

## **Exploring institutions' perceived roles in regional tourism development: An institutional thickness approach**

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## **Abstract**

In recent decades, commitment to tourism as a development strategy has grown across Latin America. However, despite being praised as an economic and social catalyst in various regions, developing tourism appropriately requires a dense institutional environment marked by leadership, trust, and governance. Against that background, we aimed to analyse institutions' perceived role in regional tourism development and perceived key factors of such development in relation to four dimensions of institutional thickness. To that end, we conducted a cluster analysis of data from 2000 to 2015 representing 18 institutions' perceptions of tourism in Colombia's Department of Antioquia. Key identified factors perceived are, particularly, the exclusive or partial focus of institutions with the tourism value chain, the relationship with technology centres, the importance of spaces for collective representation, and the acknowledgment of infrastructure as a principal investment for regional tourism development.

Keywords: institutions, institutional thickness, economic geography, tourism geography, Latin America

## **Introduction**

In recent decades, fostering sustainable tourism across Latin America has been a strategic goal of organisations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (Altés, 2006), the World Bank (Ortiz & Solo, 2009), and the United Nations World Tourism Organization and the Organization of American States (UNWTO & OAS, 2018). Nevertheless, as underscored by Oliveira Santos (2015), the results have yet to align with the region's immense potential. Among the economic, political and social problems that may be responsible for the deficit, dismal public policy and historically limited commitment to tourism as a means of social and community development have imposed important limitations (Andreu-Boussut & Salin, 2018). According to the World Economic Forum (2020), however, by better understanding the factors that affect tourism development, public-private cooperation can be calibrated to maximise tourism's potential to boost the growth of

small and medium-sized businesses, reduce poverty, and encourage greater gender parity in the labour force.

In that vein but acknowledging that other factors might also influence tourism development, this paper addresses institutions' perceived role in tourism's evolution in a regional economy in Latin America. Its approach is coherent with mounting evidence of not only institutional density's significance in processes of regional development but also the importance of institutions' perceived role in catalysing institutional engagement and commitment (Helmsing, 2001; Chang, 2008). In fact, analysing how institutions shape regional development has long been a recurring focus in research on economic geography and innovation (Zukauskaite *et al.*, 2017). At the same time, despite numerous studies examining perceptions of and attitudes towards tourism development from the perspective of local residents and visitors (Hammad *et al.*, 2017; Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2020), a gap in knowledge exists regarding institutions' perceptions of their role in such development and the institutional factors that intervene in processes of tourism development.

In response to that gap, we aimed to analyse institutions' perceptions of their role in regional tourism development and perceived key factors of such development in relation to four dimensions of institutional thickness (Amin & Thrift, 1994). To that end, study has been designed to identify the perceptions that different institutions involved in tourism development in Colombia's Department of Antioquia have about their roles in consolidating regional tourism development from 2000 to 2015, as well as the perceived factors of institutional thickness that might explain such consolidation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As fundamental components of social and economic life, institutions enable ordered thought, expectation and action by imposing form and consistency in human activities (Hodgson, 2006). The importance of institutions' role in economic development is now also increasingly appreciated, backed by wide-ranging evidence of their weight in determining the level of economic development across regions and countries (Ferrini, 2012). Nevertheless, debate persists regarding what aspects of institutional contexts are important for economic development (Nunkoo *et al.*, 2012). From yet another angle, institutions' role as catalysts of collective action has been generally accepted (Becker & Ostrom, 1995;

Basurto & Coleman, 2010), as has their role in providing infrastructure that territories can use to guarantee the effective management of resources (Anderies, 2015). Despite those findings, the literature's primary focus on how stakeholders influence the governance of destinations (Sanchez *et al.*, 2016; Deng *et al.*, 2016; Ali *et al.*, 2017; Oh & You, 2018) has left aspects of institutions' perceived role in regional tourism development only been partly addressed. However, because different institutions have different specific interests and varying degrees of influence on policymaking and the resulting directions of policy (Bramwell, 2004), knowledge on how they perceive their role in shaping decision-making processes and interactions related to tourism needs to be expanded.

As various studies considering the institutional environment at destinations have shown (e.g. Brouder & Fullerton, 2015), institutions—local authorities, development agencies, private organisations and other bodies—play a pivotal role in tourism (Liasidou, 2018). In literature addressing evolutionary economic geography regarding tourism institutions (Mellon & Bramwell, 2018), Jamal and Getz (1995) have evaluated the evolution of institutional processes in parallel to tourism associations, Pavlovich (2003) has examined organisational networks in the evolution of tourism destinations, and Wray (2009) has considered the institutional life cycles that affect tourism policies. Still other scholars have investigated the role of institutions in tourism development from more general perspectives (Desforges, 2000; Hall *et al.*, 2004; Nunkoo *et al.*, 2012; Roxas & Chadee, 2013; Authors, 2019).

In research on perceptions of tourism development, studies have largely focused on the perceptions of local residents and visitors while neglecting the perceptions the institutions involved (Hammad *et al.*, 2017; Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2020;). According to Nunkoo *et al.* (2012), however, because power relations, leadership, trust, and governance are important for development and translate into a configuration of organisations able to promote or limit regional development, understanding how institutions perceive their role in tourism development is pivotal. Institutions' perceptions, whether objective or subjective, are also important because they have an imperative voice in tourism governance and occupy a key position in the political economy of tourism development (Bramwell, 2011). In the same sense, it is widely acknowledged that institutions control most of the planning aspects associated with tourism development (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; McLoughlin & Hanrahan,

2021) and implement constraints as well as opportunities for action and for the distribution of power (Mellon & Bramwell, 2018).

Recent research addressing institutions in tourism from the perspective of the new institutional economy (e.g. Authors, 2019, 2021) has applied analytical frameworks involving the notion of *institutional thickness*. It has been defined as a set of factors influencing the organisation of institutional agents that can sustain or obstruct the tourism development. As theorised by Amin and Thrift (1994), institutional thickness encompasses four dimensions. The first refers to the existence of a strong institutional presence, understood as a range of institutions (e.g. local authorities, development agencies, chambers of commerce, business associations, innovation centres, trade unions, educational institutions, and other bodies) that participate in the building of capacities. The second dimension is related to levels of interaction and cooperation between institutions and the importance of exchanging formal and informal knowledge therein. The third dimension addresses existing structures of domination and patterns of coalition, including leadership and spaces of collective representation. Last, the fourth dimension refers to mutual awareness and the goals established through the development of common agendas.

Applying an institutional thickness approach can illuminate the societal and institutional arrangements that both favour and constrain tourism development at destinations as claimed by Zapata and Hall (2012). Thus, an approach such as the one proposed herein, based on a novel framework for analysing the perceptions of institutions involved in regional tourism development, can help to identify non-economic factors that sustain such development (Zukauskaitė *et al.*, 2017) and perceived key elements in each dimension of institutional thickness (Authors, 2019).

## **Methods**

### ***Study area***

This study analyses the perceptions of acting institutions in Colombia's Department of Antioquia about their role in tourism development in the region, which we chose to examine for several reasons. First, at the international level, tourism has managed to consolidate itself as a priority sector in Colombia's economy, one with an annual average

growth rate far above the world average. According to data from the UNWTO (2019), from 2005 to 2019 the average annual growth in tourism demand was 5.2% internationally, whereas Colombia's was 8% (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2019).

Second, at the national level, Antioquia is Colombia's second-most competitive region, behind only the Capital District, which contains Bogotá, the country's capital. Factors fuelling Antioquia's success include the sophistication and diversification of business there, the ease of doing business, the labour market, and the adoption of information and communication technologies (Private Council on Competitiveness, 2019). Antioquia also stands out for having implemented a governance model, in place now for more than three decades, in which public-private alliances have developed and strengthened direct institutional responses to long-term challenges in the region. Concerning tourism, for example, from 2000 to 2015 the governance model allowed advances in creating and consolidating institutions that are pivotal to supporting tourism development in the region (Authors, 2019). As proof, institutional integration between the public and private sectors has formalised the creation of bodies such as the Tourism Cluster, the Medellín Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Plaza Mayor Convention Centre. Above all, the model has ultimately encouraged the establishment of a common agenda that guided Antioquia and its capital, Medellín, in becoming an outstanding international destination, one endorsed by a range of awards (World Travel Awards, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2018; Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize, 2016; City of the Year, 2013).

Third and last, research has shown that institutions in Antioquia have played a vital role in the region's tourism consolidation, particularly in structuring regional policies and driving an economic transformation (Authors, 2019).

### ***Data collection***

Addressing the period from 2000 to 2015, the perceptions of 18 institutions affiliated with tourism development in Antioquia were evaluated. The data collection tool employed for the analysis was a questionnaire distributed via the online platform SurveyMonkey for the 5 months from July to December 2016.

The questionnaire was divided into five thematic sections. The first referred to general information about the institution that the participant represented, whereas the second

addressed the institution's role in tourism development in the region, its perceived relevance, and its performance. The third section concerned the level of interaction within the network of institutions involved in the region's tourism development, after which the fourth explored the resulting governance structures. Last, the fifth section collected information about the development of common agendas with other institutions.

To capture the perceptions of participants about various factors in relation to the four dimensions, the questionnaire used a Likert scale, a common instrument for measuring affective and participative variables (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014), that allows obtaining respondents' preferences and degree of (dis)agreement with any number of statements. In our study, we used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) (Bertram, 2007). The scale was defined with reference to the initial contributions of six key institutions regarding their role in regional tourism planning and management: the Government of Antioquia Tourist Office, the Medellín Chamber of Commerce, the Tourist Office and Mayor's Office of Medellín, the Medellín Convention and Visitors Bureau, Cotelco Antioquia Hotel and Tourism Association, and the National Federation of Merchants (FENALCO). Structured interviews with representatives of those institutions were performed between May and June 2016.

Sample selection began with the mapping of institutions involved, whether directly or indirectly, in tourism development in Antioquia. Of the 28 institutions invited to participate, 18 (64%) responded to all of the questions addressing their perceptions of the role of institutions in developing regional tourism. The fact that 10 institutions did not reply did not significantly impact the analysis in a negative way, because the final sample used for the analysis contained all of the most active, relevant public and private stakeholders in the territory in all areas of the value chain. Among the 18 institutions that did participate were five tourism and regional development agencies; three local, regional, or national governmental authorities; three chambers of commerce; three professional and sectorial associations; three universities; and one research and innovation centre. As for the representatives of each participating institution, 44% were department directors (i.e. in economics, planning, tourism, and business), 20% were general directors, 17% were academic directors (i.e. deans of tourism faculties), and 11% were public officials (Appendix 1).

### **Data analysis**

As shown in Table 1, the results of the questionnaire were classified into two areas—Area 1 (i.e. perceptions of the relevance and performance of institutions) and Area 2 (i.e. key development factors in the dimensions of institutional thickness)—. To study Area 1, a dissociative cluster analysis, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), was designed. Performing a dissociative cluster analysis was justified by the goal to define homogeneous groups of similar institutions based on the available variables and measurements. Thus, three clusters were created considering the scores from the questionnaire regarding the institutions' perceptions of their own relevance and performance.

**Table 1. Areas for the analysis of perceptions**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Variables and/or dimensions</b>
<i>Area 1:</i> Perceptions of the relevance and performance of institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perception of institutions' relevance</li><li>• Perception of institutions' performance</li></ul>
<i>Area 2:</i> Key development factors in the dimensions of institutional thickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Profiles dimension</li><li>• Interactions dimension</li><li>• Coalitions dimension</li><li>• Common agenda dimension</li></ul>

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In the study on Area 2, the three groups identified by dissociative cluster analysis were categorised by applying agglomerative cluster analysis, which yielded two new, final clusters. For the analysis of Area 2, the means and standard deviations (*SD*) of the scores on the questionnaire were calculated, and significant statistical differences in the perceptions of key factors in relation to the four dimensions of institutional thickness were estimated.

### **Results and Discussion**

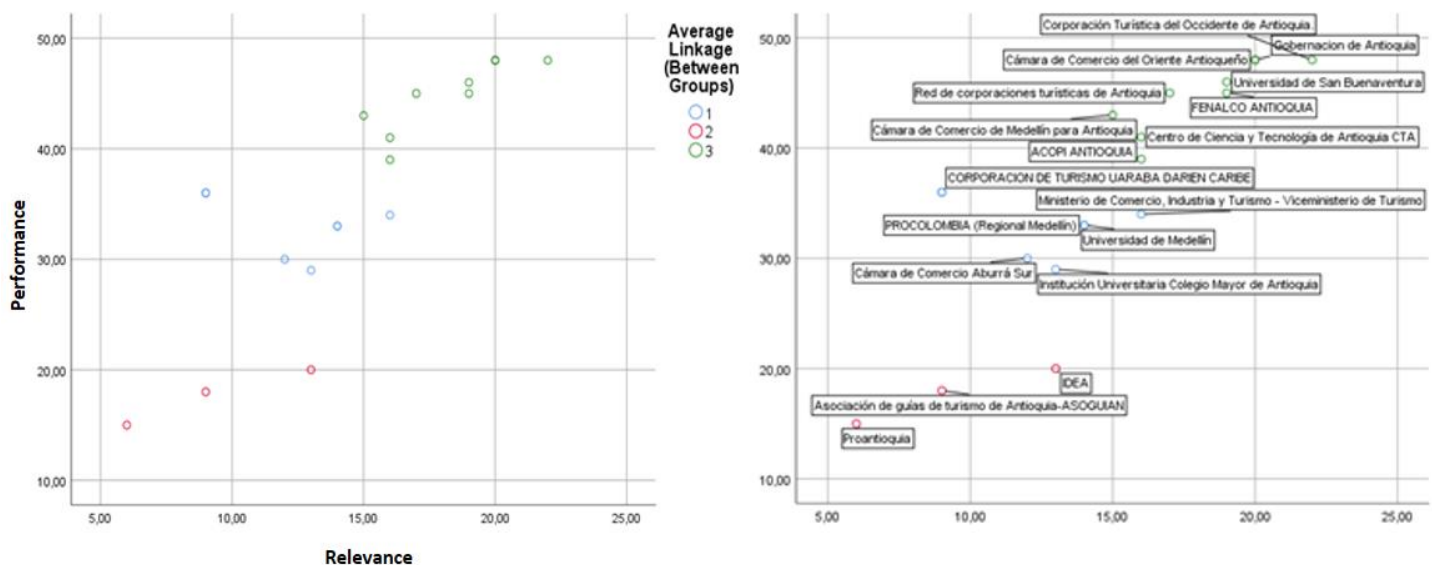
The study's chief goal was to analyse institutions' perceptions of their role in regional tourism development and perceived key factors of such development in relation to four dimensions of institutional thickness. This section presents the results according to the two areas (i.e. Area 1 and Area 2) classified in Table 1 for the analysis of perceptions.

### Area 1: Perceptions of the relevance and performance of tourism institutions

Trust in institutions is critical for good governance (Nunkoo *et al.*, 2012) but partly depends on how regional agents evaluate the relevance and performance of the institutions in question (Mishler & Rose, 2001; Lühiste, 2006;). Thus, research has generally suggested that a positive evaluation of institutions is positively related to trust in those institutions (Wong *et al.*, 2011) and that such trust justifies their creation and existence.

In Antioquia, the creation of institutions involved in regional tourism development has not only catalysed social and economic activity but also positively impacted the governance of tourism via the articulation of policies, the allocation of resources, and the establishment of rules (Authors, 2019). However, aside from quantitative evidence of those trends, which can be viewed in terms of economic impact and relate to the arrival of international tourists, institutions have a range of perceptions, as qualitative evidence, about their role in regional tourism development. Consequently, the first area analysed concerned how institutions perceive their relevance to and performance in regional tourism development, which allowed determining the degree to which they (dis)agree that an institutional fabric in the region has been vital to tourism development in Antioquia. Figure 1 shows how the results indicated three different groups of institutions.

**Figure 1. Perceptions of the relevance and performance of institutions**



○ Cluster 1: Institutions considering the relevance and performance of tourism institutions to be medium.

- Cluster 2: Institutions considering the relevance and performance of tourism institutions to be low.
- Cluster 3: Institutions considering the relevance and performance of tourism institutions to be high.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

A significant share of the representatives scored the relevance and performance of the institutions as being medium or high. Only three institutions were perceived to perform poorly in tourism and have little relevance to the sector. Table 2 summarises the common characteristics between the three clusters versus the characteristics that differentiate them.

Table 2. Common and different characteristics and perceptions between the clusters

Common characteristics and perceptions	Different characteristics and perceptions
<b>Relevance</b>	
All three clusters consider that the creation of institutions has been essential to tourism development in the region.	Clusters 1 and 2 consider that the institutions have not evolved positively nor been committed to tourism development in the region.
All three clusters consider the region's institutions to be strong given their high degree of decision-making power at destinations.	Clusters 1 and 2 consider that the region's tourism sector lacks highly trained human capital.
All three clusters believe that the institutions lack a relevant financial structure.	
<b>Performance</b>	
All three clusters believe that the institutions have given the region visibility at the national and international levels.	The clusters differ in their perceptions of the role of institutions in improving governance in the region.
All three clusters believe that institutions complement each other in the management of tourism destinations.	The clusters have different perceptions of their role in the region's increased competitiveness in tourism during the period analysed.
All three clusters consider that the existence of numerous, diverse institutions facilitates the different role of each.	The three clusters differ in their perceptions of how institutions have contributed to fostering innovation in the region's tourism activity.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

With the exception of the association of tourist guides (ASOGUIAN), the institutions with less-than-positive perceptions are focused in general issues related to regional development. With orientations not exclusively related to tourism, their involvement in the region's tourism activity is partial or supporting. More precisely, most of those institutions

primarily focus on developing primary or industrial economic activities in which the institutional dimensions or factors may differ from those connected to tourism. For instance, it is well known that regional economic development and immediate economic benefits are important in tourism, as are other factors such as the protection of environmental and sociocultural resources (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010; Bramwell, 2011).

At the same time, the results also show a positive, direct relationship between the performance perceived by the tourism focused institutions and their perceived relevance. That relationship confirms that Antioquia has managed to develop a strong institutional fabric for regional tourism development. This is an interpretation supported by evidence showing that regions where most institutional agents perceive a favourable institutional environment may be regarded as being institutionally dense (Zukauskaite *et al.*, 2017). However, aside from institutional density, other key factors received mention from participants who have conditioned regional tourism development, as discussed in the next section.

***Area 2: Key development factors in the dimensions of institutional thickness***

As indicated in the methods section, the analysis of Area 2 involved categorising the three initial groups via agglomerative cluster analysis. As a result, Clusters 1 and 2 were combined obtaining two final groups, as shown in Table 3 (Nielsen, 2016). The characteristics of the institutions represented by each group are detailed in Appendix 1, and an analysis of the results in light of the four dimensions of institutional thickness is presented below.

Table 3. Institutions included in each final cluster for the analysis of institutional thickness dimensions

<b>Cluster 1</b>	<b>Cluster 2</b>
Government of Antioquia, Tourist Office	Vice Ministry of Tourism
Subregional tourist corporation, Occidente de Antioquia	Subregional tourist corporation, Urabá
University of San Buenaventura	PROCOLOMBIA
Oriente Antioqueño Chamber of Commerce	University of Medellin
FENALCO ANTIOQUIA, association of merchants	Aburrá Sur Chamber of Commerce
Network of subregional tourist corporations	IDEA - Institute for the Development of Antioquia
Science and Technology Center of Antioquia – CTA	Proantioquia

Medellín Chamber of Commerce			University Colegio Mayor de Antioquia
ACOPI	ANTIOQUIA,	Colombian	Association of tourist guides of Antioquia - ASOGUIAN
association of SMEs			

Source: Authors' elaboration.

### *Density*

The dimension of density, the first element of institutional thickness, refers to perceptions of the existence of institutional and/or organisational fabrics represented by different types of structure. In that dimension, results refer to the number (i.e. density) of institutions; their public, private, or mixed nature; each institution's degree of involvement in tourism; and the spatial scale (Appendix 1). However, for the purposes of the study, the analysis of the dimension focused on the perceptions of the institutions in each cluster regarding the diverse factors that may enhance or weaken regional institutional thickness and therefore increase or reduce the generation of capacities in regional tourism development (Table 4).

Table 4. Perceptions of factors that affect institutional thickness

Factors	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	P Significance
	N=9 average±S.D.	N=9 average±S.D.	
1. Political continuity	4.11±1.05	4.44±0.73	0.531
2. Priority of the tourism sector as a development model	3.89±0.60	4.89±0.33	<b>0.002*</b>
3. Clarity in the roles of institutions	3.89±0.60	4.44±0.73	0.082
4. Degree of specialisation of human capital trained for institutions	4.11±1.17	4.67±0.50	0.197
5. Establishment of public policies	4.11±1.17	4.78±0.67	0.097

\*significant result < 0.05

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The findings show that, in general, a consensus exists between the clusters in the perceived influence of certain factors on institutional thickness in the region. Nevertheless, the role of tourism, or the priority of the activity, stands out as a factor with a statistically significant difference in perception between the clusters. In particular, institutions in Cluster 2 consider that a factor in the institutional environment favouring regional tourism

development is the priority granted to tourism activity by institutions. Together with general economic development, institutions involved in determining tourism development and promoting tourism policies nationwide—for example, the Institute for the Development of Antioquia, the Aburrá Sur Chamber of Commerce, the Vice Ministry of Tourism, Proantioquia, and Procolombia—consider that element to be a key factor. That view can be interpreted as vindication for the need to continue positioning tourism as a core element in the country’s development policies. Along those lines, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) has highlighted that tourism should be a significant economic sector both regionally and locally because it provides real prospects for inclusive, enduring economic growth. Thus, policymakers should recognise the need for coordinated responses across governmental bodies and the need to work closely with the private sector.

### *Interaction*

The dimension of interaction refers to exchange flows between institutions related to the exchange of knowledge and information and that ultimately affect cooperation, learning, and innovation in the sector.

Table 5. Perception of interaction flows

Factors	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	P significance
	N=9 average±S.D.	N=9 average±S.D.	
1. Degree of interaction between tourism institutions	2.22±0.44	1.78±1.09	0.114
2. Weight of interaction with governmental institutions	3.89±1.90	3.67±1.73	0.799
3. Weight of interaction with private institutions	3.11±1.62	3.33±2.00	0.676
4. Weight of interaction with unions, associations	3.44±1.74	2.67±1.66	0.346
5. Weight of interaction with academic institutions	3.67±1.73	2.78±1.86	0.262
6. Weight of interaction with compensation funds (non-profit institutions)	3.33±2.35	2.11±1.76	0.341
7. Weight of interaction with technology centres	3.75±2.38	1.22±0.44	<b>0.035*</b>

\*significant result < 0.05

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

Table 5 shows how a general balance between the clusters exists regarding perceptions of the weight of interaction flows with public and private institutions. The balance reinforces the idea that interaction between the various stakeholders in a tourism destination is essential to cultivating the destination's success (McLeod, 2020). Although public and private-sector entities interact to develop and manage the area, institutions in Cluster 1, with a statistically significant difference versus their counterparts in Cluster 2, perceived that their interaction flows with technology centres have been strong and frequent. Most of the components in Cluster 1 represent institutions with a high degree of influence over tourism development in Antioquia, including Antioquia's Tourist Office, chambers of commerce, and business associations. Those institutions, by considering technology centres to be highly relevant intermediaries for responding to specific needs (Sanz-Ibáñez *et al.*, 2019), may consider that such a relationship can raise rates of innovation in the sector. However, other studies have revealed that personal interactions also facilitate the diffusion of innovation via SME networks ( Ceci & Iubatti, 2012; McLeod, 2020).

### *Coalitions*

In the framework of institutional thickness, the dimension of coalitions refers to the importance of processes of coordination as well as leadership and power relations in the implementation of actions for regional development. To promote coordination and define power relations between the various institutions, governance structures promote the collective representation of sectoral interests (Authors, 2019). Those structures are spaces of representation with formal mechanisms (e.g. sectoral committees, regional councils, and working committees) that allow tourism destinations to achieve their objectives.

Table 6. Perception of the coalition and coordination spaces

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Cluster 1</b>	<b>Cluster 2</b>	<b>P significance</b>
	N=9 average±S.D.	N=9 average±S.D.	
1. Importance of collective representation spaces as places for sectoral dialogue	4.33±0.5	4.44±0.53	0.638
2. Importance of collective representation spaces for the promotion of public policies	4.22±0.67	4.22±0.67	1
3. Importance of collective representation spaces for the design and implementation of new projects	4.44±0.53	4.33±0.50	0.638

4. Importance of collective representation spaces for sharing information	4.22±0.67	4.11±0.60	<b>0.040*</b>
5. Importance of collective representation spaces for defining action guidelines and regulations at the destination	4.00±0.87	3.11±0.93	0.235
6. The collective representation spaces have allowed establishing a concerted vision of the destination.	4.00±0.50	3.56±1.33	0.105
7. The collective representation spaces have allowed defining the roles and competencies of institutions.	3.78±0.67	3.11±1.36	0.405
8. The collective representation spaces have allowed more efficient coordination at the destination.	3.89±0.78	4.22±1.20	0.496

\*significant result < 0.05

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 6 shows a statistically significant difference between Clusters 1 and 2 regarding the perception of spaces of collective representation as mechanisms for sharing information. In general, the relationships generated via those spaces seem to be largely determined by more rigid thematic patterns, which may reveal an institutional rigidity that precludes the flexibility needed to address issues outside the established agenda. In such cases, information is shared informally. A second notable result, albeit not statistically significant, is a difference between Clusters 1 and 2 regarding the perception of spaces of collective representation as mechanisms that define guidelines and regulations. The institutions in Cluster 1 consider such spaces to be important because they determine the behaviour and rules of action for the institutions at the destination, whereas the institutions in Cluster 2 seem to perceive them as operating as structures for dialogue. Those results confirm that the involvement of various stakeholders along with the interplay of power and knowledge occasionally prompts contradictions in opinions and interests (Dredge, 2006; Liasidou, 2018). According to Zapata and Hall (2012), the public sector generally adopts the roles of initiator and convenor of collaborative mechanisms that encourage players in the tourism industry to participate in policymaking.

#### *Common agenda*

The dimension of common agenda implies that the institutions develop a formally defined and shared set of clear regional priorities. According to McLoughlin and Hanrahan

(2021), planning is an essential activity in tourism that generally entails setting and meeting objectives. Thus, establishing common agendas appears to be a priority for regional tourism development. However, based on the results shown in Table 7, a statistically significant difference nevertheless exists between the clusters: institutions in Cluster 1 perceive that infrastructure is not a priority element in the common agenda, whereas their counterparts in Cluster 2 perceive that the factor ranks among the most relevant.

Table 7. Perception of the common agenda

Factors	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	P significance
	N=9 average±S.D.	N=9 average±S.D.	
1. The existence of a collective common agenda	3.50±0.93	4.11±1.36	0.343
2. Infrastructures as a priority of the common agenda	1.89±0.60	3.11±1,17	<b>0.024*</b>
3. Security as a priority of the common agenda	2.22±1,09	2.56±1.24	0.553
4. Legislation as a priority of the common agenda	2.33±1.00	2.22±1.20	0.834
5. Social impact as a priority of the common agenda	2.33±1.00	1.89±1.27	0.288
6. Economic impact as a priority of the common agenda	2.78±0.97	2.11±1.17	0.170
7. Attraction of investment as a priority of the common agenda	1.89±1.05	2.44±1.51	0.511
8. Capturing resources as a priority of the common agenda	2.00±1.00	2.89±1.45	0.197
9. Coordination for implementing the common agenda	2.33±0.71	3.00±1.58	0.574

\*significant result < 0.05

Source: Authors' elaboration.

As highlighted earlier, a large share of the institutions in Cluster 2, including the Institute for the Development of Antioquia and Proantioquia, play an important role in the regional development of infrastructure. Such institutions perceive that, in Antioquia, infrastructure for communication and transport and other means of support for sustaining tourism activity need to be strengthened, if not developed in the first place. That perspective aligns with the general perception that infrastructure, along with factors such as the zoning of land use, transport, the environment, perceptions of the landscape, and regulations about carrying capacity (McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2019), is integral to the competitiveness of tourism destinations. However, other research has revealed that the domains of institutions

related to general development (e.g., of transport or communication services) have complex but necessary relationships with tourism institutions as they operate together and apart from one another (Hopkins, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

This article has discussed the perceptions that different institutions operating in Colombia's Department of Antioquia have about their role in regional tourism development from 2000 to 2015, as well as what factors they consider to be crucial in light of the dimensions of institutional thickness (Zukauskaitė *et al.*, 2017). Introducing institutional thickness into the analysis allowed focusing on a set of specific non-economic factors at each destination (i.e. institutional presence, interaction patterns, mutual awareness, common agendas, and structures of domination and/or spaces of collective representation) as part of an integrated framework for analysing the role of institutions in tourism development in a region in Latin America.

The results showcase that, on the one hand, perceptions of the relevance and performance of institutions in relation to regional tourism development are more or less positive depending on the type of institution and its exclusive or partial relationship with the activity. According to Nunkoo *et al.* (2012), that result may have stemmed from how the relevance and performance of institutions are evaluated regarding their objectives. In the case of this study, the objectives of the institutions partly linked to tourism development have differed from those of institutions with exclusive functions within the tourism sector's value chain. The fact that institutions dedicated to general regional development perceive that tourism institutions contribute little value to the region's development creates a scenario in which the capacity of tourism institutions and tourism activities themselves may be questioned. As highlighted when analysing the density of institutional thickness, that trend is of concern to the participating tourism institutions, insofar as they perceive the need to prioritise tourism as a tool for regional development in a significantly different manner.

Despite recognition of tourism's economic impact as reflected, for instance, in tourism satellite accounts, the debate over its impact remains commonplace, especially in Latin American countries, albeit not limited to discussing whether tourism is important enough to promote regional economic development. At the same time, robust research

attempting to explain the link between regional development and tourism has been limited (Calero & Turner, 2019), meaning that a way forward based on institutions' perceptions of the relationship, as outlined in this article, is highly sought. Furthermore, the article is clearly connected to a better understanding of how public–private cooperation and managerial practices can maximise tourism's potential to boost regional economic development and reduce poverty.

Additional contributions of interest respond to the other identified factors perceived within the framework for institutional thickness, particularly the relationship with technology centres, the importance of spaces for collective representation, and the acknowledgment of infrastructure as a principal investment for regional tourism development. Those three factors may each encourage higher rates of innovation in the sector, contribute to good governance and a more democratic manner of development (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003), and promote the sounder allocation of resources. Such efforts may result in the increased competitiveness of destinations and, in turn, directly enhance tourism's effects on regional development.

Taken together, our findings contribute to research on tourism in at least three ways. First, they contribute to the discussion about the governance of destinations by increasing knowledge on the perception of the roles, functions, and positions of the different institutions involved. Second, they allow a better understanding of the reasons behind the commitment and involvement of business associations, chambers of commerce, and public administrations at different levels, among other bodies, and their perceived roles in creating a strong, innovative environment marked by institutional thickness that can guarantee development (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Sanz-Ibáñez *et al.*, 2019). Third, the identification of factors perceived as being key by the institutions may benefit the approaches used by practitioners to promote mechanisms able to achieve competitive advantages for tourism destinations in particular and regions in general (Hallin & Marnburg, 2008; Cooper, 2015).

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1. Profile of respondents.

Institution / Organisation	Character	Spatial scale	Commitment to tourism development	Year founded	Profile of interviewed representative
			Partial		
Aburrá Sur Chamber of Commerce	Mixed *	Regional		1992	Department Director
IDEA - Institute for the Development of Antioquia	Public	Regional	Partial	1952	Public Servant
Network of subregional tourist corporations	Private	Regional	Exclusive	2013	General Director
Proantioquia - non-profit, privately operated foundation	Private	Regional	Partial	1975	Department Director
University Colegio Mayor de Antioquia	Public	Capital city	Exclusive	1946	Academic Director
Oriente Antioqueño Chamber of Commerce	Private	Regional	Partial	1987	Department Director
Association of tourist guides of Antioquia - ASOGUIAN	Private	Regional	Exclusive	1996	General Director
Vice Ministry of Tourism	Public	National	Exclusive	2006	Department Director
FENALCO ANTIOQUIA - Association of merchants	Private	National	Partial	1946	Department Director
PROCOLOMBIA	Public	National	Exclusive	1992	General Director
ACOPI ANTIOQUIA - Colombian association of SMEs	Private	National	Partial	1957	Department Director
University of San Buenaventura	Private	Regional	Partial	1967	Academic Director
Science and Technology Center of Antioquia - CTA	Private	Regional	Partial	1989	Department Director
Medellín Chamber of Commerce	Private	Regional	Partial	1904	Department Director
Subregional tourist corporation - Occidente de Antioquia	Mixed*	Regional	Exclusive	2001	General Director
Subregional tourist corporation - Urabá	Mixed*	Regional	Exclusive	2005	General Director
Government of Antioquia - Tourist Office	Public	Regional	Exclusive	Unanswered	Public Servant
University of Medellin	Private	Capital city	Exclusive	1950	Academic Director

\*Private-public funds

Source: Authors' elaboration