

Towards Strategic Excellence: Analyzing Strategic Planning Practices In Smes Within Riohacha's Tourism Sector

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to analyze the principles of strategic planning in SMEs in the tourism sector located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha. The text was theoretically grounded by Lopera (2014), Martínez (2013), González (2014), Armijo (2009), Sánchez (2010), Benedetti and Romero (2016), Mejía and Bolaño (2014), among others. The paradigm from which the research was developed was of a positivist nature, under the hypothetical-deductive method, descriptive and documentary type, with a field and bibliographic design. The study population consisted of hotels and restaurants registered in the Chamber of Commerce of La Guajira, and a non-probabilistic sampling was used, leaving seven hotels and eight restaurants selected. One of the main findings was that Riohacha's economic, cultural, and tourism environment is favorable for the consolidation of SMEs. Likewise, there was evidence of a poor application of the principles of strategic planning in SMEs, expressed by the lack of a human talent management system, the poor use of technological resources and the absence of a marketing plan. The main conclusions were that there is a weakness in the implementation of human talent management subsystems; little importance was given to the use of information and communication technologies to access and compete in international markets, and there was no evidence of strategic plans to position the companies in the international market.

Keywords: SME, strategic planning, tourism sector, Riohacha.

1. Introduction

The importance of SMEs has several aspects: firstly, they are a source of employment for, mainly, economically disadvantaged people; ¹secondly, they promote the economic and social development of a given locality; thirdly, they provide support to large companies, helping to solve some production-related problems; and fourthly, they generate their employment for people with entrepreneurial initiatives.

The economic spectrum is fundamental for the development of SMEs, considering the dynamism of this spectrum given the progressive globalization experienced by the economies of the region as they integrate into world economies.

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This has led Latin American countries to turn their attention to untapped economic potential, such as tourism, to promote the creation and development of SMEs. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), by the year 2015, SMEs in the tourism sector will represent up to 10% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and will account for up to 11% of global employment, equivalent to 2.6 million jobs.

However, in Colombia, tourism activity has been poorly organized. It was in 2002 that tourism began to develop as an indicator of economic growth, given the climate of confidence and security experienced in the country, the tax incentives implemented and the rescue of foreign investment: fundamental aspects for the transformation of tourism.

Likewise, the economic development strategy agreed in 2011 under the name Pacific Alliance, agreed by the leaders of Chile, Mexico, Peru and Colombia to move towards the free movement of goods, services, capital and people, contributed significantly to the development of tourism activity (Chavarro and Sellamén, 2016).

Being more specific with the content of this work, in July 2015, through Law 1766, the Colombian Congress granted Riohacha the category of Special, Tourist and Cultural District, given the existing vocations and potentialities of the region.

In addition to the above, SMEs have experienced growth in the district. In 2014, there were 298 small companies (224 in 2013) and 47 medium-sized companies (38 in 2013), according to figures from the Chamber of Commerce of La Guajira.

In general, all companies, regardless of their capacity and the economic sector in which they operate, must increase their productivity and competitiveness to remain in the market. This implies an organization with a mission, vision, objectives and functions established and aligned with the business strategy. Likewise, they must establish a marketing plan that will allow them to capture the opportunities of the environment, and new clients and build the loyalty of the existing ones.

Considering the previously established premises, and adding the scientific initiative, it was decided to undertake a study to analyze the principles of strategic planning in the SMEs of the tourism sector located in the Special Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha.

In this regard, this work presents the results of the study divided into three parts. In the first part, the structural elements of the research are addressed in four sections: a first chapter dedicated to stating the premises of the research; a second chapter in which the previous research related to the study is developed; a third chapter dedicated to establishing the theoretical foundations of the research; and a fourth chapter in which a methodological characterization of the research is carried out.

The second part of this study, entitled Main manifestations of the problem, presents Chapter V, which refers to the analysis and discussion of the research results.

Finally, the third part of the study is dedicated to the final considerations, where conclusions and recommendations are presented. All that remains is to make available to the knowledge society, for its socialization, the scientific contents presented in the sections specified above.

2. Objectives

2.1 General objective

To analyze the principles of strategic planning for SMEs in the tourism sector in the district of Riohacha, La Guajira.

2.2 Specific objectives

- To conduct an analysis of the external environment of SMEs in the tourism sector located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha.
- To identify the internal organizational capacities of SMEs in the tourism sector located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha.

- To propose strategies for the application of the principles of strategic planning in the SMEs located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha.

3. Methodology

A method is a way, a means used to reach an end. In other words, it is a scientific path followed to reach a certain end. In this sense, the phenomenon, social fact or problem is studied from the whole to the parts; the theory is operationalized to obtain the elements (the parts) of the theoretical construct as a whole.

The method involves extracting consequences from a principle, proposition or assumption. Now, the positivist paradigm corresponds to the hypothetico-deductive method. It is an outline of confirmation and refutation of hypotheses or research objectives. In this confirmation, there is a process that goes from the particular to the general -induction- when studying certain phenomena, and then concluding with the creation of new laws or applying them to particular facts -deduction- (Hurtado and Toro, 2005).

According to Palella and Martins (2010), the hypothetic-deductive method consists of proposing a hypothesis, then deducing from it directly verifiable consequences in reality, and finally confronting these consequences with the facts to determine whether or not the hypotheses are sustainable (Hurtado and Toro, 2005).

In this sense, the essential steps for the development of a research according to this method are: a) observe the phenomenon or social fact to be studied; b) create a hypothesis or objectives to explain the said phenomenon or social fact; c) deduce the consequences or elementary propositions; and d) verify or check the truth of the statements by comparing them with the results.

It should be pointed out that not all studies developed under the hypothetic-deductive method propose hypotheses. This depends on the scope of the research. In this sense, hypotheses are formulated when the scope is correlational or explanatory, and in descriptive studies only when an attempt is made to predict a figure or a fact (Hernández et al., 2014).

3.1 Type of research

Given that the objectives of the study were considered from a documentary and field perspective, its development is circumscribed to two types of research: descriptive and documentary.

According to Palella and Martins (2010), the purpose of descriptive research is to interpret factual realities, which includes search, description, analysis and interpretation of data, composition or processes of phenomena.

This type of research will contribute information to the analysis of variables of the internal environment of SMEs, as well as provide guidelines for their behavior within the context of the project. Likewise, the descriptive research will be used basically in the analysis of the field objective (number 2) referred to identify the internal capacities of the SMEs of the tourism sector of the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha and everything related to the internal environment of the companies, since it allows to point out scenarios and procedures of the said variable expected in the analysis.

These approaches are supported by Chávez (2007) when he points out that descriptive research are aimed at collecting data or characteristics related to the real state of the study phenomenon, as they are presented at the moment of their collection.

On the other hand, considering the parameters to which the category related to the documentary objective (number 1) is subject in terms of analyzing the external environment of SMEs, a documentary type of research was necessary. In this sense, Montero and Hochman (2005) point out that documentary research is that in which the researcher systematically analyzes a set of valid documentation to clarify the application of concepts.

For his part, Chávez (2007, p. 137) defines documentary studies as "those conducted based on documents or bibliographic review (...) to collect information from written and non-written documents susceptible of being analyzed". Consequently, the approach to the documentary objective followed the criteria of the aforementioned authors in that the various sources that constitute the units of analysis were analyzed.

3.2 Research design

Regarding the research design, the study was considered a field study, according to Bavaresco (2001), who states that for this type of case the source of the knowledge sought is the same reality being investigated, that is, it is carried out at the site where the object of study is located, allowing a more detailed knowledge of the problem.

In this sense, the field study allows the handling of data with greater security, covering greater precision on the variable, because the information was obtained directly in the SMEs of the tourism sector, which constitute the study scenario for the application of the principles of strategic planning.

On the bases exposed by Hernández et al. (2014), the research was also considered non-experimental, since the variable involved in the study is not manipulated, proceeding to the analysis of the already existing situation to determine the characteristics that help to solve the problem through the observation of the phenomenon as it is presented in its natural context.

Based on the criteria established by the authors mentioned in the previous paragraph, a transactional design was established, since, for the development of the field objective, data collection was carried out at a single moment, describing the variable for the analysis of its incidence and interrelation in the present time.

About the research design used to approach the documentary objective was of the bibliographic type. Accordingly, the methodological treatment of the category of analysis of the external environment of SMEs was done through the review of different documents that constitute units of analysis. As Montero and Hochman (2005) refer, bibliographic designs are based on the execution of a set of steps focused on analyzing documentation, so that scientific conclusions can be drawn on the analyzed subject matter.

3.3 Research design

According to Hernández et al. (2014), the population is defined as the set of all the cases that agree with a series of specifications and particular characteristics, in terms of content, place, time or any other criterion established by the researcher. It is made up of the elements, beings or objects that contain the measurements or observations required in the research.

Given that the research alludes to the SMEs of the tourism sector located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha, the hotels and restaurants registered in the Chamber of Commerce of La Guajira were selected.

About the sample, Chávez (2007, p. 145) defines it as a representative portion of the population, which allows generalizing the results of an investigation".

There are two types of samples: probabilistic sample and non-probabilistic sample; the latter includes intentional sampling. According to Vieytes (2004, p. 403), "the purposive sample is characterized by a deliberate effort to obtain representative samples through the inclusion in the sample of supposedly typical groups". Since SMEs in the tourism sector have common characteristics, the researchers established five criteria for selecting the purposive sample, namely:

- SMEs located in the areas with the greatest influx of tourists in the district.
- SMEs most recognized in the sector.
- SMEs with more than five years of operation.
- SMEs with a documented organizational profile.
- SMEs with an established and functioning management structure.

In this regard, the sample consisted of seven hotels and eight restaurants identified in Table 1.

Hotels	Restaurants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gimaura ▪ Taroa ▪ Arimaca ▪ Apartahotel Las Delicias ▪ Las Vegas ▪ Arenas ▪ Brisas del Norte 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yotojoro ▪ Delicias Arabes ▪ Sazón Internacional ▪ La Tinaja ▪ La Cascada ▪ La Parrilla ▪ Kikos ▪ La Casa del Marisco

Table 1. Conformation of the sample

Source: Gómez, Santos and Castrillón (2016).

From the perspective of bibliographic design documentary research, the population were documentary sources. Among them are: Dirección Nacional de Estadística (2005), Informe de Coyuntura Económica Regional Departamento de La Guajira (2012), Puyana, Ramos and Zarate (2011), among others.

3.4 Data collection techniques and instruments

From the documentary research approach of bibliographic design, the data collection technique was the documentary review since the analysis was made directly from the bibliographic material selected by the researchers as units of analysis. In this regard, Arias (2016, p. 155) points out that these techniques "are the different forms or ways of obtaining information. Examples of techniques are: direct observation, the survey in its two modalities (interview or questionnaire), documentary observation".

For his part, Mendicoa (2003) points out that the documentary review makes use of various documents that make up units of analysis on which the researcher will provide his treatment inspired by his perceptions and interpretations, different from those that can be the object of quantification. This technique can be used as an observation instrument in which coding categories are developed as concretely as possible, to select those categories that enhance logical relationships according to the research objectives (Mendicoa, 2013).

For the specific case of this research, an observation script was designed to measure the external environment category of SMEs.

4. Results

The results presented in this chapter correspond to the work presented by Gómez et al. (2016) under the research project modality, whose objective was to analyze the principles of strategic planning in SMEs in the tourism sector located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha. To achieve this objective, three specific objectives were established, the results of which are described below.

Specific Objective 1

Intending to know the factors that directly and indirectly affect the environment of SMEs in the tourism sector and that are not directly controllable, given that they are generated in the economic, social and cultural spheres and can be taken advantage of and converted into opportunities to increase their productivity and competitiveness, the first objective was to analyze the environment of these SMEs.

It should be noted that the information presented in this section is the result of the documentary review, as indicated in the chapter corresponding to the methodological characterization of the research. Aspects such as general information about the department, labor market characterization, tourism potential, business and cultural development, etc., were considered.

General information about the department of La Guajira

The Mayor's Office submitted in September 2014, before the Special Follow-up Commission on the Decentralization and Territorial Planning Process of the House of Representatives, a request to conduct a feasibility and convenience study to convert its District into a new Tourist and Cultural District, following the procedure established in Article 8 of Law 1617 of 2013.

The request referred to in the previous paragraph has its foundation in the declaration of Riohacha as a tourist and cultural center, considering the significant tourism potential it currently has in Colombia. Evidence of this are the geographic, historical, ethnic and multicultural attractions, with the capacity to promote successful tourism industry.

Thus, on July 24, 2015, Law 1766 was enacted granting Riohacha the category of Special, Tourist and Cultural District, which will be governed by Law 1617 of 2013, which establishes the regime for Special Districts and other related regulations.

The department of La Guajira is located in Colombia's Caribbean region, in the extreme north of the country. It covers an area of 20,848 km², representing 13.8% of the Colombian Caribbean region (151,118 km²) and 1.8% of the country's territory (1,141,748 km²). It is bordered to the north by the Caribbean Sea, to the east by the State of Zulia of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the west by the departments of Cesar and Magdalena, and the south by the State of Zulia of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the department of Cesar. It has 15 districts, 44 corregimientos, 69 police inspections, and hamlets known as rancherías (Gómez, Santos and Castrillón, 2016).

The department of La Guajira is ethnically diverse as it is made up of the Wayuu indigenous peoples that extend from the north to the south, the Kogui, Arhuacos and Wiwas, who predominate in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. On the other hand, it has been a recipient of other population groups such as Afro-descendants, Raizales from San Andres and Providencia, Syrians, Palestinians, Jordanians and Lebanese (Bernal, 2016).

According to the 2005 census of the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), the department of La Guajira has an indigenous population that represents 44.9% of the inhabitants and 20.25% of the total indigenous population in Colombia. Likewise, the Afro-descendant population of the department represents 13.45% and the Raizal population represents 0.01%.

According to Gómez et al. (2016), the population distribution by sex in the department of La Guajira is found in a higher proportion of women than men, with a share of 50.5% and 49.5% respectively as shown in Figure 1.

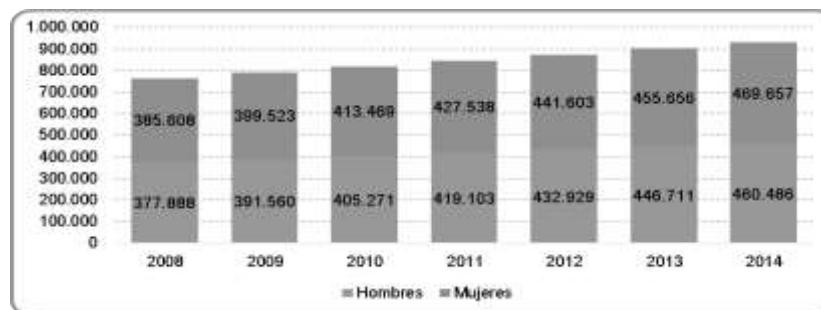


Figure 1. Population by sex, department of La Guajira, 2008-2014.

Source: Own elaboration (2016) based on expanded frequencies of GEIH microdata, Dane.

About the distribution by area, it is observed that 54.8% of the population is located in the headwaters, while 45.2%, in the rural area of the districts (Gómez et al, 2016).

According to the report entitled "Informe de Coyuntura Económica Regional Departamento de La Guajira (ICER)", corresponding to the year 2011, the economy of the department of La Guajira depends mainly on coal mining in the Cerrejón mines and trade developed especially in the district of Riohacha and in the city of Maicao (Gómez et al., 2016).

Manaure is home to the country's most important maritime salt mines and other smaller-scale operations such as gypsum, barite, and gas extraction for domestic and industrial use, which supplies most of the department's districts and numerous cities and towns on the Caribbean coast.

Other economic activities include cattle, goat and sheep farming; corn, sorghum, cassava, beans and sesame; and artisanal fishing. Tourism is also an unexploited sector that offers great potential due to its innumerable natural and cultural attractions.

Characterization of the labor market

This section presents a description of the labor market of the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha, disaggregating the general participation rate, economically active, employed and unemployed population, employment by occupational position, and underemployment and informality.

Working Age Population (WAP).

According to Gómez et al. (2016), the PET, for the 2008-2014 period, registered an average annual growth rate of 0.1%, from 68.7% to 69.1% (Figure 2). This increase was well below that recorded for the total population (TP), which experienced an average annual growth rate of 4.7%. Moreover, in 2009 and 2010 the growth rates were negative, equal to -0.1% for both years.

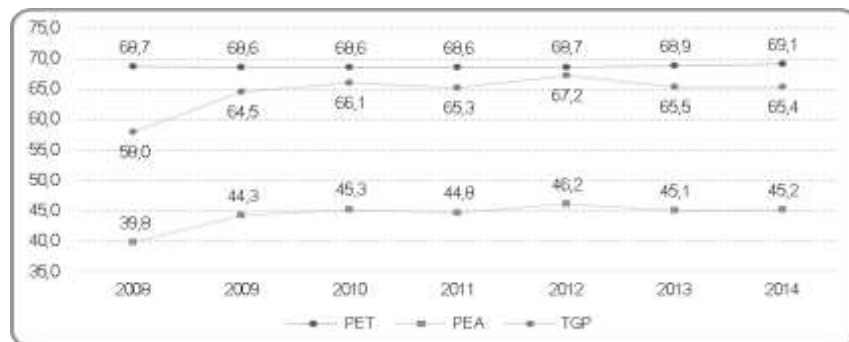


Figure 2. PET, Riohacha PT 2008-2014

Source: Gómez, Santos and Castrillón (2016) based on expanded frequencies of microdata from GEIH, DANE.

Economically active population (EAP)

According to Gómez et al. (2016), for the period under consideration (2008-2014), the EAP of the district registered a relatively low average annual increase (2.2%), when looking at the relative values as a proportion of the total population. In Figure 3, it can be observed that although it has a considerable rebound in 2009 (11.2%), it also has negative behaviors in the years 2011 (-1.2%) and 2013 (-2.4) respectively.

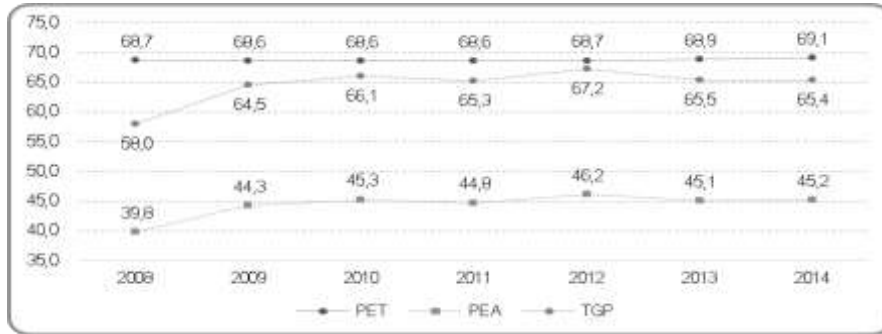


Figure 3. EAP of Riohacha 2008-2014

Source: Gómez, Santos and Castrillón (2016) based on expanded frequencies of microdata from GEIH, DANE.

When examining the absolute values, the increase is considerable, going from 64,165 to 95,951 inhabitants. This means that the labor force of the Special District grew by 7.0% annual average during this period, thereby decreasing the unemployed or unemployed population. This is consistent with the indicators of new business creation and injection of new capital into the business sector (Gómez et al., 2016).

Global participation rate (GPR)

According to Gómez et al. (2016), the GPR in the district registered a slightly increasing trend, going in relative values from 58.0% in 2008 to 65.4% in 2014, resulting in average annual growth of 2.1%. Notwithstanding this growth, the behavior for the periods was not sustained, presenting decreases in 2011 (1.2%) and 2013 (2.6%). These results reflect a greater pressure on the working-age population on the district's labor market.

Occupancy rate (OR)

According to Gómez et al. (2016), the OR of the district presented a sensibly increasing trend in the first years of the period under consideration, going from 47.6% in 2008 to 55.2% in 2009, which meant a growth of 16.1%. For the following period (2010), it was 5.0%, and in the following years the growth rate did not even reach 1.0%. On average, the period in question reached an annual growth of 3.8%.

Following the author referenced in the previous paragraph, in absolute values the employed population increased from 52,657 in 2008 to 86,305 in 2014, that is, it increased by 33,648 people, representing a year-on-year increase of 8.8%. Notwithstanding this record, the behavior for the periods was not sustained, some presented above-average increases such as 2009 (22.1%) and 2010 (10.2%); for 2012, the increase is 5.6%, and for 2014, technically, there is no growth (0.0%) as evidenced in Figure 4. The above denotes a larger working-age population inserted in the labor market of the district.

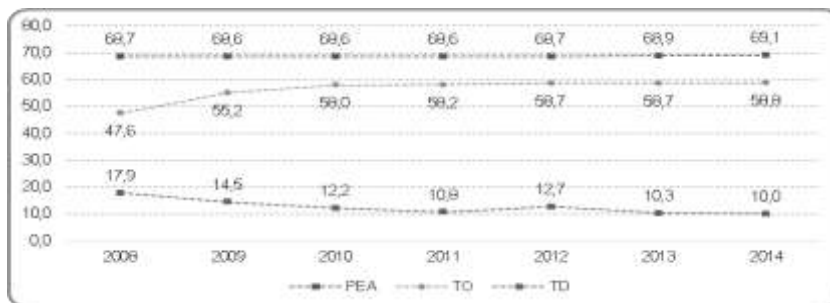


Figure 4. Employed and unemployed population, Riohacha, 2008 - 2014

Source: Gómez, Santos and Castrillón (2016) based on expanded frequencies of GEIH microdata, Dane.

Unemployment rate (UR)

According to Gómez et al. (2016), the TD of the district presented an almost sustained decreasing trend in the period under consideration, going from 17.9% in 2008 to 10.0% in 2014, which meant a decrease of 8.4% annual average. The exception occurred for 2012, with an increase of 17.6%, reaching an unemployment rate of 12.7%, when in 2011 it had been 10.8%. However, in the following years, it remained at around 10.0%.

In absolute values, the unemployed population went from 11,508 in 2008 to 9,646 in 2014, that is, it decreased by 1,862 people, representing a year-on-year decrease of 2.0%. Notwithstanding this record, in 2012 there is a considerable increase of 26.9%, by increasing the number of unemployed by 2,425 people; in 2014 it has a slight increase of 2.1%, by increasing the number of unemployed by 197 people (Graph 10). The above denotes a larger working-age population inserted in the labor market of the Special District (Gómez et al., 2016).

Employment by occupational position

The percentage distribution of the employed population in the district, according to the occupational position of workers, for the period 2008-2014, evidences high participation of self-employed workers, with an average of 58.6%, followed by employees of private companies with 22.5% and government employees with 6.8%. These three occupational positions concentrate on average 87.9% of the total employed population (Gómez et al., 2016).

Occupational position	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Pro
Empleado de una empresa privada	21,8	19,0	20,9	21,0	24,9	26,1	23,9	22,
Government employee	8,2	7,4	7,6	6,2	5,9	6,0	6,0	6,8
Domestic employee	5,6	5,1	4,6	4,7	4,4	4,8	4,0	4,7
Self-employed	57,0	59,7	59,0	61,5	57,9	56,1	58,9	58,
Employer	3,9	3,9	3,2	3,1	3,0	2,5	2,5	3,2
Unpaid worker	3,3	4,8	4,4	3,4	3,8	4,4	4,6	4,1
Other	0,2	0,1	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100

Table 2. Employed population percentage by occupational position, Riohacha, 2008-2014.

Source: Gómez, Santos and Castrillón (2016) based on expanded frequencies of GEIH microdata, DANE.

Underemployment and informality

Underemployment is a measure associated with both an indicator of employment quality and labor utilization (Puyana et al., 2011). Its measurement expresses the underutilization of workers since it records employees with inadequate wages, who are not exploiting their skills to the fullest or who wish to work longer hours to improve their income.

In its measurements, DANE distinguishes between objective underemployment and subjective underemployment. The former comprises those employed persons who, in addition to feeling dissatisfied with their work, have undertaken some concrete action to materialize a change in their labor condition; the latter simply express the desire to improve their income, increase the number of hours worked, or have a job more in line with their skills (Gómez et al., 2016).

In the period 2008-2014, the underemployment rate in the Special District of Riohacha has remained at comparatively high levels, with constant ups and downs, with no substantial sustained improvements in sight. Its real growth was 0.6%. The average number of dissatisfied workers, as a proportion of the labor force, reaches 51.9%, reflecting that more than half of the employed in the Special District perceive that their jobs are of low quality (Gómez et al., 2016). It is worth highlighting that the average rate of subjective underemployment (37.1%), which refers to those workers who are dissatisfied with their job but have not taken steps to change it, is significantly higher than that of objective underemployment (14.8%) throughout the period considered, which could be interpreted as meaning that most of the underemployed did not try to change their working conditions, as can be seen in Figure 5. It is worth clarifying that objective unemployment refers to those workers who state that they are dissatisfied with their job and, in addition, have taken steps to change it (Gómez et al., 2016).

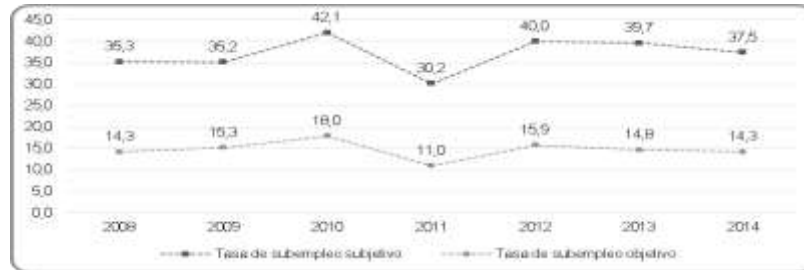


Figure 5. Subjective and objective underemployment, Riohacha 2008-2014.

Source: Gómez, Santos and Castrillón (2016) based on expanded frequencies of microdata from GEIH, DANE.

Gómez et al. (2016) emphasize that informality is a relevant issue, as it is a scourge that negatively affects the tourism sector. For this research, informal economic activities are considered to be all those that involve monetary transactions within legality, but which are deliberately not registered with the competent authorities, to evade or avoid the payment of taxes or payroll contributions, among others.

This group of informal activities includes all unpaid family occupations, day laborers or laborers in companies of five workers or less, unpaid workers in companies of others and self-employed workers in establishments of up to five people except professional freelancers and the like (Gómez et al., 2016).

Taking the percentage of employed persons affiliated with the pension system as an indicator of informality, in the Special District of Riohacha, it is observed that for the period 2008-2014 there is a downward trend; however, the district continues with average rates higher than the national total. The annual average for the period is 75.0% for the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha, while the national average is 66.8%. In effect, for the period under consideration, the informality rate of the Special District decreased from 77.8% in 2008 to 68.1% in 2014, while the rate for the Nation did so from 69.5% to 62.6%. The above figures suggest that the percentage of informal workers in Riohacha is higher than that recorded in the rest of the country (Gómez et al., 2016).

However, according to Benedetti and Romero (2016), La Guajira boasts a particular productive organization, being the third department most dependent on the exploitation of natural resources. In addition, more than half of its production is represented by mining and quarrying.

Business development

According to Gómez et al. (2016), in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha for the year 2008, a total of 11,757 companies were registered in the Chamber of Commerce of La Guajira, 99.1% (11,656) corresponded to micro-enterprises, 0.6% (74) to small enterprises, 0.1% (9) to medium enterprises and 0.2% (18) to large enterprises.

According to the author cited in the preceding paragraph, for the year 2014, the total number of companies shows a slight decrease (1,262 companies), reaching 10,495; micro companies decreased by 1,530 units, reaching 10,126, which corresponds to 96.5%, but there is a slight recovery of the other economic units, which could be interpreted as a transition towards other types of companies or due to the creation of new larger companies. Small businesses grew by 224 units to 298, representing 2.8% of the total. Medium-sized companies grew by 38 units to 47, representing 0.4%. Finally, the large company, despite having increased by 6 companies, is not reflected in percentage terms (0.2%).

The above are factors that SMEs in the tourism sector must take into account to obtain a positive effect on future activities and decisions to be taken, so it is important to know in detail how they are currently moving different elements that may affect the future the processes of the companies.

Cultural development

According to the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development (2015), Riohacha is the capital of the department of La Guajira and is known locally as Süchiimaesta. Riohacha comes from the Wayuunaiki language, Süchii (river) and Mma (land). The city has received other names over time, such as the Portal of Pearls, the Capital of the Magical Trees and the Capital of the Northeast. It also has great potential for the tourism sector, since the city is the main starting point for the different excursions that take place in this beautiful and exotic Colombian region.

In the Guide to La Guajira, published by the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development (2015), several aspects that shape its cultural development are highlighted, which are mentioned below:

- a) Regarding handicrafts: in Riohacha there is a great offer of the wonders of Guajira handicrafts such as chinchorros, blankets, hammocks, and hats, among other objects highly appreciated for their color and quality. It is a good place to organize trips and excursions for tourists to appreciate the spectacular scenery.
- b) The pedestrian tourist pier: the colonial houses, the waterfront boardwalk that encourages walking at night in front of the sea and some beaches on the north side of the mouth of the Rancherías River are worth visiting. The airport offers daily flights to other cities in the country and three hotels for lodging, with good food, and comfortable rooms at reasonable costs. Riohacha, a welcoming city on the banks of the Rancherías River.
- c) Boca Camarones: Located on the Caribbean coast between the town of Camarones and the mouth of the Tapia River. Declared a sanctuary because of the immense number of pink flamingos that live in this area, it has an area of 7,000 hectares.
- d) Casa de Robles: located in Camarones, twenty kilometers from Riohacha. Luis A. Robles, "El Negro" Robles, was born there in 1849. He was one of the most outstanding Guajiros due to his intelligence. He developed an outstanding public life, as secretary of the Treasury, parliamentarian, manager of the Republican University, and journalist. He was a very influential ideologue in the political circles of Bogotá. On the occasion of the centenary of his death, in 1999 it was proposed to convert his birthplace into a national monument.
- e) Festivals: Festival and National Reign of the Dividivi, was born in 1969 under the mandate of the mayor Ernestina Serrano. It is undoubtedly the event that identifies La

- Guajira in the national concert, which integrates the department every year with the rest of the country. It is named after the Dividivi tree, which is considered symbolic of the department since it grows wild there. This festival is celebrated on June 28, 29, 30 and July 1, since the creation of the department of La Guajira is celebrated on this day.
- f) Nuestra Señora de las Remedios Patron Saint's Day: in ancient times these festivities began on January 20 and ended on February 9. They were colorful festivities, with a lot of revelry and community participation, where popular events such as corralejas, verbenas, dances, street dances and horse races predominated.
 - g) The Feast of the Virgen de Los Remedios: it is of great importance for the people of Riohacha since it has the tradition of a cultural religious feast, and perhaps there is no tradition so anchored in the popular soul as that of the Remedios in Riohacha, since its historical roots contribute to the fact that this has happened.

On the other hand, the National Cultural Information System (2015) highlights the Carnival Festival. In this event, it is common the parade of troupes, floats, popular reign, parties in clubs, booths, parade of folkloric groups. The singularity of this carnival is the "embarradores" of Riohacha.

According to Ramírez (2014), in September 2014, the Regional Competitiveness Commission of La Guajira chose the tourism sector as the main competitive route for the Department; however, this important decision, taken by actors from all private sectors, went unnoticed. The different tourism stakeholders have not taken this initiative as their own and continue to develop their partialized concepts of tourism independently, each one pulling for their side but without establishing a single common route to boost the sector both in Riohacha and in Dibulla, Manaure, Uribía and the southern districts of the department.

In 2013, La Guajira was working with Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao on a document of understanding that would allow the approximately 1,500,000 European and American tourists that visit these islands annually to bring around 150,000 each year to La Guajira, thus expanding the tourism offer of these islands. The only thing the tourism stakeholders of these islands asked for was to maintain the natural state of tourist areas such as Cabo de la Vela, Taroa and the indigenous communities. However, they requested the development of a hotel and service infrastructure that would guarantee the wellbeing of these tourists, in addition to adapting the airport for the arrival of international flights from these islands and a dock for the arrival of tourist boats from the islands (Ramírez, 2014).

All this characterization also finds support in the words of Ansa and Yicon (2009). These authors also define culture as the set of traditions and lifestyles, it can be considered from cosmology and ethnography. In its ethnographic sense, it comprises knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and other skills and habits acquired by man as a member of society. From the field of cosmology, it is the part of the ideological system that includes beliefs about the origin, structure and destiny of the universe.

Likewise, Hostein (2010) emphasizes that La Guajira is a department favored by an ethnic fusion visible in its music that brings together indigenous people, whites and blacks. It is a diverse coexistence in the form of racial and cultural miscegenation, making it a positive place due to exchange and sharing.

TOURISM POTENTIAL OF LA GUAJIRA

The tourist potential of La Guajira has been highlighted by public and private institutions. Ethnic, natural, gastronomic and urban attractions converge in them, which have not been capitalized and exploited to strengthen local economic development and thus raise the quality of life of the inhabitants. In this regard, Ramírez (2014) made characterization of the department's tourism sector, which is highlighted below:

- The major attraction is the indigenous settlements. However, although some of them have organized themselves to receive locals and tourists, they still show weaknesses to take

advantage of their uses and customs (dances, rites, stories, among others) and consolidating this attraction as a tourist potential.

- Given the geological characteristics of the department, due to desertification processes, sun and beach tourism, including ecotourism and adventure tourism, should be strategically managed. Some stakeholders have a limited vision of the department's tourism potential. Tourism is not projected as a source of economic diversification and, therefore, with the capacity to generate jobs and develop stores.
- There is a lack of certified quality and customer service policies.
- Several activities can be exploited, such as water and sand sports.

Specific Objective 2

This section presents the results of the questionnaire of open-ended questions asked to the managers of hotels and restaurants, identified as units of analysis of this research.

The questions were designed to analyze the principles of strategic planning of SMEs in the tourism sector located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha. These principles were studied through the internal capacities of these organizations. In this regard, the following capacities were consulted: a) human talent; b) technology; and c) marketing. It is understood that the principles of strategic planning are dimensioned in the organizational profile.

Human talent capacity

To learn about the human talent capacity of SMEs in the tourism sector, the following item was proposed to the interviewees: "describe the general situation of your human talent, about professionalization, experience, command of a second language, remuneration, training, qualification, performance evaluation".

In this regard, the fifteen interviewees agreed that human talent is fundamental in an organization such as SMEs in the tourism sector to generate productivity and competitiveness. With different information contents in their answers, and some of them very sparse, their analysis of them yielded this result:

Verbigracia: "...the staff for me is key for the hotel to work, for more guests to come and be satisfied with the service..."; "the employees help me to know what we must do to improve..."; "...without the staff the restaurant service is nothing... they are what generate productivity and allow us to be competitive".

These responses affirm Castro and Hernández's (2015) statements: companies expand their competitive advantages based on their resources, which can be controlled in a diversified way, to implement strategies to increase productivity.

The content analysis of the answers issued by the interviewees also evidenced that there is weakness in the implementation of human talent management subsystems, namely: a) recruitment and selection; b) design and performance evaluation; c) labor compensation; d) people development and e) training.

The following is highlighted from these responses: "...the entry of personnel to the companies is discretionary...sometimes they are referred by close friends"; "we do not have a database of candidates to call in case there are vacancies"; "resumes are requested and we consider work experience in hotels"; "to tell the truth we do not focus much on training personnel in specific areas... there is no training plan in this regard"; "we do not evaluate the staff, we do not measure their performance"; "we do not train in customer service, or tourism courses as such"; "we do not allocate a budget for it"; "the people who work here are dedicated to performing their minimum tasks"; "to tell the truth, everyone here does their own thing and we are not very attentive to how they serve customers".

It was also learned that most of the human resources working for the SMEs in the tourism sector have little experience in the sector, as well as no command of a second language, specifically English.

In addition to these answers, the managers of SMEs in the tourism sector do not orient human talent management according to the subsystems proposed by Chiavenato (2012), which are key in the processes of such management: admission of people directly related to recruitment and selection; application of people (design and performance evaluation); labor compensation; development of people; and staff retention (training).

The admission of people is the selection process, the search for a match between what the organization wants and what the people offer. The application includes the design of the position, i.e., the tasks and functions of the job positions are established so that they can be fulfilled with maximum efficiency.

Concerning compensation, both remuneration and personnel benefits and services are aspects that contribute to keeping workers satisfied. Likewise, a proper training plan that corresponds to organizational needs must be ensured.

For the monitoring of people, companies must have databases and information systems that allow them to exercise control to achieve the objectives set.

On the other hand, it became evident that the training of company managers does not correspond to the economic activity of the company, in this case for tourism, specifically to the provision of services in the tourism area.

Technological capacity

In this regard, it should be noted that the use of technology in the processes of organizations is becoming more and more indisputable. In this context, it was evident from the responses of the interviewees and direct observation that SMEs in the tourism sector have not given the required importance to the use of technologies, such as the Internet, to access and compete in international markets.

Likewise, they do not have web pages that allow them to offer their services as tourist attractions. They are particularly deficient in special network signals (television and internet) to provide connection to users. Special mention should be made of the limitations in the use of telephone calls as an alternative for paying for services.

Informal conversations with SME managers also revealed that there is little investment in the acquisition of technology that would allow them to be competitive, as well as in updating the few pieces of technological equipment they have.

In addition, it is important to add that the personnel does not know the use of technology. There are few innovations in the processes and services provided, which also limits the promotion of new ideas.

In this regard, it is convenient to specify what Solleiro and Castañón (2016) stated about adequately managing technology. This implies knowing the market, technological trends and the capacity of competitors; acquiring, in the most favorable way, the technologies that are not convenient to develop internally, as well as those to be contracted abroad, guaranteeing their financing; adequately supervising their development and reacting to unforeseen events; evaluating their results, duly protecting the technology generated and obtaining the highest returns from their exploitation; achieving the optimization of production processes.

Marketing capacity

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2013), marketing is the process by which organizations create value for their customers and establish relationships with them to receive value from them in return. The aim is to achieve customer loyalty or capitalize more.

Considering these theoretical precisions, the responses of the interviewees revealed that SMEs in the tourism sector do not have exclusive brands for promotion. In other words, the marketing strategies developed are very weak; they only use direct contact with users once they arrive at the premises (hotels or restaurants).

The limitations are also evident in the fact that most of the interviewees are unaware of the offers of companies in the same sector to generate competitiveness. Likewise, partnerships with

these companies are scarce, preventing them from jointly offering a high-quality tourism product.

Likewise, the lack of strategic plans to position the companies, generate productivity and competitiveness to build user loyalty and attract other potential consumers was also evident.

In the words of Monferrer (2013): planning is embodied in concrete plans consistent with the organization's mission. This is composed of four stages:

- Analysis: study the company's environment to identify opportunities and avoid threats. It must also analyze the company's strengths and weaknesses.
- Planning: the moment when the organization, through its managers, establishes the objectives and strategies to achieve them.
- Execution: involves putting the strategy into operation through the design of actions.
- Control: monitoring activities through the measurement of results, the analysis of their causes and the taking of corrective measures to ensure compliance with the established objectives.

It is important to point out that, within the principles of strategic planning, the marketing plan is conceived to establish the company's marketing actions. In this regard, based on the responses of the interviewees with human resources, technological and marketing capabilities and the principles of strategic planning, a SWOT of SMEs in the tourism sector was prepared, as shown in Table 3.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
INTERNAL	The service is provided with excellent quality.	Management training not in line with the economic activity carried out by the company.
	They are legalized.	Most of them have little experience in the sector.
	Modern and spacious facilities.	Not fluent in English
	Registered in the association of tourism companies.	Low capacity to assume risks.
	Continuous quality improvement.	Lack of publicity campaigns and signs at the entrance.
	Strategic location in the district.	No strategies are designed to define the course of action of the activities.
	Affordable prices.	Lack of internal work regulations, procedures manual, and functions manual.
	Committed personnel with a sense of belonging to the company.	Low investment for the acquisition and updating of technological equipment.
	Exotic food offerings.	Little promotion of innovations in their processes and services provided.
	Teamwork.	No visible strategic guidelines.
	Teamwork.	Deficiency of some existing technological resources.
	Effective internal communication.	The plant personnel are not identified and uniformed.
	They have designed the strategic guidelines.	They generate high costs in electricity and water services.
		No training plans have been designed for employees.

	They have little culture of planning their activities.
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Table 3. Strengths and weaknesses of the SMEs studied.

Source: Gómez, Santos and Castrillón (2016).

In addition, the opportunities and threats of the SMEs were identified, as shown in Table 4.

	Opportunities	Threats
EXTERNAL	Declaration of Riohacha as a Special, Tourist and Cultural District.	Arrival in the district of large companies offering the same service with a high level of positioning.
	Arrival of new foreign tourists to Riohacha and La Guajira.	Insufficient infrastructure to deal with tourism in the city of Riohacha and the Department of La Guajira.
	Government incentives and assistance to tourism-related companies.	Variation in prices offered by suppliers.
	Strategic alliances to attract domestic and foreign tourists.	Quality-price ratio of other companies in the tourism sector.
	New potential markets.	Social problems in the district (increase in crime).
	Increased use of social networks.	Deficiencies in public services in the Department of La Guajira.
	Tourist attractions that can be offered to visitors.	New regulations for the activity.
	Excellent strategic location of the district.	
	Achieving regional prestige and national recognition.	

Table 4. Opportunities and Threats of the SMEs surveyed

Source: Gómez, Santos and Castrillón (2016).

The SWOT allowed outlining some strategies to promote the development of the principles of strategic planning, which will contribute to improving the productivity and competitiveness of SMEs.

Specific Objective 3

In this objective, the researchers proposed strategies for the application of the principles of strategic planning in the SMEs located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha. It should be noted that the strategies were established to take advantage of the opportunities and strengths of the SMEs in the tourism sector, and therefore contribute to reducing the threats and weaknesses, as well as to consider the application of the principles of strategic planning. With this in mind, the following strategies are presented:

- a) In order to meet the needs and demands of customers, it is proposed to increase the supply capacity of SMEs in the tourism sector of the District of Riohacha, which is oriented to the current and future situation of the city of Riohacha, recently declared a Special, Tourist and Cultural District, which presents a considerable increase in the

influx of tourists and therefore it is necessary for SMEs to increase their capacity to be at the forefront and, of course, according to their budget.

- b) Develop training plans oriented to training in the economic activity developed by the company, as well as training in marketing and English. Specifically, human talent plays a very important role in the organization, which is why the personnel must be trained, as well as the top management. The purpose is to increase the productivity and competitiveness of the companies, attracting more customers and building loyalty among existing ones.
- c) Establish actions aimed at acquiring technologies. This will strengthen management, promote services, and increase productivity and competitiveness. They should also contemplate the design of web pages and the controlled use of social networks. Likewise, applications such as blogs, podcasts, and promotional videos, among others, must be made available. Specifically, the use of technologies allows the application of various marketing strategies oriented to price, product, distribution channels and promotion.
- d) Establish technical cooperation links among all SMEs in the tourism sector, aimed at developing workshops and discussions related to the tourism sector, specifically:
 - Customer service.
 - Tourist attractions.
 - Gastronomy of the department.
 - Management of four- and five-star hotels, among other topics that can be identified.
- e) Promote the development of new ideas among the staff for the provision of the service, creating a climate conducive to innovation.
- f) Identify new services and opportunities to improve existing services.
- g) Incorporate the development of cultural activities within existing services. To this end, it is necessary to quantify the use and enjoyment of the region's cultural heritage.
- h) Establish a human talent management system based on the following subsystems:
 - Admission of persons.
 - Application of persons.
 - Compensation of people.
 - Development of people.
 - People maintenance.
 - People monitoring.
- i) Implementing the principles of strategic planning:
 - Establish a precise mission on the description of the organization's *raison d'être*, establish its institutional tasks, the goods and services it delivers, the main functions that distinguish it and make it different from other institutions and justify its existence.
 - Establish the vision, that is, how the company wants to be recognized, and how it represents the values on which its actions will be based in the provision of goods and/or services.
 - Determine the strategic objectives. This corresponds to the achievements that the organization expects to achieve in a given time to fulfill its mission efficiently and effectively.

This strategy also involves strengthening the organizational profile of SMEs. In this regard, they should: review the organizational design, develop internal regulations, procedure manuals and function manuals, to standardize the activities assigned to the company's employees and develop a marketing plan taking into consideration that strategies and

businesses should be established to generate productivity and competitiveness. These include 1) concentration of existing products or services; 2) market and/or product development; 3) concentration on innovation and technology; 4) strategic alliances; 5) diversification; and 6) cost reduction.

- The marketing plan must be conceived following the marketing plan stages:
 - Situation analysis: involves the development of an internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) study of the organization to its products.
 - Identification of the marketing objectives for the company.
 - Marketing strategies: involves the way to meet the objectives of the plan identified in the previous stage. These strategies will allow growth through the commercialization of products in new markets. Likewise, they will favor growth through new products or improvements to existing products by improving their quality to target current markets.
- j) Establish linkage strategies with higher education institutions and the National Learning Service (SENA) in the standardization and certification processes, as well as in the structuring of educational contents for the development of the training plan for tourism aimed at the employees of the SMEs, as established in the second paragraph of this section.

5. Conclusions

Having presented the results of the research in the previous pages, this section is reserved for the conclusions of the research, based on the specific objectives studied.

- About specific objective number 1, referred to an analysis of the external environment of the SMEs in the tourism sector of the SMEs located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha, it is concluded that this context is favorable for the development and consolidation of the SMEs studied. It is possible to affirm this by taking into account:
- The change of category to Special, Tourist and Cultural District, which will be governed by Law 1617 of 2013. This change is based on the declaration of Riohacha as a significant tourist and cultural destination in Colombia, given that it has a wide range of geographic, historical, ethnic and multicultural attractions with the capacity to support a successful tourism industry.
- The great potential and countless attractions from the natural, cultural and scientific point of view, among which the following stand out: Cabo de La Vela, the beaches between Dibulla and Bahía Honda, the pyramidal hills of La Teta and Pilón de Azúcar, the historical ruins in the town of Puerto López, the Los Flamencos Fauna and Flora Sanctuary, the Macuira and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta National Natural Parks (PNN).
- The working age population (WAP) registered an average annual growth rate (for 2014) of 0.1%, from 68.7% to 69.1%. This indicates that this population is in a position to actively participate in the labor market, that is, the potential labor supply.
- The growth, for the year 2014, of small companies: growing from 224 to 298 (representing 2.8% of the total) the medium-sized one grows by 0.4%, while the large company, despite having increased by 6 companies, is not reflected in percentage terms (0.2%).
- Significant tourism potential.

Concerning specific objective 2, where the internal organizational capacities (human resources capacity, technological capacity and marketing capacity) of the SMEs in the tourism sector located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha were identified, it was concluded that:

- There are weaknesses in the implementation of human talent management subsystems, namely: a) recruitment and selection; b) performance design and evaluation; c) labor compensation; d) personnel development; and e) training.
- SMEs in the tourism sector have not given due importance to the use of technology to access international markets and sell their services competitively.
- SMEs do not have exclusive brands for promotion. In other words, the marketing strategies developed are very weak: they only use direct contact with users once they arrive at the premises (hotels or restaurants).
- The lack of strategic plans to position the companies, generate productivity and competitiveness, to build user loyalty and attract new consumers.

Regarding the third and last specific objective, configured as a propositional stage that alludes to proposing strategies for the application of the principles of strategic planning in the SMEs located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha, it is concluded with eleven strategies aimed at these organizations, summarized as follows:

- Increase the supply capacity of SMEs.
- To develop training plans.
- Establish actions aimed at acquiring technologies.
- Establish technical cooperation links between SMEs in the tourism sector, aimed at developing workshops and discussions related to tourism.
- Promote the development of new ideas, among the personnel, for the provision of the service.
- Identify new services and opportunities.
- Incorporate the development of cultural activities within the existing services.
- Establish a human talent management system.
- Implement the principles of strategic planning.
- Develop a marketing plan.
- Establish linkage strategies with higher education institutions and the National Learning Service (SENA).

In addition, a series of recommendations for SMEs in the tourism sector are presented in the following section.

6. Recommendations

To strengthen the management of SMEs in the tourism sector, and thus position themselves in the market to promote the economic and social development of La Guajira, the following recommendations are made:

- To take advantage of the district's economic, social, cultural and tourism opportunities. Also, to attract national and international sources of financing in connection with the declaration of Riohacha as a tourist and cultural destination.
- Acquire information and communication technologies to modernize service delivery, access national and international markets, increase productivity and competitiveness, and promote the development of innovations.
- Implement the principles of strategic planning: establish the mission, vision, objectives, missions and functions.
- Redesign the organizational profile. This requires a review of organizational designs (organization charts), as well as documenting positions, processes and functions.

- Establish the human talent management system: formalize the recruitment and entry of personnel; review the remuneration system; establish performance evaluation mechanisms; and set up training plans.
- Develop a marketing plan that establishes the different strategies that will enable companies to improve their productivity and competitiveness, as well as build customer loyalty and attract new customers.
- To consider the strategies for the application of the principles of strategic planning in the SMEs located in the Special, Tourist and Cultural District of Riohacha, presented in this work.

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