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## Regional Spotlight

## Tourism planning and innovation: The Caribbean under the spotlight

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## ABSTRACT

The importance of the islands working together toward a multicentre product for tourists has been highlighted as early as the 1980s, and yet hardly anything has been done in that sense. Can cluster be considered as the way forward for the sustainable development of the Caribbean? This question could be considered as the first step of the tourism planning process. Hierarchical method or linkage method that works by identifying entities that match each other based on the investigator selection of similar attribute categories is the most suitable clustering approach for the Caribbean. Despite the fact that cluster appears as a potential solution for issues faced by some Caribbean islands and other destinations in the world, it cannot be seen as a panacea.

## 1. Introduction

The ultimate objective of destination marketing organisations (DMOs) is to achieve growth and sustainability for a destination by developing its unique image; coordinating private and public tourism industry constituencies; providing information to visitors; maintaining customer satisfaction; encouraging investments in attractions; and so on (Gowreesunkar, Cooper, & Durbarry, 2009; Gowreesunkar, Séraphin, & Morrison, 2018). This objective is, however, getting increasingly difficult to achieve due to an increased number of competitors, products with shortened life spans and service life cycles, and shifts in consumer preferences (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016). In a small area like the Caribbean, it is very difficult for destinations to gain and sustain competitive advantage. This is because islands are, among other things, small, vulnerable and geographically insular; tourism resources are scarce with a predominant reliance on sun, sea and sand; import penetration can be high; there is typically limited access to entrepreneurial networks; there may be a lack of opportunities for self-sustaining strategies, and so on (Gowreesunkar, Van der Sterren, & Séraphin, 2015).

How, then, can DMOs achieve long-term competitive advantage in this highly tourism-dependent region? In this regional spotlight, ‘clusters’ are investigated as a potential strategy. Indeed, “alliances and partnership are more and more common between countries in the tourism industry” (Séraphin, 2011, p.38). There are many different

applications of clustering. Among these are, for instance, segmentation of tourists according to their behaviour (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016); of locals according to their opinion on tourism (Perez & Nadal, 2005); and of hotels according to their marketing strategy (D’Urso, Prayag, Disegna, & Massari, 2013; Prayag, Ramphul, & Mootoo, 2010). ‘Cluster’ is a broad concept rather than a precise term, so for the purpose of this regional spotlight it will be understood as the segmentation of the Caribbean islands according to their geographical proximity and tourism assets.

Most studies on tourism in the Caribbean focus on the role and importance of the industry for the economic development of the region, as well as issues related to its development (Williams, Rangel-Buitrago, Anfuso, Cervantes, & Botero, 2016). The importance of the islands working together toward a multicentre product for tourists has been highlighted as early as the 1980s by Peters (1980), yet limited progress has been made to date. Interestingly, none of the papers published on tourism cluster activity by the three premier outlets (*Tourism Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research* and the *Journal of Travel Research*) are based on the Caribbean. This is in spite of the fact that it is documented heavily in the literature (Table 1) that clusters are used in tourism to: boost destinations attractiveness and regional economic development (Jin, Weber, & Bauer, 2012); to boost the competitiveness of some sectors of the economy, particularly for least economically successful regions (Bernini, 2009); to share good practice and be more innovative (Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006).

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**Table 1**  
Sample of research on 'cluster' in tourism.

Journals	Author	Year	Title	Topic
Annals of Tourism Research	Amaro, Duarte & Henriques	2016	Travelers' use of social media: A clustering approach	Segment travelers according to their use of social media
Annals of Tourism Research	Jackson & Murphy	2006	Clusters in regional tourism. An Australian case	Application of cluster theory to tourism
Annals of Tourism Research	Perez & Nadal	2004	Host community perceptions. A cluster analysis	Cluster based on opinion of tourism
Annals of Tourism Research	Fredline & Faulker	2000	Host community reactions. A cluster analysis	Cluster based on residents' perceptions of tourism and events
Tourism Management	Jin, Weber & Bauer	2012	Impact of clusters on exhibition destination attractiveness: Evidence from mainland China	Cluster and destination attractiveness
Tourism Management	Bermini	2009	Convention industry and destination clusters: Evidence from Italy	Cluster and local tourism development
Tourism Management	Erkuş-Öztürk	2009	The role of cluster types and firm size in designing the level of network relations: The experience of the Antalya tourism region	The size of the firm in a cluster that determines the level of networking of that cluster
Tourism Management	Novelli, Schmitz & Spencer	2006	Networks, clusters and innovation in tourism: A UK experience	Cluster and stakeholders collaboration
Tourism Management	Lee, Lee, Bernhard & Yoon	2006	Segmenting casino gamblers by motivation: A cluster analysis of Korean gamblers	Segment the casino gambling
Tourism Management	Jackson	2006	Developing regional tourism in China: The potential for activating business clusters in a socialist market economy	Cluster as a way of fostering competitive advantage in regional China
Journal of Travel Research	Grun	2008	Challenging "factor-cluster segmentation"	Clustering is widely spread but it is not the best practice
Journal of Travel Research	Lee	1983	Marketing strategies for hotels: A cluster analysis approach	Clustering of hotels and their marketing strategy
Journal of Travel Research	Prayag, Disegna, Cohen & Yan	2013	Segmenting markets by bagged clustering: Young Chinese travelers to Western Europe	Clustering of travelers
Journal of Travel Research	Davis & Sternquist	1987	Appealing to the elusive tourist: An attribute cluster strategy	Attribute as a way of clustering visitors
Journal of Travel Research	Cha, McCleary & Uysal	1995	Travel motivations of Japanese overseas travelers: A factor-cluster segmentation approach	Motivation of travelers as a way of clustering
Journal of Travel Research	Armond & Elfessi	2001	A clustering method for categorical data in tourism market segmentation research*	Clustering method
Journal of Travel Research	Mazanec	1984	How to detect travel market segments: A clustering approach	Segmentation & impacts
Journal of Travel Research	Dolnicar & Leisch	2003	Winter tourist segments in Austria: Identifying stable vacation styles using bagged clustering techniques*	Clustering vacation styles
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	Kibicho	2010	Community-based tourism: A factor-cluster segmentation approach	Hierarchical cluster analysis and local community
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	Hawkins	2010	A protected areas ecotourism competitive cluster approach to catalyse biodiversity conservation and economic growth in Bulgaria	Cluster & competitive advantage
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	Ryan & Huyton	2010	Who is interested in aboriginal tourism in the Northern Territory, Australia? A cluster analysis	Cluster & interests for a destination
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	Voges	2008	Rough clustering of destination image data using an evolutionary algorithm*	Clustering using algorithm
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	Guillet, Guo & Law	2015	Segmenting hotel customers based on rate fences through conjoint and cluster analysis	segment hotel customers based on room rates and rate fences
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	Upchurch, Ellis & Seo	2008	Applying the hierarchical cluster analysis procedure upon the process of yield management	Clustering the use of yield management
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	Lin & Morais	2010	The spatial clustering effect of destination distribution on cognitive distance estimates and its impact on tourists' destination choices	Clustering and impacts on tourists' destination choice
Leisure Sciences	Legare & Haider	2008	Trend analysis of motivation-based clusters at the Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site of Canada	Clustering motivation

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