

TOURISM GOVERNANCE IN 5 INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES OF INÍRIDA, GUAINÍA, COLOMBIA: A STUDY BASED ON THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CRITERIA, GSTC-D

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Abstract: This article presents the main findings of a research study on sustainable tourism in five Indigenous communities in the municipality of Inírida, Guainía (Colombia). These communities inhabit a territory of exceptional biological and cultural richness, located within the Estrella Fluvial de Inírida (EFI), a strategic ecosystem recognized as a Ramsar site. The area also features one of the region's most iconic natural attractions: the Mavecure Hills. The study was conducted using the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Destination Criteria (GSTC-D 2019), and analyzes opportunities and challenges related to environmental, cultural, socioeconomic, and governance sustainability. One of the key findings is that participatory governance—particularly through the local Ramsar committee, a governance structure ruled by the Environmental Ministry of Colombia—is fundamental for tourism territorial management, the development of tourism products, and community ownership of tourism initiatives. Strategic guidelines are proposed throughout a gap analysis to help consolidate a sustainable road guide tourism model that connects local stakeholders, promotes social equity, and contributes to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. Adopting a qualitative and exploratory methodology, data collection was conducted through two field visits, participant and active observation, and seventeen semi-structured interviews. Key actors included community leaders, public officials, tourism operators, and tourists. The collected information was coded using NVivo to identify patterns. The GSTC-D criteria was then employed to create an evaluation tool “Gap analysis”.

Keyword: sustainable tourism, nature-based tourism, governance, GSTC-D, indigenous communities

Introduction

Tourism, considered a driver of global economic development, has undergone changes after the pandemic. The sector's reactivation has preferred destinations with high biodiversity and cultural richness, positioning Colombia, as a megadiverse country, in a strategic place. The Peace Agreement (2016) between the government and the oldest guerrilla group on the continent, “Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo” (FARC), opened new opportunities for historically isolated territories, where indigenous communities have begun to consider tourism as a development path and as an option to counteract illicit activities such as gold extraction, according to interviews made to local actors of the tourism chain in the area of study. (Agapito, 2021; Martínez, 2021; Mateos, 2021; Quintero Díaz, (2025).

However, this possibility raises a tension: how to harness the benefits of tourism without compromising the natural and cultural values of the territory? Faced with this challenge, sustainable tourism emerges as an alternative, aligned with the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals. The proper adaptation and application of international standards such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

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from destiny issued on 2009 (GSTC-D) Criteria can be a useful tool to guide responsible practices in the industry will be explained in the Methodology and Results chapter of this article.

This study assesses the feasibility of implementing sustainable tourism guidelines, based on GSTC-D criteria, in five indigenous communities in the municipality of Inírida, in the department of Guainía, Colombia. These communities are located within a Ramsar zone, considered of special importance for global biodiversity. It is a strategic ecosystem, called the Fluvial Star (EFI, Estrella Fluvial de Inírida), spanning more than 300,000 hectares, where the Inírida, Guaviare, Atabapo, and Orinoco rivers converge. The area is host to an extraordinary biological diversity with more than 1,100 plant species and 950 registered fauna species. Its hydric, cultural, and ecological richness makes it one of the 21 priority conservation sites (Trujillo, F., Usma Oviedo, J. S., & Lasso, C. A. (Eds.). (2014). pag 18; Suárez, C. F., & Usma Oviedo, J. S. (2014), pages 25; Usma Oviedo, J. S., Franco-Jaramillo, M., Trujillo, F., & Mesa Ramsar EFI (Eds.). (2021), pages 23,29,84;

The municipality of Inírida is characterized by profound ethnic diversity, with 98% of the territory inhabited by indigenous peoples living in scattered riverside settlements with low population density, difficult to quantify due to their territorial mobility (Salazar et al., 2006). The historical incursion of religious missions, especially the one led by Sofia Müller, evangelic missionary, since 1943, "'In 1943, the American Sophia Müller, a pastor of the New Tribes Missions evangelical church, set out to convert the indigenous people to evangelical Christianity, imposing the Müllerian education system, which gave rise to an evangelical majority in the Department.'" (Salazar, C. A., Gutiérrez, F., & Franco, M. (2006), page 38), radically erased ancestral cultural practices, including traditional medicine and the organization in malocas (Salazar, C. A., Gutiérrez, F., & Franco, M. (2006), page 41,42. In one of the communities, Remanso's main plan of life document says" "They said that those who practiced the evil culture we had 'belonged to the devil, that they had to go to hell,' and so, out of fear of that, it was no longer practiced" (028 del 30 de April de 1986, INCORA, page 2) , what can be configured as an *ethnocide*, establishing new forms of social organization in these communities. (Trujillo, F., et al (2014), page 50). Currently, tourism in the region is developed almost entirely in indigenous territory, governed by the law of indigenous reserves and the worldviews of communities such as the Curripaco and Puinave, as the Political Constitution of Colombia says in the articles, 63 and 329. (Resolution of 028 del 30 de April de 1986, INCORA).

2. Methods

This article will be developed in a two-phase process. The first phase will cover the characterization of the tourism activity in the area of study, the actors involved, the type of tourism carried on, and the vision of local actors regarding this tourism activity. The second phase will evaluate through a gap analysis the present tourism according to the GSTC-D criteria. The results of this gap analysis will lead to the third and final phase, which will analyze the feasibility of the GSTC criteria being implemented by the five indigenous communities.

The tourism characterization phase was carried out through direct and participant observation on two trips I carry out between august and October 2021. On the first trip, a total of 17 Interviews were conducted representing voices of tourism in the local and national scale. Having One of these interviews

done in presence of a meeting of the whole community. Table 1 has details of categorization of actors interviewed.

Table 1 List of local and national actors for semi-structured interviews

Stakeholder Category	Number	Representative Profiles
Community Members / Community Leaders	3	Arcángel Agapito, Silvio López, Abel (Caño Raya)
Tourism Service Providers / Entrepreneurs	3	Mauricio Bernal, Hugo Mateos, Ligia Giraldo.
Municipal Government Officials	1	Jennifer Martínez (Tourism Coordinator).
Departmental Government Officials	1	Mónica Cobos (Department of Agriculture).
Regional Environmental Authority Officials (CDA)	1	Pilar Tafur.
SENA Officials	2	Frank Pabón, Liz Perón.
Visitors or Tourists	2	Nubia and Oswaldo
Academic or Educational Institutions	2	Fernando Carrillo (Biologist), Manuel Romero (Anthropologist)
Other Relevant Stakeholders (NGOs / Experts)	2	Andrés Díaz (ATTA), Yeimileth Porto (Awake)
Visitors or Tourists	2	Nubia and Oswaldo
Academic or Educational Institutions	2	Fernando Carrillo (Biologist), Manuel Romero (Anthropologist)
Other Relevant Stakeholders (NGOs / Experts)	2	Andrés Díaz (ATTA), Yeimileth Porto (Awake)

On the second trip, same year, I conducted participant observation through the acquisition of 2 local tourism packages, facilitating a firsthand evaluation of the services chain and community-led offerings.

This immersive approach included fluvial transportation across the EFI and the documentation of representative tourist activities offered at the time of research: trekking to the Mavicure Hills, attraction managed by the *Venado* Community, swimming the San Joaquin Stream- a characteristic blackwater ecosystem of the Inírida River, staying in indigenous community homestays houses at the *Remanso* community; Furthermore, the study incorporated, taking a boat on the Inírida river for 20 kilometers to take a visit to a specialized productive project, the stingless bee reserve (meliponiculture) in the *La Ceiba* community, camping experience in the Atabapo riverbanks adjacent to the *Caño Raya* community and the *Playa Blanca* community white sand beaches. The second trip, was subjacent to the first visit ensuring that the primary local stakeholders and their roles within the tourism governance structure had been identify and characterized. To complete the characterization, analysis of secondary information such as “Planes de Vida”, documents that register the foundational social structure and planning of life from each Indigenous community, Government plans from de department of Guainía, reports from WWF Colombia, Environmental Corporation for the territory reporting to the Ministry of Environmental And development of Colombia (CDA), Omacha Foundation, Alexander von Humboldt Research Institute for Biological Resources, official information from the Governmental office of Agricultural tourism, finally all the information was opened coded in am excel matrix using NVivo.

Scaffolding from the results from the first phase, a gap analysis was made and resulting on a tool designed in Excel based on the GSTC-D (2019) criteria. This tool measures a) the absence, b) existence, and c) permanence over time (more than 4 years) of activities that respond to the strategies listed in the international standard. An ordinal rating convention from 0 to 3 was used, allowing assessment not only of the presence or absence of key elements but also of their level of institutional maturity. The GSTC-D standard is composed by four (4) sections: A). Sustainable Management with 11 criteria in distributed in three sub-sections A(a) Management structure and framework; A(b) Stakeholder engagement; A(c) Managing pressure and change. Section B). Socio-economic Sustainability: eight (8) criteria aspects in two sub-sections, B(a) Delivering local economic benefits; B(b) Social wellbeing. Section C). Cultural Sustainability: seven (7) criteria aspects in two sub-sections C(a) Protecting cultural heritage; C(b) Visiting and the las Section D). Environmental Sustainability: eleven (11) criteria aspects in three sub-sections D(a) Conservation of natural heritage, D(b) Resource management, D(c) Management of waste and emissions. Each section includes from three to eight indicators that allow for reviewing both the current state and the strategic planning of the destination and the correspondence to the SDGs. <http://www.gstcouncil.org/>. See Table 2.

Table 2 Gap Analysis convention. Own elaboration

Convention	0	1	2	3
	Absent	Presence (Unsatisfactory: Refers to Less Than 1 Year of Permanence, if there is an activity related to the evaluated criteria)	Presence – Medium Level (Refers to Permanence Between 1 And 5 Years of permanence of activity related to criteria evaluated)	Presence – High Level (Refers to More Than 5 Years of Permanence; At Least One Government Change)

AI Disclosure Note: Artificial intelligence tools were used to improve English writing fluency. NotebookLM was utilized to cross-examine and emphasize key variables from the results of the self-made gap analysis tool, while GPT-5.5 and Gemini text editors were employed for manuscript editing and refinement.

3. Results

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative research on tourism dynamics in the 5 indigenous communities. The results are presented following the logical sequence of methodological phases, so that the diagnoses obtained during the initial stage of characterization, Objective 1, and the validation through interviews and my observation in the field enable a systemic integration of information, which can be used to complete Phase 2, the gap analysis using the GSTC-D criteria,

3.1. Tourism Characterization in 5 indigenous communities in the municipality of Inírida, Colombia.

The five communities analyzed belong to different indigenous reserves in the department of Guainía, each with official resolutions delimiting their territory. The community of Remanso is part of the Remanso-Chorrobón reserve (Resolution 28 of 1986), with 73,680 hectares and 216 inhabitants, composed of the Puinave and Curripaco ethnic groups (INCORA. (1986).



Figure 1: Ubicación de Comunidades en estudio y trayectos fluviales. Fuente: Elaboración propia a partir de Google Earth. Y (Giraldo Ospina et al., 2014. pág. 26)

Community of Venado, with 124 inhabitants, belongs to the homonymous reserve (Resolution 027 of 1986), inhabited by seven ethnic groups, including Curripaco, Guanano, and Cubeo (INCORA 1986, Resolution 27). Playa Blanca community, part of the Río Atabapo reserve (Resolution 082 of 1989), is the largest, with 513,720 hectares and 119 inhabitants as reported on the “Plan de Vida” manuscript (Resguardo Indígena Ríos Atabapo e Inírida, 2020) and (INCORA, 1989). Caño Raya community shares its resolution with Playa Blanca with 123 inhabitants. La Ceiba community is located within the Almidón–La Ceiba reserve (Resolution 026 of 1986), with 40,960 hectares and 155 inhabitants, representing ethnic groups such as Piapoco and Desana. A total of 737 official population by the time of official reporting 2020.

Not so long ago, the first two communities to open their territory to tourism activities and start talking with "white" tour operators to make agreements to bring foreign visitors -for the indigenous peoples, foreigners are any humans who are not members of their tribe or nearby tribes- were the leaders from the Remanso and Venado communities, due to their closeness to the natural tourist attraction, the Mavecure Hills, which were featured in the Academy Award-nominated movie *The Embrace of the Serpent* (2015). “That’s when the demand for tourists to come to Mavecure occurred,” said Arcangel Agapito, indigenous guide and tour operator from Remanso Community (Agapito, 2021).

In general, tourism dynamics in the five communities under study are characterized by an interrelation between the opportunity that the Mavecure Hills bring as a flagship product and main driver, and the ethnic based social structures, mainly of the Curripaco and Puinave peoples, seeking economic alternatives as the only legal source of income (Agapito, 2021; Martinez, 2021). During the second semester of 2021, it was observed that tourism activity primarily concentrated on nature-based tourism, ethno-tourism, and sport fishing, with fishing for tourist purposes being later prohibited by the Colombian government in April 2023 through Sentence C-148 of 2022. This means that most visitors concentrated on the Remanso and Venado communities, leaving La ceiba, Caño Raya and Playa Blanca, having very few tourists and demand (Lopez, 2021; Bernal, 2021; Mateos, 2021). The La Ceiba Community appears as a convenient option for ecotourism adventures, since the community is located halfway along the Inírida River route to the Hills flagship attractions, with the opportunity to visit the Steenless Bees Reserve, and the opportunity to stay in brand new chalets owned by the community administration, powered by photovoltaic energy, which was very rare at the time of the study (Carrillo, 2021; Giraldo, 2021).

Table 4 presents the characteristics, organizational governance, and nearby attractions of each community. All information was gathered through observation and active participation in the tourist trips previously mentioned in the methodology section.

Table 3: Communities, Associations, Type of accommodations and attractions nearby

COMMUNITY	TOUR OPERATORS WITH JURISDICTION ON EACH COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY LEGAL ASSOCIATIONS	TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION AVAILABLE	TOURIST ATTRACTION
VENADO	TONINAS TOURS, AROMA VERDE, PUINAVE TRAVEL	ASOZON (68 associates)	Camping, Touristic chalets donated by International cooperation funding (Visión Amazonía), (Capacity for 20 guests at a time)	Mavecure Hills, White sand beaches on summer (November to march) San Joaquín Stream (Redish waters, Steen rays watching)
REMANSO	PUINAVE TRAVEL	ASOECOTURAMA (10 Families)	Camping on dry season only (November to March), Home staying (80 beds), Chalets under construction in association with a "white" colonist capital habitant.	Mavecure Hills, Inirida Flower (Endemic Flowr) Sabanas, San Joaquin Stream, sports fishing), Bird Watching
LA CEIBA	AROMA VERDE, AWAKE	ASOMEGUA (10 families)	Home Staying and 3 cabins (9 beds 20 people capacity) owned by community, powered by photovoltaic cells.	Vitina Stream, Mojosa Lake, Pajarito stream, Moriche lake, The Honey Track, Bird Watching.
PLAYA BLANCA	NROTH AMAZON TRAVEL, PUINAVE TRAVEL	No data	temporary camping on the Beach, only for dry season (November to march) during winter season, waters are to high and only available for day trips from Inirida)	White sand beaches, Trekking in Inírida Flwer Sabanas, Bird Watching, kayaking in streams, River Steenray watching.

	NORTH AMAZON TRAVEL (by the time of publication of this article, this community no longer does tourism)	CAÑO RAYA	No data	One cabin with two beds. No Home staying was available at time of research.	White sand beaches, kayaking
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For the local tour operators offer characterization, the result is a hybrid value chain. One indigenous Tour Operator, “Puinave Travel”, owned Arcángel Agapito, first “baquiano” local guide*. As per other tour operators, all are considered by the local communities, as white people or colonist migrants. Coming from other parts of the Colombian territory, that moved to the area for other reasons before becoming part of the tourist value chain. One of them, male, in his early sixties, created the “North Amazon Travel” company, came to live in the area as a member of the police force and stayed after retirement. Knowing a vast part of the territory and local communities gave him a local advantage of negotiation with communities on the Atabapo river side, Limits to the Venezuelan frontier. Another tour operator, Toninas Tours, owned by a male, late fifties, came to Guainía a youngster, descent of former government official that stayed in the capital and built family business hotel mostly workers in the Venado Community. A couple of biologists with experience in scientific research in the area decided to stay and offer a sustainable tourist product in this rich and biodiverse location with an NGO named Aroma Verde. This NGO acts a tour operator with purpose of funding sustainable projects. Offers experiences on streams, sustainable fishing, visiting Mavecure Hills with “baquiano” guides form Venado community, experience the beekeeping at La Ceiba community, where the Steen less Bee reserve was their main work and goal for sustainable tourism, and finally a there is Parature company, owned by an anthropologist in his early seventies. His interest is to promote investigative projects and offers hotel accommodations on the capitol and transfers to communities for research stays. He is strongly against ethnic tourism, since his view is of non equal relations between visitors and indigenous local views of existence (Giraldo,2021, Carrillo, 2021; Bernal,2021, Romero,2021; Mateos,2021).

Dynamics of the tourist activity in destination:

The local tourism operators, who manage logistics, river transportation, and the capture of national and international demand (Bernal, 2021; Mateos, 2021). On the other hand, the indigenous communities act as hosts, offering accommodation services in family homes or purpose-built malokas, usually with the investment of a “Blanco” form the capital city Inirida, meals based on local gastronomy—such as *pescado moquiao*, cooked for 6 hours under the smoke of a burning fire or *ajicero*, a soup made with catch of the day fish, yuca, a time of amazon rout and very spicy seeds called “aji” —and community guiding through trails and sacred sites (Agapito, 2021; López, 2021; Pabón, 2021). Community organization is governed by the traditional authority of the Captain, who defines internal regulations, entry fees ranging between \$15,000 and \$20,000 COP, and the distribution of benefits for collective needs such as health or fuel (Agapito, 2021; López, 2021; Martínez, 2021).

Regarding the perceptions of the actors interviewed, there is a consensus among community leaders, business owners, corporation and governmental officers: the role of tourism is tool for conservation and

survival. For many families, tourism represents "the only legal and viable alternative to illegal mining" (Agapito, 2021; Martínez, 2021; Mateos, 2024). However, Manuel Romero, from his academic and experience as an anthropologist working with the local indigenous communities for more than 40 years creating their "Planes de Vida", which translates "Community Life Plans", expresses concerns about the socio-cultural impact of the tourist activity. Romero, warns about the risk of the "commodification of culture" and the loss of privacy for indigenous peoples due to tourist flows (Romero, 2021). This tension is evident in the phenomenon of westernization, where tourists and experts notice a progressive loss of native languages and traditional dances, further influenced by the presence of evangelical churches that forbid certain ancestral practices (López, 2021; Romero, 2021; Nubia and Oswaldo, 2021).

Findings in the interviews and the observation processes highlight critical deficiencies in infrastructure and basic services limiting the destination's potential. The absence of potable water is a cross-cutting issue; in the communities, consumption depends on rainwater harvesting, water pits that are usually damaged if existing, or the river, which is consumed raw or boiled, while operators must transport bottled water from Puerto Inírida for tourists (Agapito, 2021; Bernal, 2021; Comunidad Caño Raya, 2021). Basic sanitation is precarious, with a lack of public restrooms and adequate treatment systems, leading to situations where, in the words of locals, "for the indigenous people, [the bathroom] is the bush" (Comunidad Caño Raya, 2021). Solid waste management falls mostly on tour operators, who must remove the trash generated during expeditions and transfer it back to the capital, given the lack of final disposal systems in the communities (Agapito, 2021; Bernal, 2021).

Connectivity and transport represent additional critical findings. Cellular communication and internet access are described as "non-existent" in rural areas by the time of the research, making immediate logistical coordination impossible and in case of emergency a critical exposure of the activity to visitors (Agapito, 2021; Cobos, 2021). River transportation, the sole means of access to the communities from Puerto Inírida, suffers from a lack of regulation, fluctuating prices due to fuel costs, and technical safety deficiencies (Bernal, 2021; Pabón, 2021). At the Governmental offices, Departmental and municipal levels, interviewees perceive a "total disconnection" between the municipal Mayor's Office and the departmental Governor's Office, resulting in an institutional trust crisis (Cobos, 2021; Tafur, 2021). At the time of the research, local actors denounce that the resources obtained from the tourism tax at the airport are not reflected in investments in the territory.

"The municipality charges a tax to visitors... the district spends the tax, but we don't know on what" (Agapito, 2021). As per one of the representatives from the Environment Corporation, CDA, "The allocation of the tourism tax... no one knows where it is allocated. It is not clear" (Tafur, 2021). Also, the couple of visitors interviewed, "Because if one is paying the tax, that's where you get a first intuition or observation... That is lacking in terms of communication from the tourism side" (Nubia and Oswaldo, 2021).

Regardless of the previous limitations mentioned, opportunities are identified, communities like *La Ceiba* have managed to integrate productive conservation projects, such as, the nature Based Solution of nourishing meliponiculture (stingless bee honey), to create a startup governance green project that is starting to attract visitors, creating the "Honey Route," which serves as a model for sustainability and ecotourism type of product (Giraldo, 2024). Likewise, there is growing interest in specialized niches

such as Avi tourism (birdwatching) and scientific tourism, leveraging the biodiversity of the Guiana Shield and the designation of the Estrella Fluvial de Inírida Ramsar site (Porto, 2024; Tafur, 2024). These initiatives show the relationship between tourism and environmental conservation, and could allow biodiversity protection to be perceived as a profitable activity (Porto, 2024). According to Porto (2024), *"to the extent that we conserve biodiversity, it becomes possible to conduct a much more responsible tourism"* (Porto, 2024).

Finally, while the national Educational Service SENA (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje) leads training/courses processes only in cooking services and nature based guiding, local entrepreneurs consider these courses are insufficient and unadapted to international market, there is no offer for bilingual training in local institutions (Bernal, 2024; Díaz, 2024) forcing the hiring of external guides to serve European or North American visitors (Agapito, 2024). The tourism dynamics observed in the five communities under study during 2021 reveal a destination with an exceptional nature based and ethno-tourism opportunity, but one whose sustainability is threatened by infrastructural precarity, fragmented governance, and an urgent need to strengthen local capacities to ensure that economic benefits are equitably distributed among the communities that own the territory.

In terms of number of visitors, this destiny could be considered a small size market, between 2018 with 2946 visitors and 2019 with 2896 visitors, even less during pandemic, dropping to 1774 visitors on 2020. In 2021, with the lifting of restrictions and improved promotion, the destination experienced a good recovery with 1151 visitors only in the first quarter, according to the official information issued by the Secretary of agricultural and touristic activities from the department of Guainía dated May 2021.

According to the GSTC, Section A, Sustainable Management, the management structure and framework, stakeholder engagement and managing pressure and change are the leading criteria to look for a strong governance in a touristic destiny (GSTC-D,2019). In accordance to this, as documented in the 2021 Environmental Management Plan for the EFI Ramsar Site, the formulation of strategies based on interinstitutional coordination, involving consultation with local communities and business stakeholders through the Regional Wetlands Committee (RWC), evidencing a future governance approach. Plans have been developed to strengthen sustainable tourism with the support and partnership of the following institutions: the Ministry of Environment, the Corporation for the Sustainable Development of the Northern and Eastern Amazon (CDA), the Amazonian Institute for Scientific Research (SINCHI), WWF, and the EFI Ramsar Roundtable. The following initiatives have been prioritized as an initial step:

- The CDA Green Window Program, through the project “Implementation of the Amazon Regional Green Business Plan within the CDA jurisdiction to strengthen initiatives offering Green Business products and services in Guainía” (Tafur Guarín et al., 2021), has provided tourism initiatives with equipment and resources useful for carrying out their activities.
- The Government of Guainía is currently implementing its departmental development plan, prioritizing the formalization of tourism initiatives and capacity building for their leaders (Usma O et al., 2021).
- The EFI Ramsar Roundtable initiated a process to identify existing and potential tourism initiatives located within the wetland’s area of influence, with the objective of subsequently engaging partners to support and strengthen leaders in sustainable nature tourism. The first project resulting from this effort is “Capacity Building for ASOCRIGUA and the Communities of the Remanso Chorroboacán

Indigenous Reserve for Nature Tourism Management in Guainía and the Mavecure Hills.” According to an interview with the representative responsible for Indigenous Affairs at Visión Amazonía, the project was approved with funding of COP 749,505,000 (Visión Amazonía, 2018) and entered the implementation phase in 2022.

- WWF Colombia, representing non governmental organizations within the Regional Wetlands Committee, works on awareness raising and leadership training, including “a communication strategy to position the region and the development of public private partnerships to strengthen the implementation of scientific, nature based, community based, and cultural tourism” (Usma O et al., 2021).
- The same document reports that the contribution of the SINCHI Institute includes the preparation of the Bird Guide of the EFI Ramsar Site, which is being developed jointly with community leaders through participatory workshops.
- According to the EFI Environmental Management Plan, the National Training Service (SENA) is designing a training program covering topics such as outboard motor maintenance, natural resource management, tour guiding, accounting and finance, English language skills, local, national, and international gastronomy, and handicrafts. Through these actions, SENA seeks to promote a sustainable and responsible model by strengthening local stakeholders, enhancing governance, improving economic well being, and supporting the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources (Usma O et al., 2021).

3.2. Gap evaluation using GSTC-D Criteria tool developed for this study.

The gap evaluation results for the second phase, will be shown section by section as included in battery of criteria in the GSTC-D 2019. The result of the evaluation using the scale from 0 to 3 explained in previous chapter was made by me and has biases to consider. A final validation of information should be made in future assessments and is based on the active observation, and the conclusions from the interviews made to local actors’ part of the tourist value chain. The gap on each section can be seen on Tables 4,5,6 and 8. Color black is 0, red is from 0,1 to 1,99, yellow from 2 points to 2,99 and green is f3 points.

Section A: Sustainable Management: the following findings characterize the tourism governance and sustainability frameworks in Remanso, Venado, La Ceiba, Caño Raya, and Playa Blanca:

- **Institutional Leadership and Full Compliance in La Ceiba:** The community of **La Ceiba** serves as the regional example for governance, achieving a maximum overall score of **3.0** in Section A1: Destination management responsibility. This indicates full compliance across all five (5) indicators applied to these criteria, significantly exceeding the group average. This strength gives La Ceiba a leading role to harvest future governances within the other four (4) communities.
- **Polarization of Resident Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms (A5):** There is a notable disparity in how communities enable public participation in destination planning. **La Ceiba**, Venado and **Remanso** show high to acceptable levels of compliance (scores of 3 and 2,

respectively), indicating active systems for monitoring resident concerns. In contrast, **Caño Raya** and **Playa Blanca** record a score of **0**, reflecting an absolute absence of formal mechanisms for community feedback or education on tourism opportunities.

- **Concentration of Governance Gaps in Outlying Communities:** A recurring trend of lower compliance is observed in **Caño Raya** and **Playa Blanca**, which both average **1.4** for the Sustainable Management section. This score highlights a shared weakness in the systematic application of administrative and management structures (Section A(a)) compared to the more consolidated frameworks found in the communities near by the flagship attraction.
- **Weakness in Systemic Monitoring and Public Reporting (A3):** Across the five communities, there is a lack of consistency in implementing quantifiable socio-economic, cultural, and environmental indicators. The criteria require targets to be identified and measured at least annually, but the overall results for Section A suggest that regular, public evaluation of tourism impacts remains a significant gap for most of the study area, apart from the most advanced governance structures. Said that, a connection between the municipality gathering information at the only point of entrance is needed.
- **Partial Integration of Sustainability Standards in Enterprise Engagement (A4):** While the lead communities show progress, the data reveals a heterogeneous pattern in how tourism-related enterprises are informed about sustainability issues. The gap between the maximum scores in La Ceiba and the lower scores in the other four (4) communities suggests that the promotion of sustainability is not yet a must in destination-wide practice.
- **Managing Visitor Volumes and Activities (A8):** The assessment identifies differences in the implementation of visitor management systems. While the criteria require a system for balancing the needs of the local economy and the environment, the results show that only three Remanso, La Ceiba and Playa Blanca have established at least one activity of monitoring and action plans to manage visitor flows effectively at specific seasons.
- **Shared Vulnerability in Risk and Crisis Management (A11):** The results suggest a general destination-wide weakness in formalizing risk reduction and emergency response plans. While the criteria demand a documented plan that recognizes a wide range of risks (natural disasters, health, etc.) and establishes communication procedures, the lower averages in the majority of the communities indicate that these procedures are either incipient or not yet communicated to residents and visitors.

Table 4 Section A: Sustainable Management

SECTION A: Sustainable Management			0,6	0,6	0,5	1,1	0,3	0,4
Adaptation from de GSTC Destination Criteria v2.0			AVERAGE	REMANSO	VENADO	LA CEIBA	CAÑO RAYA	PLAYA BLANCA
A(a) Estructura administrativa y de gestión			0,9	0,9	0,8	1,8	0,4	0,6
A1 Destination management responsibility The destination has an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, with involvement by the private sector, public sector and civil society. This group has defined responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of socio- economic, cultural and environmental issues. The group is adequately funded, works with a range of bodies in delivering destination management, has access to sufficient staffing (including personnel with experience in sustainability) and follows principles of sustainability and transparency in its operations and transactions.	a. Documentary evidence showing relevant make-up and responsibilities of the group.	SDO 16,17	1,4	2	1	3	0	1
	b. A financial plan and budget showing current and future funding sources.		1,8	2	2	3	1	1
	c. Evidence of links and engagement with other bodies.		1,8	2	2	3	1	1
	d. Records of permanent staff and contracted personnel, indicating relevant experience.		0,8	1	0	3	0	0
	e. Management guidelines and processes, which demonstrate awareness and adherence to sustainability principles and transparency in operations and letting of contracts.		0,6	0	0	3	0	0
A2 Destination management strategy and action plan The destination has established and is implementing a multi-year destination management strategy and action plan that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, was developed with stakeholder engagement and is based on sustainability principles. The strategy includes an identification and assessment of tourism assets and considers socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues and risks. The strategy relates to and influences wider sustainable development policy and action in the destination.	a. A published document setting out the current destination strategy and action	SDO 17	1	1	1	1	1	1
	b. The strategy/plan clearly visible and available on- line		1	1	1	1	1	1
	c. Evidence of stakeholder consultation, meetings etc. in developing the plan.		1,4	1	1	3	1	1
	d. Reference to sustainability principles and an assessment of assets, issues and risks, contained in the strategy and action plan.		1	1	1	1	1	1
	e. Specific references in the strategy/action plan to wider sustainable development policy (including pursuit of the SDGs), and vice versa.		1,2	1	2	3	0	0
A3 Monitoring and reporting The destination is implementing a system to monitor and respond to socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues and impacts arising from tourism. Actions and outcomes are regularly monitored, evaluated and publicly reported. The monitoring system is periodically reviewed.	a. Specific quantifiable socio-economic, cultural and environmental indicators and targets identified.	SDO 12	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Measurement against these indicators, with results recorded and publicized at least annually.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Written evidence of monitoring and reporting of actions and outcomes.		0,6	1	0	1	0	1
	d. Previous reviews of monitoring system and schedule for future reviews.		0	0	0	0	0	0
A(b) Stakeholder engagement			0,5	0,5	0,5	0,6	0,3	0,4
A4 Enterprise engagement and sustainability standards The destination regularly informs tourism- related enterprises about sustainability issues and encourages and supports them in making their operations more sustainable. The destination promotes the adoption of sustainability standards, promoting the application of GSTC-I Recognized standards and GSTC-I Accredited certification schemes for tourism enterprises, where available. The destination publicizes a list of sustainability certified enterprises.	a. Evidence of regular communication of sustainability issues to tourism-related businesses (Media, meetings, direct contact etc.).	SDO 12,17	1	1	1	1	1	1
	b. Sustainability support and advice to tourism- related business – available and promoted.		1	1	1	1	1	1
	c. Number and percentage of businesses certified against tourism sustainability standards (and whether GSTC recognized/accredited), with targets for wider outreach.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Evidence of promotion of certification schemes.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. List of tourism-related certified enterprises, kept up to date.		1	1	1	1	1	1
A5 Resident engagement and feedback The destination enables and promotes public participation in sustainable destination planning and management. Local communities’ aspirations, concerns and satisfaction with tourism sustainability and destination management are regularly monitored and publicly reported, and action is taken in response to them. The destination has a system to enhance local understanding of sustainable tourism opportunities and challenges and to build the capacity of communities to respond.	a. Evidence of the promotion and facilitation of public participation in destination planning/management.	SDO 11,17	1	1	1	1	1	1
	b. Information on the type and level of such participation.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Surveys of residents and other systematic feedback mechanisms, covering tourism issues.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Evidence of action taken in response to residents’ feedback.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Programmed of information, education and training on tourism provided for residents.		1,4	2	2	3	0	0

A6 Participación de visitantes y retroalimentación El destino tiene un sistema para monitorear e informar públicamente la satisfacción del visitante con la calidad y sostenibilidad de la experiencia del destino y, si es necesario, tomar medidas en respuesta. Los visitantes son informados sobre los problemas de sostenibilidad en el destino y el papel que pueden desempeñar para abordarlos.	a. Visitor surveys (and other feedback mechanisms) – carried out and reported.	SDO 11,12	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Surveys and feedback includes visitor reaction to sustainability issues.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Evidence of actions taken in response to visitor survey/feedback findings		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Examples of visitor information that covers sustainability issues and how to respond to them.		1	1	1	1	1	1
A7 Promotion and information Promotion and visitor information material about the destination is accurate with regard to its products, services, and sustainability claims. Marketing messages and other communications reflect the destination's values and approach to sustainability and treat local communities and natural and cultural assets with respect.	a. Current information and promotional material with appropriate content.	SDO 11,12	0,8	1	1	1	0	1
	b. A process exists for checking the accuracy and appropriateness of destination promotion and information.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Evidence of consultation with local communities and environmental and cultural bodies on communications content and delivery.		0,6	1	1	1	0	0
A(c) Managing pressure and change			0,34	0,35	0,15	0,8	0,1	0,3
A8 Managing visitor volumes and activities The destination has a system for visitor management which is regularly reviewed. Action is taken to monitor and manage the volume and activities of visitors, and to reduce or increase them as necessary at certain times and in certain locations, working to balance the needs of the local economy, community, cultural heritage and environment.	a. The destination management strategy and action plan addresses seasonality and spread of visitation.	SDO 11,12	0,6	1	0	1	0	1
	b. Variation in visitor volumes throughout the year is monitored, including in the most visited locations.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Impacts of visitor volumes and activities are identified through observation and community and stakeholder feedback.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Actions taken to manage visitor flows and impacts.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Marketing strategy and selection of target markets takes account of visit patterns; the impact of activities and destination needs.		0	0	0	0	0	0
A9 Planning regulations and development control The destination has planning guidelines, regulations and/or policies which control the location and nature of development, require environmental, economic, and socio-cultural impact assessment and integrate sustainable land use, design, construction, and demolition. Regulations also apply to operations, including property rental and concessions for tourism purposes. The guidelines, regulations and policies were created with public participation and are widely communicated and enforced.	a. Specific policies/regulations/ guidelines which control development – documented and identified by title and date.	SDO 9,11	0,8	1	0	3	0	0
	b. Impact assessment requirements are set out, covering environmental, economic, and socio- cultural impacts, at sufficient scale to address long term issues for the destination.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Specific regulations on property rental and operation for tourism, with evidence of their application and enforcement.		1,4	1	1	3	1	1
	d. Evidence of public participation in the development of policies/regulations/guidelines.		0,8	1	1	1	0	1
	e. Evidence of consultation with, and consent from indigenous people or minority ethnic groups when tourism development has been proposed or has occurred in their territories.		1,4	1	1	3	1	1
	f. Evidence of communication and enforcement of the policies/regulations/guidance, at planning, development and implementation stages.		0,6	0	0	3	0	0
A10 Climate change adaptation The destination identifies risks and opportunities associated with climate change. Climate change adaptation strategies are pursued for the siting, design, development and management of tourism facilities. Information on predicted climate change, associated risks and future conditions is provided for residents, businesses and visitors	a. The destination management strategy and action plan identifies and addresses climate issues.	SDO 13	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Regulations, guidelines and zoning for tourism development and activities accommodate the consequences of climate change.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. A climate risk assessment, covering current and future risks – undertaken and made publicly available.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Evidence of consideration of impact on, and contribution of, local ecosystems to climate change adaptation.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Information on climate change that has been made publicly available.		0	0	0	0	0	0
A11 Risk and crisis management The destination has a risk reduction, crisis management and emergency response plan that is appropriate to the destination. Key elements are communicated to residents, visitors, and enterprises. Procedures and resources are established for implementing the plan and it is regularly updated.	a. A documented risk reduction, crisis management and emergency response plan for tourism in the destination.	SDO 11,16	0,6	1	0	1	0	1
	b. The plan recognizes a wide range of risks, including natural disasters, terrorism, health, resource depletion, and others appropriate to the location.		0,6	1	0	1	0	1
	c. Communication procedures identified for use during and after an emergency.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Program for local delivery of information and training on risk and crisis management.		0	0	0	0	0	0

Based on the gap analysis results for **Section B: Socio-Economic Sustainability**, the following findings characterize the state of tourism governance and socio-economic management across the five studied communities:

- **Systemic failure in monitoring the economic contribution of tourism in all five communities (B1):** There is an absolute absence of mechanisms to measure the direct and indirect economic impact of tourism across all five communities. Every community—**Remanso, Venado, La Ceiba, Caño Raya, and Playa Blanca**—recorded a score of **0** for criterion B1. The data reveals a total lack of programs for economic data gathering, annual reporting on tourism contribution, or the measurement of visitor expenditure and employment spread.
- **La Ceiba demonstrates regional leadership in socio-economic governance:** The community of **La Ceiba** achieved a maximum score of **3.0** for Section B2, significantly outperforming the group. This leadership is particularly evident in the sub-section of **Decent Work and Career Opportunities (B2)**, where it is the only community to achieve full compliance (score of 3), contrasting sharply with **Caño Raya and Playa Blanca**, which record scores of **0** in this same category. This is strongly related to the co-work with Aroma Verde Ong and Awake tour operator and the leadership of la Ceiba in conservation projects and relating them to the tourist activities.
- **Uniform high compliance in Property and User Rights (B6):** The assessment identifies **Property and User Rights** as a universal strength and the only criterion with perfect compliance across the entire destination. All five communities achieved a score of **3**. This indicates that laws and regulations regarding property rights are documented, enforced, and—critically—comply with communal and indigenous rights without authorizing resettlement without prior informed consent.
- **Critical performance in delivering economic benefits to local operators and services value chain in the territory(B(a)):** The sub-section **B(a) Delivering local economic benefits** represents the most significant aspect of weakness for the destination as a whole, with a low group average of **0.7**. While **La Ceiba** shows higher engagement (**1.6**), **Caño Raya and Playa Blanca** present a near to total failure in this dimension with scores of **0.2**. This reveals a shared struggle to ensure tourism spending from related services such as, hospitality, cooking services, cleaning, guiding or similar.
- **Heterogeneity in Decent Work and Career Opportunities (B2):** The data shows a polarization in how communities support career opportunities and training in tourism. While **La Ceiba** (score of 3) and **Remanso** (score of 2) show established or developing commitment to local employment and training, **Caño Raya and Playa Blanca** (scores of 0) have no evidence of skills training programs or statements of commitment to decent work. This might be related to the fact that training and access to SENA courses can be difficult since fluvial transportation to main center in the capital city is required.
- **Deficiency in Destination Accessibility (B8): Access for All** is a shared weakness, with an average of 0.6 for the group criteria. Remanso, Venado, and La Ceiba achieved only a minimal score of **1**, while **Caño Raya and Playa Blanca** scored **0**. This indicates a systemic failure of regulations, standards, infrastructure, and implemented solutions for visitors with disabilities or specific access requirements across all sites and facilities; specially for nature-based activities that demand hopping in and out of boats.

- **Shared moderate support for local entrepreneurs and fair trade (B3):** In contrast to other economic indicators, all five communities show at least one action supporting locals to interact with the tourism value chain and promote crafts and local foods. Scores range from **1 (La Ceiba, Caño Raya, Playa Blanca)** to **2 (Remanso, Venado)**.
- **Stability in Social Wellbeing and Impacts (B(b)) vs. Economic Benefits:** The destination performs more consistently in the **Social Wellbeing** sub-section (average **1.3**), not being 1.3 the desirable evaluation. While economic monitoring and benefit delivery are highly fragmented, social aspects such as **Safety and Security (B7)** and **Property Rights (B6)** show more established—though still low—governance patterns across the five communities. This might be due to the traditional social structure of tribes that protect each member of community over the economic activity.

Table 5 Section B: Socio-Economic Sustainability

SECTION B: SOCIO ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY (Adaptation from de GSTC Destination Criteria v2.0)			2,0	2,4	1,9	3,0	1,4	1,4
			AVERAGE	REMANSO	VENADO	LA CEIBA	CAÑO RAYA	PLAYA BLANCA
B(a) Delivering local economic benefits			0,7	1,1	0,6	1,6	0,2	0,2
B1 Measuring the economic contribution of tourism The direct and indirect economic contribution of tourism to the destination's economy is monitored and publicly reported. Appropriate measures may include levels of visitor volume, visitor expenditure, employment and investment and evidence on the distribution of economic benefits.	a. Program of economic data gathering.	SDO 1,8,9	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Annual reports on the direct and indirect economic contribution of tourism in the destination.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Data covering a range of measures of economic impact (e.g. volume, expenditure, employment, investment and spread of economic benefit in the destination).		0	0	0	0	0	0
B2 Decent work and career opportunities The destination encourages and supports career opportunities and training in tourism. The destination's tourism enterprises commit to providing equality of opportunity for local employment, training and advancement, a safe and secure working environment, and a living wage for all.	a. Provision of relevant skills training programs/courses, available locally.	SDO4,5,8,9,10	1,2	2	1	3	0	0
	b. Statements of commitment by tourism enterprises to the provision of decent work/ career opportunities.		1,4	2	2	1	1	1
	c. Training and employment opportunities promoted to and taken up by local people, including women, young people, minorities and people with disabilities.		1	1	1	3	0	0
	d. Channels for checking working conditions and receiving/handling grievances (e.g. involvement of labor unions).		0	0	0	0	0	0
			0,8	1	0	3	0	0
B3 Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade The destination encourages the retention of tourism spending in the local economy through supporting local enterprises, supply chains and sustainable investment. It promotes the development and purchase of local sustainable products based on fair trade principles and that reflect the area's nature and culture. These may include food and beverages, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.	a. Advice, finance or other support – available in the destination for tourism-related SMEs.	SDO 8,12	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Assistance with market access for local tourism- related SMEs.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Action to encourage and assist local tourism enterprises to purchase goods and services locally.		1	1	1	1	1	1
	d. Initiatives to help local farmers, artisans and food producers to engage in the tourism value chain.		0,4	1	0	1	0	0
	e. Local produce and crafts identified, promoted and available for sale to visitors in the destination.		1	2	0	3	0	0
B(b) Social wellbeing and impacts			1,3	1,4	1,3	1,5	1,2	1,2
B4 Apoyo a la comunidad El destino tiene un sistema para permitir y alentar a las empresas, los visitantes y el público a contribuir a las iniciativas comunitarias y de sostenibilidad de manera responsable.	a. Se alienta y facilita el apoyo a la comunidad local y las iniciativas de sostenibilidad de las empresas turísticas locales.	SDO 3,4	1	1	1	3	0	0
	b. Existen y se promueven esquemas para que los visitantes apoyen la comunidad local y las iniciativas de sostenibilidad.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. El voluntariado y el compromiso con la comunidad no implica intrusión o explotación.		0	0	0	0	0	0
B5 Preventing exploitation and discrimination The destination upholds international standards on human rights. It has laws, practices and an established code of conduct to prevent and report on human trafficking, modern slavery and commercial, sexual, or any other form of exploitation, discrimination and harassment of or against anyone, particularly children, adolescents, women, LGBT and other minorities. The laws and established practices are publicly communicated and enforced.	a. Reference (title, date) to specific laws that pertain in the destination regarding human rights, exploitation, discrimination and harassment.	SDO 10,16	1	1	1	1	1	1
	b. Evidence of communication and enforcement of above laws and related good practice (including to tourism enterprises and visitors).		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Risk and impact analysis regarding human rights, including human trafficking, modern slavery and child labor – conducted regularly.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Destination and key tourism players are signatories to the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.		0	0	0	0	0	0
B6 Property and user rights Laws and regulations regarding property rights and acquisitions are documented and enforced. They comply with communal and indigenous rights, ensure public consultation and do not authorize resettlement without free prior and informed consent and fair and just compensation. Laws and regulations also protect user and access rights to key resources.	a. Reference (title, date) to specific laws that pertain in the destination regarding property rights and acquisitions and user and access rights to resources.	SDO11,16	3	3	3	3	3	3
	b. Reference in the above laws to communal and indigenous rights, public consultation and resettlement.		3	3	3	3	3	3
	c. Evidence of enforcement of the above laws in the context of tourism development and activity.		3	3	3	3	3	3
	d. Evidence of community consultation, consent and compensation.		3	3	3	3	3	3
B7 Safety and security The destination has a system to monitor, prevent, publicly report, and respond to crime, safety, and health hazards that addresses the needs of both visitors and residents.	a. Security and health services are well established and active in the destination.	SDO 3,11,16	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. The needs of visitors are identified and addressed in the delivery of security and health services.		1,2	2	1	1	1	1
	c. Tourism facilities are inspected for compliance with safety and hygiene standards.		0	0	0	0	0	0
B8 Access for all Where practical, sites, facilities and services, including those of natural and cultural importance, are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities and others who have specific access requirements or other special needs. Where sites and facilities are not immediately accessible, access is afforded through the design and implementation of solutions that take into account both the integrity of the site and such reasonable accommodations for persons with access requirements as can be achieved. Information is made available on the accessibility of sites, facilities and services.	a. The existence of any regulations and standards regarding the accessibility of visitor sites, facilities and services.	SDO 3,10	0,6	1	1	1	0	0
	b. Consistent application of accessibility standards in public facilities.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Data on the extent/proportion of visitor sites and facilities that are accessible.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Evidence of programs to improve access for people with a range of access needs.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Information on accessibility included in communications about the destination as a whole.		0	0	0	0	0	0
f. Details of accessibility included in visitor information about key sites.	0	0	0	0	0	0		

Section C: Cultural Sustainability: the overall average for Section C across all five communities is significantly low at **0.5**. This reflects a general lack of formal systems to evaluate, rehabilitate, and conserve cultural assets, as well as a lack of established visitor management protocols. This signifies that the physical and landscape heritage of the entire destination remains technically unmapped and unprotected within the tourism context.

- **Universal Baseline for Intangible Heritage Recognition:** A notable shared strength is the indicator for **Intangible Heritage (C3)**, where every community—Remanso, Venado, La Ceiba, Caño Raya, and Playa Blanca—achieved a score of **1**. This is the only indicator in Section C where all five communities show consistent, non-zero compliance, indicating a foundational level of support for local traditions, arts, and gastronomy across the entire destination.
- **Significant Disparity in Guide Training and Professionalization:** There is a marked contrast in the provision of training for guides (C6e). **La Ceiba** shows full compliance with a score of **3**, while **Remanso and Venado** show moderate compliance with scores of **2**. In sharp contrast, **Caño Raya and Playa Blanca** have a score of **0**, indicating a significant gap in professional capacity between the more established and closest to the Mavecurre Hills and the more remote or emerging communities closer to the Venezuela border.
- **La Ceiba as the Leader in Cultural Governance:** **La Ceiba** consistently outperforms the other communities in cultural sustainability, achieving an average of **1.2**, which is more than double the general average. It is the only community to register any compliance (score of 1) in **Site Interpretation (C7)** and **Visitor Management actions (C6b)**. This identifies La Ceiba as having a more developed, though still incomplete, framework for managing cultural tourism compared to its peers.
- **Critical Governance Gaps in Intellectual Property and Artifact Protection:** There is a total absence of formal systems to protect **Intellectual Property (C5)** and laws governing the sale or display of **Cultural Artifacts (C2)**. All five communities recorded a score of **0** for these indicators. This demonstrates a shared vulnerability regarding the legal protection of community rights and historical items against potential tourism-related exploitation.
- **Absence of Monitoring for Traditional Community Access:** The assessment reveals that none of the destinations (Remanso, Venado, La Ceiba, Caño Raya, Playa Blanca) monitor or protect **Traditional Access (C4)** to natural and cultural sites for local residents. Every community scored **0** for this indicator, signifying that the impact of tourism on local access to ancestral lands has not yet been integrated into the destination management framework.
- **Absolute Management Failure in Caño Raya and Playa Blanca Cultural Sites:** For the sub-section **C(b) Visiting Cultural Sites**, both **Caño Raya and Playa Blanca** registered a score of **0.0**. They lack visitor flow monitoring, guidelines for behavior at sensitive sites, and training for guides. This trend indicates that cultural tourism in these two communities currently lacks any formal management structure or impact mitigation strategy.

- **Lack of Formal Policy and Identification of Cultural Assets:** Compliance for the **Protection of Cultural Assets (C1)** is **0** across all communities. The data indicates an absence of comprehensive lists of cultural assets, vulnerability assessments, or rehabilitation programs (criteria C1 a, b, and

Table 6 Section C: Cultural Sustainability

SECTION C: CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY (Adaptation from de GSTC Destination Criteria v2.0)			0,5	0,7	0,5	1,2	0,1	0,2
			AVERAGE	REMANSO	VENADO	LA CEIBA	CAÑO RAYA	PLAYA BLANCA
C(a) Protecting cultural heritage			0,26	0,3	0,1	0,6	0,1	0,2
C1 Protection of cultural assets The destination has a policy and system to evaluate, rehabilitate, and conserve cultural assets, including built heritage and cultural landscapes.	a. Lists of cultural assets, including evaluation and indication of vulnerability.	SDO	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Program of rehabilitation and conservation of assets.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Mechanisms for using income from tourism to support conservation of cultural assets.		1	1	1	1	1	1
C2 Cultural artefacts The destination has laws governing the proper sale, trade, display, or gifting of historical and archaeological artefacts. The laws are enforced and publicly communicated, including to tourism enterprises and visitors.	a. Reference to relevant laws relating to historical artefacts pertaining in the destination (title, date).	SDO 11	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Evidence of communication of relevant laws to tourism enterprises and visitors.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Evidence of enforcement of relevant laws.		0	0	0	0	0	0
C3 Intangible heritage The destination supports the celebration and protection of intangible cultural heritage, including local traditions, arts, music, language, gastronomy and other aspects of local identity and distinctiveness. The presentation, replication and interpretation of living culture and traditions is sensitive and respectful, seeks to involve and benefit local communities, and provides visitors with an authentic and genuine experience.	a. Identification and listing of intangible cultural heritage.	SDO 11,12	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Examples of celebration and visitor experiences of intangible cultural heritage (events, distinctive products etc.).		0,2	0	0	1	0	0
	c. Evidence of involvement of local and indigenous communities in developing and delivering visitor experiences based on intangible cultural heritage.		1	1	0	3	0	1
	d. Feedback from visitors and local communities on delivery of intangible heritage experiences.		0	0	0	0	0	0
C4 Traditional access The destination monitors, protects, and when necessary, rehabilitates or restores local community access to natural and cultural sites.	a. Monitoreo de accesibilidad a sitios naturales y culturales para la comunidad local.	SDO 11	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Evidencia de compromiso con la comunidad local con respecto al acceso a sitios naturales y culturales.		0,4	1	0	1	0	0
	c. Acción específica para proteger y / o rehabilitar el acceso de la comunidad local.		0	0	0	0	0	0
C5 Intellectual property The destination has a system to contribute to the protection and preservation of intellectual property rights of communities and individuals.	a. Monitoring of accessibility to natural and cultural sites for the local community.	SDO 16	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Evidence of engagement with the local community regarding traditional access.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Specific action to protect and/or rehabilitate local community access.		0	0	0	0	0	0
C(b) Visiting cultural sites			0,3	0,4	0,4	0,6	0,0	0,0
C6 Visitor management at cultural sites The destination has a system for the management of visitors within and around cultural sites, which takes account of their characteristics, capacity and sensitivity and seeks to optimize visitor flow and minimize adverse impacts. Guidelines for visitor behavior at sensitive sites and cultural events are made available to visitors, tour operators and guides before and at the time of the visit.	a. Monitoring of visitor flows and impact on cultural sites, with results shared across the destination.	SDO 11,12	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Evidence of action to manage tourism-related impacts in or around cultural sites.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Existence and distribution of published guidelines on visitor behavior at sensitive sites and cultural events and periodic monitoring of compliance.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. A code of practice for tour operators and tour guides and/or other engagement with them on visitor management at cultural sites.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Provision of training for guides.		1,4	2	2	3	0	0
C7 Site interpretation Accurate interpretative material is provided which informs visitors of the significance of the cultural and natural aspects of the sites they visit. The information is culturally appropriate, developed with host community collaboration, and clearly communicated in languages pertinent to visitors and residents.	a. Provision of informative interpretative material on site and in formats that are accessible pre-arrival.	SDO 4,11	0,2	0	0	1	0	0
	b. Evidence that interpretative material has been well researched and is accurate.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Interpretation material that identifies the significance and sensitivity/fragility of sites.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Evidence of host community collaboration in preparation of relevant interpretative material.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Interpretative material available in relevant languages.		0	0	0	0	0	0

Based on the gap analysis results specifically for **Section D: Environmental Sustainability**, the following findings characterize the current state of tourism in the five communities under study:

- **Absence of Scientific Impact Monitoring for Sensitive Environments:** Criterion **D1** (Protection of sensitive environments) shows that most communities lack systems to monitor and measure tourism impacts (D1a), eradicate invasive species (D1c), or use tourism income specifically for conservation (D1e). While **La Ceiba** shows a score of **3** for biodiversity conservation programs (D1b), the lack of data-driven monitoring (D1a) remains a shared weakness across the five communities, suggesting management is based on observation rather than systematic measurement. Nevertheless, D1f. Communications with visitors and enterprises on reducing spread of alien species has perfect score of 3 for all five communities, this is due to strict control for trafficking of native and endangered species present in this Ramsar ecosystem, with permanent monitoring by the Police and the CDA's jurisdiction.
- **Absolute Systemic Failure in Waste and Emissions Management (D(c)):** Across all five studied communities (Remanso, Venado, La Ceiba, Caño Raya, and Playa Blanca), the sub-section average for Management of Waste and Emissions is **0.0**. This reflects a total lack of guidelines for wastewater treatment (D8), solid waste monitoring (D9), greenhouse gas mitigation (D10), and low-impact transportation (D11). The data reveals that not a single community has implemented even foundational systems for recycling, carbon reporting, or air pollution reduction.
- **High Compliance in Visitor Management Logistics at Natural Sites:** even though this criterion reads like D1, a significant shared strength is identified in criterion **D2** (Visitor management at natural sites). **Remanso, Venado, and La Ceiba** achieve maximum scores of **3** for monitoring visitor flows (D2a), managing impacts from the activity perse (D2b), and distributing behavioral guidelines (D2c). While **Caño Raya and Playa Blanca** share this strength in flow monitoring and impact management, they show a slightly lower capacity in the provision of guide training compared to the other three communities.
- **Critical Gap in Destination-Wide Codes of Practice for Operators:** Despite the high scores in visitor management, a recurring weakness is found in criterion **D2d** (Code of practice for tour operators and tour guides), which scores **0** in every community. This evidence highlights a shared disconnect between community-level visitor management and the formalization of professional standards for the external operators who bring visitors into these natural environments. Important to say, that in findings in previous phase, La Ceiba stood up for sustainable practices but, this have to do with the fact that ecotourism activities are promoted by a specific operator, Aroma Verde (Giraldo,2021: Carrillo,2021). But there is no evidence form the community side to make control codes.
- **Remanso as the Destination Leader in Environmental Sustainability:** Remanso exhibits the highest overall average for Section D at **2.1**, significantly outperforming the general average of 1.4 and the low scores of 0.9 found in Caño Raya and Playa Blanca, Remanso's leading position is primarily driven by its unique strengths in resource management (D(b)) and higher scores in species protection (D4) relative to its peers.

- **Geographical Disparity in Energy Conservation Efforts:** The results reveal a stark difference in energy efficiency and renewable energy management (D5). **Remanso and Venado** show active engagement with scores of **2 and 1** respectively, indicating the existence of some energy targets or renewable investments. Conversely, **La Ceiba, Caño Raya, and Playa Blanca** score **0** in this criterion, showing no system to encourage energy monitoring or reduction among tourism enterprises.
- **Universal Neglect of Water Stewardship and Quality Monitoring:** A systemic absence of water-related governance is evident across the entire destination. Criteria **D6** (Water stewardship) and **D7** (Water quality) receive scores of **0** in all five communities, The data indicates that water risk is not assessed, water consumption is not monitored, and quality standards for drinking or ecological purposes are not publicly reported or monitored in any of these areas.
- **Concentration of Professional Capacity in Central Communities:** A pattern of professionalization inequality emerges regarding guide training (D2f). **Remanso, Venado, and La Ceiba** achieved scores of **3**, indicating established training programs. In contrast, **Caño Raya and Playa Blanca** scored only **1**, revealing a notable gap in the human capital development required for environmental interpretation and impact mitigation in these more outlying areas.

Table 7 Section D Environmental Sustainability

SECCION D: ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (Adaptation from de GSTC Destination Criteria v2.0)			1,4	2,1	1,5	1,4	0,9	0,9
			AVERAGE	REMANSO	VENADO	LA CEIBA	CANO RAYA	PLAYA BLANCA
D(a) Conservation of natural heritage			1,1	1,1	1,0	1,4	0,9	0,9
D1 Protection of sensitive environments The destination has a system to monitor, measure and respond to the impacts of tourism on the natural environment, conserve ecosystems, habitats and species, and prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species.	a. List of natural heritage sites and assets, indicating type, conservation status and vulnerability.	SDO 14,15	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Program to conserve biodiversity and natural heritage.		1,4	1	1	3	1	1
	c. Program to eradicate and control invasive species.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Action to identify, monitor and mitigate tourism impacts on biodiversity and natural heritage.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Mechanisms for using income from tourism to support conservation of natural assets.		0,2	0	0	1	0	0
	f. Communications with visitors and enterprises on reducing spread of alien species.		3	3	3	3	3	3
D2 Visitor management at natural sites The destination has a system for the management of visitors within and around natural sites, which takes account of their characteristics, capacity and sensitivity and seeks to optimize visitor flow and minimize adverse impacts. Guidelines for visitor behavior at sensitive sites are made available to visitors, tour operators and guides before and at the time of the visit.	a. Monitoring of visitor flows and impact on natural sites, with results shared across the destination.	SDO 14,15	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Evidence of action to manage and mitigate tourism-related impacts in or around natural sites.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Existence and distribution of published guidelines on visitor behavior at sensitive sites, and periodic monitoring of compliance.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. A code of practice for tour operators and tour guides and/or other engagement with them on visitor management at natural sites.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Cooperation with local conservation bodies to identify environmental risks associated with tourism and measures to reduce them.		0,4	1	0	1	0	0
	f. Provision of training for guides.		1,4	1	1	3	1	1
D3 Wildlife interaction The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards for wildlife interactions. Interactions with free roaming wildlife, taking into account cumulative impacts, are non-invasive and responsibly managed to avoid adverse impacts on the animals concerned and, on the viability, and behavior of populations in the wild.	a. Reference (title, date) to international, national and local laws that apply in the destination regarding interaction with wildlife.	SDO 14,15	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Endorsement of international standards for wildlife viewing for both marine and terrestrial species.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Distribution of a code of practice for wildlife interaction, including viewing, which reflects international standards.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. System for checking compliance with regulations, and code of practice amongst tourism operations.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Actions to monitor wildlife wellbeing and minimize disturbance, in locations where interactions occur.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	f. Provision of information to visitors on harmful wildlife interaction, such as touching and feeding.		0	0	0	0	0	0
D4 Species exploitation and animal welfare The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards that seek to ensure animal welfare and conservation of species (animals, plants and all living organisms). This includes the harvesting or capture, trade, display, and sale of wildlife species and their products. No species of wild animal is acquired, bred or held captive, except by authorized and suitably equipped persons and for properly regulated activities. Housing, care and handling of all wild and domestic animals meets the highest standards of animal welfare.	a. Reference (title, date) to specific international, national and local laws, standards and guidelines that apply in the destination regarding animal welfare and conservation of species.	SDO 14,15	3	3	3	3	3	3
	b. Notification of laws, standards and guidelines to tourism enterprises and guides.		3	3	3	3	3	3
	c. A system for inspection of the conditions of captive wildlife and domestic animals, including their housing and handling.		3	3	3	3	3	3
	d. Licensing and checking of qualifications of personnel responsible for captive wildlife.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Action to promote the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in the tourism sector and to ensure compliance with it.		3	3	3	3	3	3
	f. Provision of information to visitors on avoiding trade in endangered species, e.g. in purchase of souvenirs derived from threatened species of wildlife notified by IUCN or CITES.		2,2	3	3	3	1	1
	g. Enforcement of legislation to ensure that any hunting activity is part of a scientifically based, properly managed and strictly enforced approach to conservation.							
			3	3	3	3		3

D(b) Resource management			0,3	1	0,5	0	0	0
D5 Energy conservation The destination has targets to reduce energy consumption, improve efficiency in its use, as well as increase the use of renewable energy. The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, reduce, and publicly report their contribution to these targets.	a. Energy consumption targets are publicized and promoted.	SDO 7	0,6	2	1	0	0	0
	b. Program to increase energy efficiency – e.g. promoting and supporting insulation.		0,6	2	1	0	0	0
	c. Investment in renewable energy and percent of total provision/consumption.		0,6	2	1	0	0	0
	d. Support and incentives for energy monitoring and reduction by enterprises.		0,6	2	1	0	0	0
D6 Water stewardship The destination encourages enterprises to measure, monitor, publicly report and manage water usage. Water risk in the destination is assessed and documented. In cases of high water risk, water stewardship goals are identified and actively pursued with enterprises, to ensure that tourism use does not conflict with the needs of local communities and ecosystems.	a. Provision of guidance and support for monitoring and reduction of water usage by enterprises.	SDO 6	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Program to regularly assess water risk.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Setting, publication and enforcement of water stewardship goals, where water risk has been assessed as high.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Monitoring and control of sources and volume of water used for tourism purposes and its effect on local communities and ecosystems. Promotion and checking of adherence to goals by tourism enterprises.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Visitor information on water risk and minimizing water use.		0	0	0	0	0	0
D7 Water quality The destination monitors water quality for drinking, recreational and ecological purposes using quality standards. The monitoring results are publicly available, and the destination has a system to respond in a timely manner to water quality issues. El destino monitorea la calidad del agua con fines de consumo, recreativos y ecológicos utilizando estándares de calidad. Los resultados del monitoreo están disponibles públicamente, y el destino tiene un sistema para responder de manera oportuna a los problemas de calidad del agua.	a. Program of water quality monitoring.	SDO 3,6	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Existence of data and reports on water quality.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Monitoring bathing water, with certification and identification of sites reaching set standards.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Evidence of actions to improve water quality.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Information for visitors on quality of local drinking water, to encourage use as alternative to bottled water.		0	0	0	0	0	0
D(c) Management of waste and emissions			0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
D8 Wastewater The destination has clear and enforced guidelines in place for the siting, maintenance and testing of discharge from septic tanks and wastewater treatment systems. The destination ensures that wastes are properly treated and reused or released safely without adverse impacts on the local population and the environment.	a. Written guidelines and regulations on wastewater treatment.	SDO 14,15	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. System of enforcing guidelines amongst enterprises		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Monitoring/testing of released wastewater.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Provision of sustainable municipal water treatment systems, for use by the tourism sector, where practical and appropriate.		0	0	0	0	0	0
D9 Solid waste The destination measures and reports on its generation of waste and sets targets for its reduction. It ensures solid waste is properly treated and diverted from landfill, with provision of a multiple-stream collection and recycling system which effectively separates waste by type. The destination encourages enterprises to avoid, reduce, reuse, and recycle solid waste, including food waste. Action is taken to eliminate or reduce single- use items, especially plastics. Any residual solid waste that is not reused or recycled is disposed of safely and sustainably.	a. Waste monitoring program, with results and targets published.	SDO 12,14,15	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Coordinated campaign/advice/support with tourism enterprises on waste management, including food waste.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Campaign to reduce/eliminate single use items, especially plastics.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Waste management program for public offices and facilities.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Provision of a collection and recycling system, with at least four streams (i.e. organic, paper, metal, glass and plastic).		0	0	0	0	0	0
	f. Provision of sustainable system for disposal of residual waste.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	g. Campaign to eliminate dropping of litter, including by visitors, and to keep public spaces clean.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	h. Adequate bins for separated waste disposal.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	a. Published target for percentage of emissions reduction by specified date.	SDO 13	0	0	0	0	0	0

D10 GHG emissions and climate change mitigation The destination has targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and implements and reports on mitigation policies and actions. Enterprises are encouraged to measure, monitor, reduce or minimize, publicly report and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including from suppliers and service providers). Offsetting of any remaining emissions is encouraged.	b. Annual climate report, including monitoring and mitigation actions.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Supported campaign or other engagement with tourism enterprises on reduction and mitigation of emissions.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Action to reduce emissions from public sector operations.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Information for enterprises and visitors on offsetting schemes that meet recognized standards.		0	0	0	0	0	0
D11 Low-impact transportation The destination has targets to reduce transport emissions from travel to and within the destination. An increase in the use of sustainable, low-emissions vehicles and public transport and active travel (e.g., walking and cycling) is sought in order to reduce the contribution of tourism to air pollution, congestion and climate change. El destino tiene objetivos para reducir las emisiones de transporte del viaje hacia y dentro del destino. Se busca un aumento en el uso de vehículos sostenibles con bajas emisiones y transporte público y viajes activos (por ejemplo, caminar y usar bicicleta) para reducir la contribución del turismo a la contaminación del aire, la congestión y el cambio climático.	a. Investment in more sustainable transport infrastructure, including public transport and low emissions vehicles.	SDO 9	0	0	0	0	0	0
	b. Information promoted to visitors on alternative transport options to and within the destination		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Data on visitor use of alternative transport modes.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	d. Improvement and promotion of cycling and walking opportunities.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	e. Prioritization of visitor markets accessible by short and more sustainable transport options.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	f. Public sector and tourism enterprises prioritize low-impact transportation in their own operations.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	a. Guidelines on light and noise pollution – produced and promoted to tourism enterprises.	SDO 3,11	0	0	0	0	0	0
D12 Light and noise pollution The destination has guidelines and regulations to minimize light and noise pollution. The destination encourages enterprises to follow these guidelines and regulations.	b. Identification and monitoring of potential sources of noise and light pollution related to tourism.		0	0	0	0	0	0
	c. Mechanisms to enable residents to report noise and light pollution, with follow-up action.		0	0	0	0	0	0

4. Discussion and guidelines resulting from gap analysis

One of the key findings in the characterization of the unified tourism destination is the existence of the Ramsar Committee, a coordination space between tourism stakeholders and the Wetland Sustainability Council (CSH), which demonstrates potential for environmental and sustainable tourism governance processes (Fierro Castro, 2018; Palomino Villavicencio et al., 2016). However, aside from the Bird Guide project with the SINCHI Institute, the other initiatives show a top-down approach, lacking effective community participation (Usma O et al., 2021; Fierro Castro, 2018).

The increase in visitors to Inírida between 2021 and 2022 (Inírida Tourism Secretariat, 2022) confirms Soshkin's (2020) assertion regarding the preference for destinations with natural richness. The destination's structure corresponds to the tourism supra-system model (Varisco, 2012; Gómez, 2019), although there are still gaps in security, health, and systematized tourist data, which are necessary for planning.

The tourism product is consistent with alternative tourism modalities (Ibañez & Rodríguez, 2012b; Salcedo Guzmán & San Martín Reboloso, 2012; WTO, 2019). However, only La Ceiba shows ecotourism practices aligned with legal and academic definitions (Law No. 2068, 2020; Martínez Quintana, 2017; WTO, 2019), thanks to ASOMEGUA and the operator Aroma Verde.

Regarding criterion A of the GSTC-D (2019), strengths were identified in governance (criterion A1) and planning in La Ceiba. However, there is weakness in impact monitoring (A3), community participation (A5), and tourist surveys (A6), which limits adaptive planning and affects Sustainable Development Goals. (Gap Analysis Phase). Section B on socioeconomic sustainability reveals that, except for cases like ASOMEGUA and the investment in ASOCRIGUA in Remanso, there is weak distribution of tourism benefits (Salcedo Guzmán & San Martín Reboloso, 2012). Exclusion persists in terms of health, safety, and accessibility, contrary to the principle of tourism for all (Law No. 2068, 2020).

In the cultural dimension, tourism in host communities reflects a loss of ancestral practices, consistent with what Salazar et al. (2006b), who warned about ethnocide processes. Nevertheless, there is potential to rebuild patrimonial value and communicate it as a tourism experience. Regarding environmental sustainability, the knowledge on biodiversity documented in sources such as Biodiversity of the Inírida Fluvial Star (2014, 2018, 2021) stands out, although it is not incorporated into tourism operations (Giraldo Ospina et al., 2014). Only La Ceiba shows integration of this knowledge when tours are operated by Aroma Verde Ong. Likewise, the destination faces challenges in renewable energy, waste, and sanitation.

Once the characterization and gap assessment are complete, key actions can be detected to guide the destination toward the early adoption of regulations. This will enable safer operations, reduce cultural and environmental impacts, and reinforce tourism governance. (WTO, 2019; GSTC, 2019; Law 2068, 2020).

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Table 8 Guidelines for a more sustainable practice from the Governance point of view

Guideline	Subsystem
1. Inter-institutional coordination	It is recommended to integrate the Secretariats of Health, Security, Infrastructure, Planning, and Transit into the tourism system to guarantee equitable access to essential services such as healthcare, connectivity, river safety, and energy solutions in host communities. This would support participatory and effective governance (Giraldo Ospina et al., 2014).
2. Dissemination of key information	The flow of information between levels of the tourism system must be strengthened. It is proposed to share with communities the 2021 environmental management plans related to tourism, as well as the findings of the study "Characterization of Natural and Anthropogenic Risks in the Department of Guainía" (Giraldo Ospina et al., 2014), with the support of the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management.
3. Strategic communication of the destination	It is suggested to use precise terms such as nature tourism, rural tourism, ethno-tourism, adventure tourism, and birdwatching. In the case of La Ceiba, the use of "ecotourism" is appropriate due to its alignment with sustainable practices (Law 2068, 2020; Salcedo Guzmán & San Martín Reboloso, 2012). Moreover, the importance of attracting conscious and responsible tourists is emphasized (Díaz, ATTA, cited in Fierro Castro, 2018).
4. Workshop with communities to use GSTC-D tool in this study	It is recommended to implement the self-assessment exercise using the proposed tool, which would strengthen the Ramsar Committee as a governance mechanism. This exercise would enable adaptive, evidence-based planning and avoid bias (GSTC, 2019).
5. Indicator monitoring	The implementation of a progressive monitoring system for the indicators in the four GSTC-d sections is a priority, starting with Section C (Cultural Sustainability), which has shown the highest feasibility, followed by the remaining criteria. This should be led by the Ramsar Committee.
6. Understanding visitor profiles	It is recommended to implement a data collection system at the César Gaviria Trujillo Airport to learn about traveler profiles and motivations, in compliance with the Habeas Data Law (Article 15, 2003).
7. Transparency in benefit distribution	It is crucial to promote clear agreements on tourism rates and income distribution within the framework of the Wetland Sustainability Council (CSH). Transparency and economic empowerment of communities can help counter illegal economies present in the region (Fierro Castro, 2018; WTO, 2019).

8. Replication of the La Ceiba model	The case of La Ceiba demonstrates a successful link between conservation and tourism. It is recommended to document its practices and replicate them in other communities in the municipality.
9. Clear and participatory finances	It is suggested that the Inirida Mayor's Office organize accountability spaces regarding the use of tourism revenue and implement participatory mechanisms to define its future allocation.
10. Risk prevention	It is proposed to train tour operators and communities in risk prevention and safety. SENA should lead this training, funded through tourism resources and self-management strategies (Giraldo Ospina et al., 2014).
11. Formalization of transport	Land (moto taxi or tuk tuk) and river transport must be regulated through technical inspection brigades and pilot certification to ensure visitor safety when entering communities.
12. Cultural and religious inclusion	Tourism can be integrated with the cultural and religious practices of each community, including ancestral medicine, cuisine, artisanal fishing, and hunting, always through prior consultation and benefit-sharing schemes.
13. Strengthening of ecotourism	It is recommended to design tourism experiences in which visitors participate in traditional activities (fishing, use of medicinal plants, crafting utensils), promoting respect for and appreciation of ancestral knowledge.
14. Energy and water solutions	Public-private partnerships are proposed to implement non-conventional renewable energy solutions (Law 2099, 2021) and improve access in communities such as La Ceiba and Playa Blanca. For water resources, solutions such as artificial wetlands inspired by natural biological processes are highlighted (Correa, 2022).
15. Waste management	A municipal program for tourism waste management is essential, including waste separation at the source, environmental education for visitors and communities, and strengthening municipal collection.
16. Port infrastructure	Adequate infrastructure is needed for tourist embarkation and disembarkation, separate from commercial cargo. Only Remanso has a functional port; other communities such as La Ceiba, Venado, and Playa Blanca require urgent intervention (Giraldo Ospina et al., 2014).
17. Connectivity and communication	To eliminate connectivity barriers, a radio communication system is proposed to connect communities with the capital without relying on satellite signal. This would strengthen tourism operations and access to basic rights.

5. Conclusions

The application of the GSTC-D (2019) international standard criteria has made it possible to map strengths, opportunities, and gaps in the local tourism system. Beyond serving as an evaluation framework, these criteria present themselves as a practical guide for any community to design its tourism operation gradually, adaptively, and participatively, always under a responsible governance approach. It is recommended that these results be validated through consensus and the participation of the local actors identified in this study, using the tools developed for it, to mitigate the biases that can result from third-party research.

In summary, the implementation of tools such as the GSTC-D criteria, combined with spaces for active governance, turns tourism into a powerful strategy not only for generating income but also for conserving natural and cultural heritage. This vision is especially relevant in territories like this, where biodiversity and ancestral knowledge are essential assets for the future of the planet.

The analysis reveals a five-community destination with strong potential for sustainable tourism development, thanks to its biological and cultural richness, as evidenced by the presence of the Inírida Fluvial Star (EFI), designated as a Ramsar site. However, it also highlights deep internal inequalities and structural weaknesses in governance, basic infrastructure, cultural integration, and environmental management, configuring a fragile scenario in the face of high demand and uncontrolled tourism, calling for a comprehensive, strategic, and urgent intervention.

Among the priorities is the need to strengthen basic infrastructure—energy, water, and waste management—along with promoting organizational and entrepreneurial capacities in communities, such as bilingual and inherited tribe visions to share with visitors through ecotourist practices.

It is also essential to intentionally integrate cultural heritage into the tourism offer, recognizing it as a central stage of the tourism product rather than being a complimentary asset. This integration must be accompanied by clear policies for impact management, viewed in the section C: Cultural Sustainability.

Platforms such as the Ramsar Committee and the Wetlands Council, led by the CDA Environmental Corporation, represent key inter-institutional governance spaces to enable this articulation and promote joint decision-making not seeing in operational activities in tourism by the time of the research.

6. Data Availability

All data availability necessary to do this analysis will be available and open when Publication is due. This includes the Interviews in Spanish texts, the Excel custom made logbook for the gap analysis using the GSTC-D 2019 and open Excel archive with Oppen Coddling.

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