFs, from now on), as "the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organization. They are the few key areas where -things must go right- for the business to flourish", and, given their importance for the company, these factors must be central to three key management tasks or functions: the management information systems, the formulation of the company's strategy, and its implementation. With these antecedents, the strategic management of the company will integrate with the CSFs: without this, the company's competitiveness in its sector of activity is inconceivable (Kotler, 2000).

In the services sector, to cite an example, knowledge of the CSFs has constituted a competitive advantage for the leading companies. For this reason, the search for techniques by which the CSFs can be identified

has been the topic of studies such as those of Geller (1985) and Brotherton and Shaw (1996), who did this for the case of tourism, a sector that which was showing marked dynamism in the 1990's.

Another relevant empirical study, presented by Haven-tang, Jones and Webb (2007), is a case study on the CSFs of the tourism business in the United Kingdom. In Baker and Cameron (2008) an analysis was made of the CSFs associated with market research and the design of strategies for the promotion of a tourist destination; this latter is understood as "a geographically-delimited place to which visitors are temporarily attracted and includes continents, regions, countries, states, cities and towns" (Bull, 1995; Pike 2004).

Table 1 gives the results of an analysis of the bibliography. It shows the growing importance attributed to knowledge of those items that contribute to visitors' preferences, attraction and competitiveness, in the management of the tourism offer of any particular destination.

Table 1: Factors studied by other authors

Type of Factor	Cognitive Factors			Operational Factors	
Authors	Receptivity of the residents	Culture	Natural resources	Access routes	Security
Sternquist (1985)	x	x			
Haahti (1986)	x	x	x		
Gartner and Hunt (1987)	x		x		
Calantone and others (1989)	x	x		X	x
Gartner (1989)	x	x	x		
Ahmed (1991)	x	x	x		
Chon (1991)	x	x	x	X	x
Fakeye and Crompton (1991)	x	x	x	X	
Crompton et al. (1992)	x		x		
Chon (1992)	x	x			
Echtner and Ritchie (1993)	x	x	x	X	x
Driscoll and others (1994)	x	x			x
Dadgostar and Isotalo (1995)		x	x		
Muller (1995)	x	x			x
Ahmed (1996)	x	x	x		
Opperman (1996)		x		X	x
Schroeder (1996)	x	x	x		

| Baloglu (1997)	x	x	x	X	x
Crouch and Ritchie (1999)					x
Baloglu and McCleary (1999)	x	x			x

These studies illustrate the significance of knowledge of those factors that determine operating efficiency in the hotel activity sector, and of the factors that ensure effectiveness in the marketing of a tourist destination, particularly when this sector has a strategic role in the national economy, as is the case of the research presented in the paper on Cuba as a tourist destination, in all its aspects.

2. CONCISE DESCRIPTION OF CUBA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

With an average annual growth rate of 14 %, Cuba is situated in eighth place in the ranking of preference among international tourist destinations, and in third place among destinations in the Caribbean (Hosteltur, 2008). Surprisingly, the increase per period in the preference for the island of Cuba is superior to that for the destinations that flourished at the end of the 1980's: Jamaica and Punta Cana (Dominican Republic).

The tourism sector underwent a structural change in the 1990's, by which it became a strategic sector, highly attractive for investment. At that time, several Caribbean destinations came to prominence, apart from those already well-established such as Riviera Maya (Mexico) and others. This stage was characterized by the entry in the Caribbean area of multinational and family hotel chains with international experience and recognized brands, which secured presence in the principal destinations, as shown in Graphic 1, up to the year 2008; it is also demonstrated in this graph that the Spanish chains are those with the strongest presence.

Graphic 1: Presence of Int. chains (by number of hotels) in the Caribbean (Dominican R., Jamaica and Cuba)
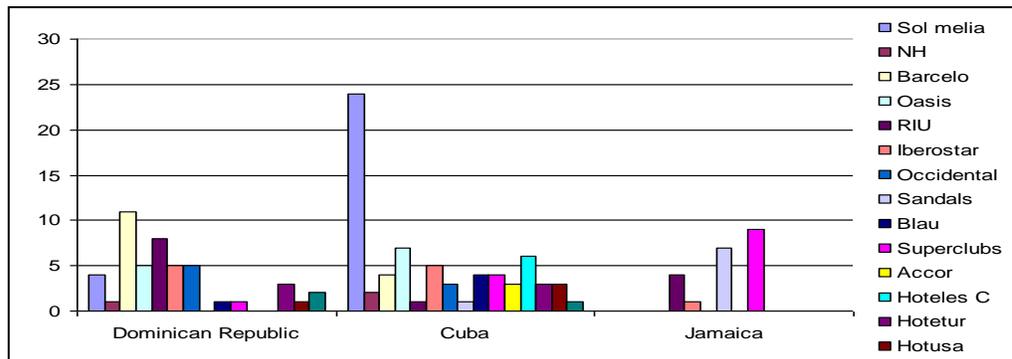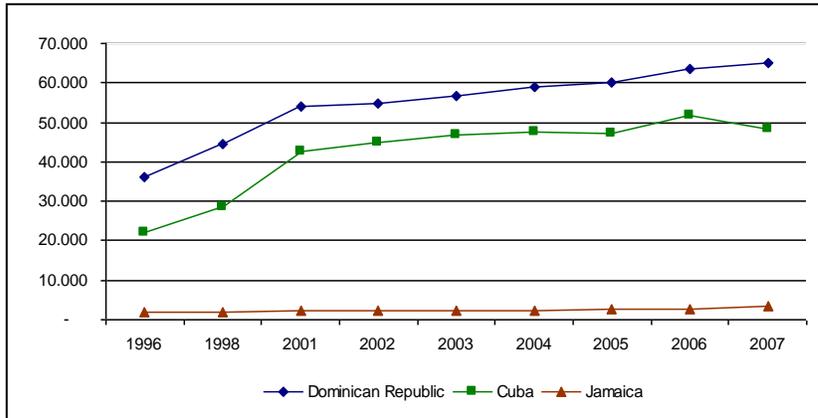

Source: Authors' own compilation from data obtained from the chains (January 2009)

Graphic 2 and 3 presenting a comparative analysis between the three emerging destinations, in which a turning point is demonstrated in 1998 in the hotel capacity as the result of the expansion in investment.

The consequences of this are seen in terms of the attraction of tourists, through the increase in the numbers of arrivals, which are significant in the case of Cuba and Dominican R., whereas Jamaica shows a less pronounced rise.

Graphic 2: Comparison of total hotel capacity (by number of rooms) per country, 1996-2007

Source: Authors' own compilation, from official statistical data of Dominican R., Jamaica and Cuba

Graphic 3: International Tourism, number of arrivals 1996-2006
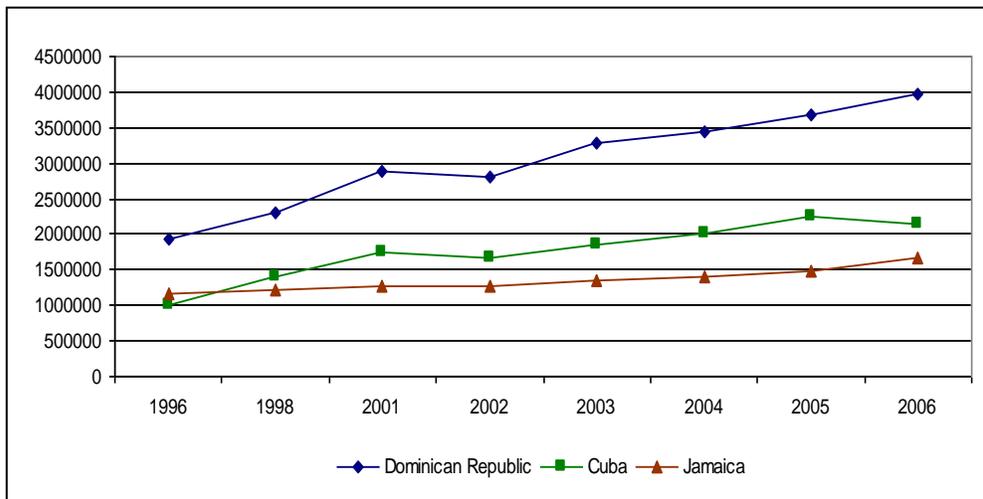
Source: Authors' own compilation, from the World Development Indicators database (2008)

It can be appreciated in the previous graphics that Cuba has shown a favorable behavior as a tourist destination. This has been the result of implementing the tourism strategy conceived in the 1990's to strengthen the tourism sector and hotel activity in the Island by opening the country up to investment and cooperation with foreign chains (Romero and Gómez, 2009).

The eight Spanish chains present in the Island administer 6,519 rooms in 23 hotels; next in size are two French companies with 1,410 rooms in six hotels; Italian, German and Jamaican companies are also

present; these latter companies have innovated in the concept of marketing and provision of service, introducing the "all-inclusive" product in the destination.

The entry of foreign companies has taken place by means of what García (2004) has described as local alliances that have been formed with the object of producing and selling in the destination country. These operate in the destination through cooperation, management and leasing agreements under which the foreign company takes responsibility for the operation and marketing of the hotel complexes. This consequently entails responsibility for the design, implementation and monitoring of the strategy for these operations, taking into account the characteristics of Cuba as the destination country (Table 2). Therefore knowledge of the CSFs will be extremely valuable in this process.

Table 2: Characteristics of Cuba as a destination

Attribute	CUBA	REST OF THE WORLD
Weight of the market	International tourism	National and international tourism
Markets of origin	Long distance	Short and medium distance
Means of transportation	Flights associated with accommodation capacities.	Scheduled flights, cruises, coaches, trains, cars.
Access routes	Air, maritime	Air, maritime, terrestrial
Ownership	Public sector	Private sector

More efficient and efficacious policies and strategies will be designed in function of these factors, not only in order to ensure the investment and growth of the sector but also to improve its attractiveness and promotion.

3. MAPPING AS A TOOL FOR DETERMINING THE CSFs

Modeling by means of maps can be utilized for diverse ends: for planning, prospection, structuring of data or, as in the case presented here, as a tool for determining the factors of greatest strategic importance. Representation in the form of maps allows information to be structured and thus described more clearly and precisely, and understood more easily and rapidly, than with other types of model (Ortigueira, 2007). At the practical level, the capacities offered by mapping could be described in terms of the generation of ideas, the description of phenomena, and the rational presentation of structure.

Modeling can be considered to fall into three main types: conceptual (Novak 1984); cognitive (Eden, 1988); and mental mapping (Buzan, 1993). Although the visual representation of each type shows a certain degree of similarity, both the objective and the use of the model show significant differences.

The difference between mental, conceptual and cognitive maps is that, in the mental map, the point of departure is one single principal or central idea from which a branching structure is created; branches in which the relationships are passive only represent an association, not a cause-and-effect. In the conceptual map, the nodes are labeled by using descriptive texts and, unlike cognitive maps, the links are labeled expressing the relationship existing between the nodes (Novak, 1984) and subsequently what William,

Trochim & Rhoda (1986) call Concept Mapping: a pictorial representation that is the result of combining a multidimensional scaling and a cluster analysis, from a matrix of data.

In the work described here, a more in-depth study is made of Cognitive Maps given that this tool is of particular interest for determining the CSFs of a competitive enterprise, i.e. a tourist destination. A cognitive map is a representation of how people think about one situation in particular, by means of the organization and structuring of the elements or problems that comprise it; then the concepts that form the connections between those elements are modeled graphically. Thus causes and effects are identified, and the causal links are explained (Ackermann, Eden and Cropper, 1992). According to these authors, the cognitive map is based on the Personal Construct Theory, an approach from previous research that was conceived as an aid to obtaining the system of constructs that a person uses to make sense of a repertoire of elements in a particular situation; in this case, short phrases are used that express an idea or opinion.

In conceptual and cognitive maps, there may also be various different approaches in the construction of complex networks. On this point, in the more recent literature, extensive use is made of what are termed Fuzzy Cognitive Maps (Axelrod, 1976). An augmented perspective has even been described, that consists of the creation of maps from the aggregation of several adjacency matrices (Salmeron, 2009), referred to as augmented Fuzzy Cognitive Maps (FCMs, in the rest of this paper).

4. AUGMENTED FUZZY COGNITIVE MAPS, AS A TOOL FOR STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

The idea of FCMs was introduced by Axelrod in 1976; these maps examine the causal relationships existing between the nodes of a cognitive map, taking as their bases the relationships displayed in an adjacency matrix. Among the elements that will form part of the matrix, and of the resulting map, are the nodes (variables, attributes, concepts, key terms, etc.) and the relationships of causality. According to Kosko (1986), FCMs constitute "fuzzy-graph structures for representing causal reasoning". The type of causality is considered fuzzy to the extent that it admits degrees forming a vector, which indicates the state of the system at a particular moment in time. This state may undergo changes, which are identified as feed-back in the map, and so the state of the system is interrelated with the rest of the elements in the map (Ortigueira, 2007).

There are, moreover, various different kinds of analysis can be performed in the map, as is the case of indirect effects and centrality. The indirect effect analyzes the effect observed between two nodes that do not show a direct causal relationship; centrality represents the importance of the node for the causal flow in the cognitive map.

The starting point for producing a FCM is the creation of a non-symmetrical squared adjacency matrix, whose rows and columns are formed by the nodes selected. The relationship between the nodes of the map is represented in this matrix. The FCM represents relationships of causality between nodes of a network of relationships that are considered relevant in a particular field; in its augmented model it also enables various different maps with nodes in common to be integrated. The relationships are represented in the model by means of arrows that indicate the direction of the causal relationship.

Salmeron (2009) identifies two characteristics possessed by a cognitive map model. The first characteristic is depiction of the intensity of the relationship existing between the nodes of the network of causal relationships, represented by a number, either 0 or 1. The causal value can take a positive or negative sign;

the positive sign is substituted by the value +1, the negative by the value -1; the value 0 indicates the absence of any causal relationship. The second characteristic is that feedback is included, whereby the effect of change in one node can affect one or more other nodes. The adjacency matrix (A) contains the individual result of the relationships between nodes (Cij) established by each expert (aij), giving as the result:

$$
\mathbf{A=} \begin{array}{c} \\ C_1 \\ C_2 \\ \\ C_i \end{array}
\begin{array}{cccc}
C_1 & C_2 & & C_j \\
\end{array}
\left(
\begin{array}{cccc}
a_{11} \ldots a_{12} & \ldots & a_{1j} \\
a_{21} & a_{22} & \ldots & a_{2j} \\
\ldots & \ldots & & \ldots \\
a_{i1} & a_{i2} & \ldots & a_{ij}
\end{array}
\right)
$$

where all the aij elements can take the value: -1 or 0 or +1, representing the relationship between each node (C1, C2,….,Cn).

From the individual matrices generated by the analyzed opinion of each expert, the next step is to carry out a process of aggregation of these matrices, giving rise to the augmented adjacency matrix (B).

$$
\mathbf{B=} \left(
\begin{array}{cc}
\cdots & \cdots \\
\\
\cdots & W_{ij}
\end{array}
\right)
$$

In this aggregated matrix, the row and column vectors would include the nodes of all the individual matrices, and the Wij values of the resulting augmented adjacency matrix B would be:

$$
W_{ij} = \frac{\sum_{K=1}^{n} W_{ij}^{k}}{n}
$$

* in which n is the number of adjacency matrices aggregated, k is the identifier of each expert, and i and j are the identifiers of the relationship between nodes.

The resulting map with the augmented model combines the opinion of each and every one of the experts considered, so there is no need for any expert to change their opinions in order to reach a consensus view.

Modeling by means of augmented FCMs as a tool for strategic diagnosis is the methodology selected for the analysis of the CSFs of Cuba as a tourist destination. The application of this methodology is considered particularly useful and it allows us to demonstrate, as result of the qualitative study, the key factors for the success of Cuban tourism destination, through the information that is available on the case under study.

5. MODELING THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF CUBA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

In the study presented here on the CSFs, the nodes are represented by the CSFs analyzed; thus the cognitive map is capable of representing the relationship existing between cognitive and operational

factors, and the degree of influence exerted by those factors, obtained by integrating the opinions of all the experts considered.

To arrive at the final model, we start from an analysis of the information content (Diefenbach, 2001) of interviews conducted by Cuban communications officials with management experts, knowledgeable about the destination; a total of seven such interviews were conducted in the period from October 2007 to May 2008.

Those interviewed were considered to be experts as a consequence of having participated to a significant degree in the decision-making processes and the conception of the tourism strategy of the Island. They include persons holding senior positions in relevant government ministries and official associations. Specifically, the interviewees are: two senior members of staff of the Ministry of Tourism of Cuba, two senior members of staff of the Ministry of Culture, the official Historian of the City of La Habana, the president of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, and an external tourism adviser from an international consultancy of recognized prestige. This methodology also took into account the criteria proposed by Okoli and Pawlowski (2004), who stated that a range of between 5 and 18 experts is considered valid for such interviews.

From the content analysis the key concepts were extracted that are representative of the meaning of the texts (i.e. the transcripts of the interviews) and that determine both the nodes of the map and the relationships existing between the nodes. Essentially, by producing the augmented FCM, it was possible to 'discover' the expert knowledge incorporated in the unstructured texts. The concepts translate into the 17 CSFs presented in table 3.

Table 3: Critical success factors of Cuba as a tourist destination

LABEL	CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR
A	*Systematic promotion of cultural events*
B	*Advance knowledge of agents and tour operators*
C	*Tourist motivation*
D	*Quality leisure and recreation*
E	*Receptivity of the residents*
F	*Richness of culture*
G	*Richness of heritage*
H	*Richness of history*
I	*Protection of the heritage*
J	*Traditions*
K	*Political, social and economic stability*
L	*Communication*
M	*Conservation of cultural values*

N	*Protection of biodiversity*
O	*Landscape, nature and climate*
P	*Cost of air travel*
Q	*Security*

The next step is to model the relationships and their intensities, giving rise to the augmented adjacency matrix (figure 1). Then the FCM is constructed from this matrix.

Figure 1: Augmented Adjacency Matrix

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
A	0	0.14	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B	0	0	0.29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
D	0	0	-0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
E	0	0	0.29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	0	0.71	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G	0	0	0.43	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
H	0	0	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
I	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
J	0	0	0	0	0	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
K	0	0	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
L	0	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
M	0	0	0	0	0	0.29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
O	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
P	0	0	-0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q	0	0	0.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The resulting model (figure 2) shows the causal relationships and intensities of the CSFs of Cuba as a tourist destination, and allows the hierarchical positions or rankings of these factors to be established. It can be observed from the model that, according to the criteria of the experts, the principal cause motivating both the tourist and the foreign investor is the cultural richness of the Island (0.71), followed by the richness of its heritage (0.43). In comparison with Jamaica and Dominican Republic this perception

is understandable, considering the artistic recognition and prestige of Cuba, the numerous World Heritage cities, the places of historical interest, etc.

The advance knowledge of agents and tour operators (0.29) and the receptivity of the residents (0.29) also appear as relevant factors. With respect to the critical factors that have a negative influence on Cuba as a tourist destination, the experts identify the cost of air travel to the Island (-0.14), which is high in comparison with other emerging destinations of the area, and is significantly higher than the market average. Despite the artistic, cultural and musical potential of the Island, which differentiates it from the rest of the countries of the Caribbean, deficient management of the leisure and recreation facilities (-0.14) is identified as a negative factor.

Figure 2: Augmented fuzzy cognitive map
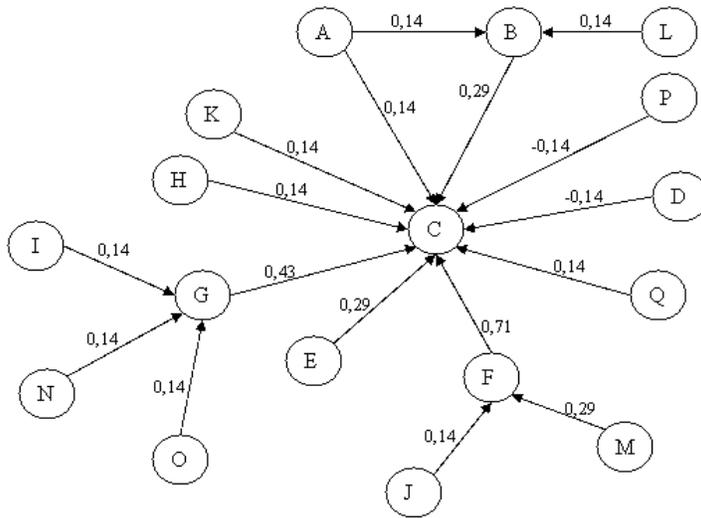
The results demonstrated by the augmented FCM (figure 2) are consistent with the model proposed by Crouch and Ritchie (1999) for measuring the competitiveness of a destination. That model serves to identify the factors of success in the tourism industry that will determine the competitive success of a particular tourist destination, and includes among these factors elements that coincide with the results obtained in our research, such as: political and social stability, security and the available means of transport or access routes. The high value attributed to the causal relationship between richness of culture and motivation of the tourist reveals the importance of this relationship in the formulation of the tourism strategy for Cuba.

These results are consistent and in agreement with other similar studies, such as that of Bailey (2008), who argues that growing importance is attributed in the literature regarding "the symbolic and cultural meanings of tourism and the ways in which cities are increasingly competing for tourists through the promotion of cultural assets and different forms of spectacle" offered.

From these considerations, therefore, two alternative proposals for generic strategy arise: one of Leadership in Costs and the other of Differentiation. Table 5 gives details of the requirements of each of these two alternatives for Cuba in its search for competitive advantage as a tourist destination.

Table 4: Alternative Strategies

Leadership in Costs	Differentiation
- Economies of scale (own and investors' resources)	- Segmentation of markets by attraction or preference
- Mass tourism (All-Inclusive product)	- Matching the Cultural tourism offer to that of 'Beach and Sunshine'
- Advantages in costs (Integration with tour operators)	- Advantages associated with intangibles

This strategy should be focused on increasing the number of tourists and the foreign investment in the sector, through strategies of diversification that are not based solely on Beach and Sunshine tourism, given the weight in the FCM accounted for by factors such as the richness of the culture and heritage. Furthermore, given the geographic location of the Island, the cultural and geographic proximity to other tourist destinations in the Caribbean, together with the presence of international management chains that operate in these destinations, the creation of multi destination tourism packages is also considered appropriate; this would be a way of exploiting the CSFs of other destinations in combination with Cuba's own.

6. FINAL REMARKS

Modeling using augmented Fuzzy Cognitive Maps, and taking the content analysis as the methodology for this, constitute an appropriate procedure for the analysis of strategies, in the context of identifying and exploiting the critical success factors of a tourism sector, as has been demonstrated in this study of developing Cuba as a tourist destination.

From the experts consulted, it has been possible to specify 17 critical success factors; these have then been integrated in a model that shows the direction and intensity of the causal relationships between the factors. Models like this should serve as an important tool for those the involved in the process of decision-making and the conception of the tourism strategy of national and foreign chains present in the Island, particularly the Spanish chains.

The article provides useful information for understanding the Cuban tourism industry and the particular characteristics of the destination, especially in the context of the beach and sunshine holiday destinations in the Caribbean. The great value of this information rests on its usefulness not only as an aid for understanding the expectations of the customers but also for the market studies of investors and managers. Appropriate strategies can then be formulated and implemented. Those factors that are perceived as positive can be strengthened; action can be taken to create awareness of those factors that are positive and already present there but that are not visible and not considered critical; and lastly, action can be taken to modify factors that are evidently negative, or are perceived negatively without justification.

The methodological proposal presented in this paper is appropriate for application to research on the attractions of other destinations. The authors believe it would be of great interest to conduct similar studies in the other destinations mentioned: the Dominican Republic and Jamaica.

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