Designing a Strategic Marketing Plan for Rural Tourism Development

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WPI

Corredor Biológico
Pájaro Campana

Designing a Strategic Marketing Plan for Rural Tourism Development

An Interactive Qualifying Project
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Degree of Bachelor of Science

by
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Report submitted to:

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Abstract

This report, prepared for the Bellbird Biological Corridor, details the potential of adapting sustainable tourism in rural areas throughout Monteverde, Costa Rica. The study considers the economic and environmental impacts of rural tourism and how to develop a promotional plan for networking the various tourism initiatives throughout the region and promoting the shared use of resources. Through interviews and surveys with the initiatives and stakeholders, we gathered data that allowed us to establish a well-informed marketing plan, which will benefit both the initiatives and stakeholders. The initiatives' distinguishing attributes were analyzed and emphasized in order to promote their businesses through an online interactive map to increase their web presence.

Executive Summary

Introduction & Background

Costa Rica is a country of immense biodiversity, which has begun to draw large numbers of tourists from all over the world to visit and experience nature (Buckley, 2003). An issue arises with an increase of tourism when tourists and tourist attraction operators are unaware of their negative impact on the environment (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). Rural towns often overlook the negative impacts of an increase in tourism because they are mainly focused on developing their economies. Mass tourism has spurred the rise of sustainable tourism to arise because of the need to protect the environment. Sustainable tourism is characterized as any type of development, improvement, or tourism activity that respects the environment, preserves the natural and cultural resources, and contributes to a region's social and economic durability (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). Costa Rica is currently working to improve their sustainable tourism by implementing a subcategory of sustainable tourism that focuses on efficiently linking the cultural aspects of an area while preserving the environment, also known as rural tourism (Buckley, 2003, Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008).

Rural communities around the world are also looking for ways to strengthen their economies, as well as provide a better quality of life for individuals within the community (EPA, 2016). Within Costa Rica, it is becoming more and more popular to achieve an improved economy by increasing environmental and cultural tourist attractions (Whelan, 1998). Increasing tourist populations benefit the local economies; however, rural communities sometimes struggle to successfully market their attractions (Kotler, 2002). Occasionally, rural communities focus on general promotional strategies to increase tourism, but they fail to adapt these strategies

to their specific target audience (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003). With rural tourism, identifying the target audience before beginning a promotional plan is necessary, especially for Costa Rica, because there are various ecological regions across the country that attract different demographics of tourists. (Shaver et al., 2015). Focusing on the target audience allows advertising tactics to be designed and executed according to what the target audience is most interested in (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003). A marketing strategy that has been successful is the creation of a network of attractions. In the rural regions of Costa Rica such as the Bellbird Biological Corridor, a network of rural tourism has not yet been successfully achieved due to a lack of communication and unity among the different initiatives in various towns (H. Villalobos, personal communication, November 10, 2017).

The Bellbird Biological Corridor is an organization with the intention of reestablishing and protecting the biodiversity of the region from Monteverde to the Gulf of Nicoya. They are accomplishing this by creating a network of tourism initiatives throughout the rural areas of the Corridor itself, which will improve their economies and, as a result, incentivize residents to protect the biodiversity. These like-minded initiatives all seek to preserve the environment, while attracting tourists to the region.

Project Goal & Objectives

The goal of our project was to develop a marketing plan to increase tourism in the rural areas of the Bellbird Biological Corridor while offering tools to enhance the initiatives' marketability to stimulate growth of the local economies.

We completed four objectives to accomplish this goal.

Objective 1: *Determine the distinguishing attributes of each initiative.*

Objective 2*: Identify which attributes to emphasize when marketing the initiatives.*

Objective 3: *Assess each initiative and provide recommendations for improvements.*

Objective 4: *Design an optimal marketing strategy for rural tourism development.*

Methods

In order to gather all of the necessary data to design a successful marketing plan, our first step was conducting observational studies and interviews by visiting each of the initiatives along the Bellbird Biological Corridor. Through these studies, we gained information on the main attributes that each of the initiatives wanted to emphasize to tourists. We categorized the data into a matrix, which highlighted their location, products, services, transportation and languages offered.

Once we analyzed the data, we created a recommendations rubric, which allows the initiatives to further develop their attractions based on their personal goals and aspirations. We aimed to survey tourists at the initiatives, but there were not any present. Instead, we based the recommendations rubric on surveys with tourists in other towns and criteria that would appeal to tourist populations in general, which was found through literature review and online research. Once the rubric was established, we specified that for each of the initiatives, the recommendations depend on their own personal needs and developmental goals. When our sponsor, Hugo Villalobos, discusses the rubric with the initiatives, the lacking attributes for each of them will be emphasized in order to assist the businesses in their personal developmental growth.

During our last two weeks in Monteverde, we developed the promotional plan for the Corridor, which depended on the target audience, the various attributes of the initiatives, and the marketing strategies the initiatives could implement. Through our research and the discussions we had with our sponsor, we decided that an effective marketing strategy to address a lack of advertising throughout the Corridor was by applying Internet marketing. We used the Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana website to promote the collaborative efforts of the initiatives by placing them on a virtual map that could display vital information about them. A website and map may not only help attract more tourists to the area, but also benefit the initiatives by increasing their marketing strategies.

Results

Initiatives want to attract rural tourists who appreciate the natural environment and Costa Rican culture.

Rural tourists are people who participate in paid tourist activities in rural areas that focus on maintaining the area's culture, values, history, and land (Loureiro, 2010). The initiatives' strong emphasis on nature and Costa Rican culture validates that they want to attract tourists who appreciate the natural environment and do not want an

overdeveloped tourist experience because that is not what they are offering. In addition, each initiative provides rural tourists with unique experiences that embody Costa Rican culture in various ways. These experiences range from coffee tours that demonstrate the traditional Costa Rican coffee culture to handicrafts that incorporate local Costa Rican symbols and traditions.

There is a vast range of development among the initiatives.

The wide range of development depends on aspects such as the variety of products and services initiatives offer to tourists and their capacity and desire for growth and development. The vast range that exists between the initiatives makes it difficult to form a simple connection between the products and services that they offer to tourists. Their discrepancies have to be made clear to tourists because if they were grouped together, there would be misconceptions about what the attractions offer. Before visiting the initiatives, we did not expect the gap in development within them to be this evident.

The majority of initiatives are difficult to access and distant from town centers.

None of the initiatives are located on a main road and nine of the 13 total initiatives are not located near a town center. This can become problematic because tourists may not be able to reach the initiatives if they cannot obtain accurate directions, due to their locations being on unmarked or underdeveloped roads. If tourists are unable to reach an initiative on their own, they may choose to not visit the initiative at all. Therefore, the inaccessibility of the initiatives may prevent them from receiving an increase in business from tourists.

Initiatives have a misconception about how tourists seek information.

Currently, a word-of-mouth strategy is used throughout the tourism industry and is considered one of the most reliable sources of advertising. During the interviews, a majority of the initiative operators believed that their current promotional strategies, which include a word-of-mouth strategy, are effective for them and, therefore, they are not focused on creating new marketing plans. However, in our interviews with tourists, it was evident that the vast majority of tourists rely on the internet to find attractions. Therefore, we concluded that most initiatives would benefit from having a stronger web presence because it would bridge the gap between what the initiatives are advertising and how the tourists are finding the information.

All initiatives wanted to be included on the map in order to gain the potential benefits, despite some being reluctant of a potential increase in clientele that they may not be prepared for yet.

During our interviews, we discovered that nine of the 13 initiatives have limitations on the number of tourists that they can accept or manage. These constraints are due to factors such as limited space, resources, and products and services. Although there are initiatives that are not yet ready for tourists, all 13 initiatives we visited want to be included on the online map. This can become a problem for the nine initiatives that have limitations on a tourist increase because if the online map is successful, it could potentially produce an increase in clientele that they are not prepared for yet.

Recommendations

We recommend that our sponsor explains to each initiative where they can focus improvements based on their developmental goals.

We are recommending that our sponsor, Hugo Villalobos, uses the rubric we created to give personalized recommendations to each initiative by reviewing the rubric with them and discussing their current rankings. This rubric allows our sponsor to make specific, personalized recommendations for each initiative in order to assist them in making improvements that are most realistic and beneficial for their initiative based on their own personal developmental goals.

We recommend that the Bellbird Biological Corridor organizes trips for the less-developed initiatives to visit the more-developed initiatives in order for them to better visualize their future potential.

We suggest that when the Bellbird Biological Corridor host meetings with all initiatives and members of the Corridor, they announce what developed initiatives they are going to showcase in order for the visiting initiatives to select which aspects of the tour appeal to them based on the products and services the showcasing initiative is offering.

Continuously evaluate each initiative in order to identify progress that has been made, as well as new potential areas of improvement.

We suggest that the initiatives and our sponsor continue communication so that the initiatives can send updates when they make progress on their goals. This will allow our sponsor to update the rubric to help the initiatives visualize potential improvements and will enable Mr. Villalobos to keep the website updated to market the initiatives best.

Continue to visit and evaluate more initiatives in order to add their information to the map.

We were unable to visit all initiatives in the Corridor due to time constraints, therefore, we suggest that our sponsor continues to visit new initiatives and add them to both the online interactive map, as well as the poster. We recommend that Mr. Villalobos only prints out the poster either once he visits ten or more initiatives or when a year passes to save time and materials.

Conclusion

The Bellbird Biological Corridor is implementing a plan for successfully promoting rural initiatives through major collaboration efforts amongst the initiatives. The organization selects initiatives to participate in the project if they are working towards environmental and cultural preservation of the Corridor. A cohesive map of the corridor has been developed with all of the initiatives labeled in order to allow the owners of the attractions to increase promotion while also showing tourists the wide range of attractions available nearby. With this information, the Corridor will be better advertised for tourists while enhancing the established connections amongst the organization. This increase in tourism is vital in order to stimulate economic growth in the rural areas so they can continue environmental preservation efforts within the biological corridor.

Through our efforts, we hope that the initiatives work together to develop themselves further and increase the tourist population within the Corridor. A research finding that can be explored further is why some initiatives have the power to grow but do not pursue this development, and what factors are limiting their desire to grow. In the future, we hope that the implemented marketing plan is expanded upon with more established connections, and is maintained by annual updates to the map and to the initiatives themselves.

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1. Background

1.0. Introduction to Background

From the late 1970's, Venice, Italy has experienced an increase in tourists lacking in cultural awareness, which has created a vicious cycle (Russo, 2002). From 2011 to 2015, the number of overnight foreign tourists in Venice has increased by 353,000 visitors per year (Annuario Del Turismo, 2016). The large population of tourists in Venice has created a cultural barrier between tourists and local residents, which causes tourists to have less respect and awareness for the environment that surrounds them (Raymond & Hall, 2008). The increase in the tourist population and the centralization of tourist activities has caused an increase in pollution, specifically in canal traffic (Russo, 2002). The over-congestion of the metropolitan area has caused the cost of living to increase drastically, forcing local households to move to peripheral areas (Russo, 2002). It is common for tourist locations to have higher prices for transportation and housing, which makes it difficult for the local communities to afford living in such environments (Alonso, 1964). Venice is an example of the negative consequences of urban tourism; however, there are many cities and rural regions worldwide that are implementing sustainable approaches to tourism to avoid similar outcomes.

Cities are meant to serve high volumes of people and they still suffer consequences from increased tourism. The increase of tourism in rural communities is particularly concerning because they have a more fragile ecosystem; therefore, landscapes and the diversity of indigenous species can deteriorate (Egbali, Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011). A sustainable approach to tourism is needed that will safeguard the beneficial aspects of the rural environment and surrounding communities. Costa Rica is an example of a country striving to implement sustainable tourism approaches in rural regions such as the Bellbird Biological Corridor. Within the biological corridor the Monteverde region is home to a diverse ecosystem spanning over 164,000 hectares of forest land (Bellbird Biological Corridor, n.d.). A major attraction is the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve and its great biodiversity because the region contains over 500 species of animals, tens of thousands of different insects, and over 2,500 different plant life species (Monteverde Info, 2011). Tourism threatens the ecosystem by disrupting the species' habitats and often imposes negative consequences on the future generations. Uncontrolled tourism can cause wildlife population decline and extinction (Higginbottom, 2004). The Costa Rican government has recognized the threat of tourism and weighed the economic benefits, and is now implementing strategies of tourism that help conserve the ecosystem (Whelan, 1998).

Costa Rica is moving towards decentralizing its tourist activities to rural, less-visited regions such as those within the Bellbird Biological Corridor. The movement will help protect areas that are oversaturated with tourists, while helping the local residents economically. Decentralizing tourist activities will also allow tourists to have a more authentic experience, while ensuring that Costa Rica does not follow in the same footsteps as Venice (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008; Egbali, Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011). It is crucial for initiatives that are looking to bring tourists to the Corridor to understand both the importance of properly protecting and preserving the existing environment from over-development as well as how to properly market their attractions to draw tourists. The various tourism attractions that are scattered throughout the region are looking to expand their reach in order to grow their businesses.

Our sponsor, the Bellbird Biological Corridor, is an organization with the intention of connecting tourism initiatives throughout the rural areas of the Corridor. The organization has

started a project to create a network between far-reaching tourist attractions. In our time in Costa Rica, we assisted the Bellbird Biological Corridor in organizing this project by recommending marketing strategies for the initiatives to increase their tourist population.

In this chapter, we begin by exploring the various aspects and subsets of sustainable tourism and how they can be implemented. We then discuss the economic impacts of sustainable tourism in rural areas. Then we explain the importance of marketing rural tourism and a tourism network. Finally, we introduce our sponsor, their attempts to employ a tourism network, and our project.

1.1. Sustainable Tourism

Tourism, as an industry, has evolved into two main categories: mass tourism and alternative tourism (Theng, Qiong, & Tatar, 2015). Mass tourism emerged along with the middle class and is characterized by popular destinations, teeming with tourists who participate in an expected circuit of activities and attractions (Theng, Qiong, & Tatar, 2015). The popularity of such destinations has proven to have negative economic, social, cultural, and ecological consequences on those communities, which resulted in the emergence of alternative tourism forms (Theng, Qiong, & Tatar, 2015). One of the most common alternative tourism types is sustainable tourism, characterized as any type of development, improvement, or tourism activity that respects the environment, preserves the natural and cultural resources, and contributes to a region's social and economic durability (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008).

There are many different subsets of sustainable tourism, including, but not limited to, ecological tourism (ecotourism) and rural tourism (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). In general, sustainable tourism focuses on the development and advancement of tourism and recreational activities, while also considering the principles of sustainability outlined above (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). Sustainable tourism also emphasizes the maintenance of a region's cultural and ecological integrity as well as its biodiversity (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008).

Ecotourism is a subcategory of sustainable tourism, categorized by the sustainable commercialization of natural resources as tourist attractions (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). Countries such as Kenya, Ecuador, Nepal, Madagascar, and Costa Rica, depend on ecotourism as their main source of foreign income (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). The overall goal of ecotourism is to minimize environmental and cultural deterioration of the area, while maximizing economic benefits and respect for the existing cultures (Fennell, 2003). Ecotourism is intended to have positive impacts on the environment, while allowing tourists to be completely immersed in nature to gain a better appreciation for the environment and culture that surrounds them (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). Although ecotourism aims to have minimal consequences on the environment and benefit the local people, there are a few disadvantages of this tourism type. For example, ecotourism can occasionally compromise the land if the underdeveloped natural environment is converted into profitable space for tourism (Andrew, n.d.). In addition, the introduction of ecotourism to an area could result in the displacement of residents, cultural insensitivity, and economic instability (Andrew, n.d.).

Rural tourism, another subcategory of sustainable tourism, aims to efficiently link the cultural aspects of the area, while preserving the environment (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). Studies show that there is a positive relationship between the development of rural tourism and an increase in income for rural residents (Egbali, Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011). Rural tourism is an effective way to enhance a region's economy and employment (Egbali,

Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011). Globally, rural tourism emphasizes the appreciation for natural assets, including rural spaces, natural resources, and cultural identity (Juganaru, I., Juganaru, M., & Anghel, 2008). For instance, rural tourism can include activities such as hiking, horseback riding, wine tours, food tastings, and other region-specific activities. Rural tourism can also lead to the preservation of local industries related to tourism, as well as the introduction of other industries that are not directly related to tourism (Egbali, Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011). For example, rural tourism can help preserve local handicraft shops while also aiding in the introduction of new restaurants. Another positive impact that accompanies the development of rural tourism is the strengthening of the local residents' sense of pride for their products, possessions, and national culture (Egbali, Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011). Although there are countless advantages of rural tourism, there are also potential disadvantages. For example, vital features of an environment can be damaged or destroyed by tourists who do not have a sound understanding of the culture and nature of the region they are visiting (Egbali, Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011). Additionally, soil erosion, increased waste, and pollution could result from the increase of tourists to the rural areas (Egbali, Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011). However, these consequences can be lessened or prevented by taking extra precautions to protect the land and educate the tourists (Egbali, Bakhshandea, & Sayyed Ali pour, 2011).

1.2. Economics of Tourism

In 2015, 292 million jobs were sustained worldwide solely by tourism, which demonstrates that every country should see tourism as an opportunity for economic and societal growth (Turner, 2017). It is expected for the tourism industry to continue growing due to a shift in consumer interest from spending money on goods to spending money on experiences (Turner, 2017). Many of the larger scale tourism industries rely on large cities with all-inclusive hotels, but the trend for sustainable tourism, especially in rural areas, is spreading fast because it is economically and environmentally beneficial.

Rural communities around the world are looking for ways to strengthen their economy in order to provide a better quality of life for themselves, while building local assets (EPA, 2016). Many of the communities that have unexploited environmental or historical aspects are moving towards commercializing the sites by attracting tourists to experience natural and cultural riches that the rural areas have to offer. By bringing tourists to these areas, the local communities gain a profit and an increase in their economic value (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). There has been an expansion of employment opportunities for the local people living near the developing attractions due to increased tourism. For example, in South Africa, the tourism industry in the less developed areas, managed to create 1,533,000 jobs, which led to a 9.8% increase in the country's employment rate in 2016 (Turner, 2017). Therefore, an increase in tourism has a direct correlation with the amount of employment opportunities created for the local people.

As mentioned previously, a major appeal in rural tourism is the natural and cultural factors an area has to offer. In order to promote these aspects, the two need to be preserved and protected (Swarbrooke, 1998). Sustainable tourism helps improve the economy of the rural area while preserving the environment. Once the rural area starts to gain profits and economic benefits, a larger budget could be put aside for environmental and cultural preservation (Butler, 1991). Allocating money towards conservation is important because one of the reasons tourists are attracted to the rural sites is for the natural beauty of the attractions. In order to preserve the attractions, a well-managed coalition of the community, local organizations, and private

entrepreneurs is necessary (Ceballos, 1996). This ensures the development of tourist attractions in order to increase the economy while preserving the environment.

Sustainable tourism plays a major role in helping rural areas develop their economy and preserve their land. Costa Rica is an excellent example of a country moving towards the direction of sustainable tourism. By using rural land for tourism, the country is striving to better its economy, while maintaining an eco-friendly status. Costa Rica is vastly growing its tourism industry while being mindful of the environment so that the tourist attractions do not result in deterioration of the biodiversity (Buckley, 2003). By successfully implementing sustainability efforts in tourism, rural communities benefit through economic profits and land preservation.

1.3. Promoting Rural Tourism

Rural communities across the globe are attempting to grow their economy by expanding their tourism industry; however, some marketing strategies are consistently failing (Kotler, 2002). Oftentimes, rural communities only focus on general promotional strategies to increase tourism, but they fail to adapt these strategies to their specific target audience (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003). With rural tourism, identifying the target audience before beginning a promotional plan is necessary, especially for Costa Rica, because there are various ecological regions across the country that attracts different demographics of tourists. (Shaver et al., 2015).

To identify the target audience, first, tourist groups need to be analyzed in order to find consistent trends. This will allow the tourist attraction operators to be able to identify the core tourist groups that they should appeal to (Venzin, 2016). Once the specific marketing strategy is established, it can be implemented in order to reach the targeted subgroups of tourists (Venzin, 2016). Targeting to a specific group of people, for example "green" or rural tourists, has the potential to increase the amount of customers by promoting services that would appeal to that type of tourist group (Bradić, Kosar, Djeri, Vukosav, & Garača, 2017). The final step is to test the responses and monitor the results. It is crucial that the tourist attraction operators identify their target audience so that it is easier for them to make informed decisions about current and future marketing strategies (Venzin, 2016).

It is vital that the needs and behaviors of the consumers are considered when implementing a lucrative marketing plan so that advertising tactics can be designed and executed accordingly (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003). An example of a specific marketing plan for a rural region is to promote a network of tourist attractions that are connected through products that they share with consumers. The network can be developed further by creating different routes that the visitors can follow once the demographic is known because their habits and tendencies can be anticipated (Franco, W., Torres-Naranjo, & Franco, M., 2017).

Costa Rica has been working towards attracting tourists to remote regions with little accessibility, which is why rural tourism initiatives would benefit from an increase in marketing (Amador-Jiménez & Mrawira, 2009). In order for rural tourism to be successful, the location and the network of tourist attractions must be highly considered (Wang, Pizam, & Breiter, 2011). The network that is created must satisfy tourists needs, while mutually benefiting the economy, which can be accomplished by having a series of diverse attractions that offer different products and experiences (Wang, Pizam, & Breiter, 2011). A balance between customized service for the tourists and upholding the mission and values of the rural tourist attractions must be maintained in order to sustain the attraction for an extended period of time (Hurst, Niehm, & Littrell, 2009). It is also imperative that the network created does not alter the unique cultural identities of the different areas within the rural area (Seryasat, M., Salmani, Zamani, Karimian, & Seryasat, H., 2014). In

rural locations, a network of rural tourism in remote regions has not yet been successfully achieved due to a lack of communication and unity among the different initiatives (H. Villalobos, personal communication, November 10, 2017). However, organizations are beginning to work to bridge gaps between the local initiatives.

1.4. Bellbird Biological Corridor

Our sponsor, the Bellbird Biological Corridor, is an organization working towards the goal of creating a cohesive tourism network. The organization is a multi-institutional initiative dedicated to uniting the diverse actors throughout the Bellbird Biological Corridor in order to protect the biodiversity, connect the wide variety of ecosystems, and promote rational use of natural resources (Bellbird Biological Corridor, n.d.). In attempts to make strides toward this goal, the Bellbird Biological Corridor has created a strategy for sustainable tourism development using a community-based rural tourism model (González Vega, 2015). The purpose of the plan is to promote low-impact tourism alternatives that can help the Corridor be seen as a sustainable tourism destination, while also emphasizing conservation and ecological connectivity (González Vega, 2015). In order to assist our sponsor in achieving this goal, part of what we have been tasked with is to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for the various initiatives located throughout the Bellbird Biological Corridor region to connect them within a cohesive network.

The Bellbird Biological Corridor region is an area that connects the Pacific-slope habitat between the Monteverde Reserve Complex and islands off the Gulf of Nicoya in order to enhance vital migratory routes for several species of concern, including the Three-Wattled Bellbird, as seen in Figure 1 (Bellbird Biological Corridor, n.d.). Throughout the Corridor, there is a wide variety of initiatives that would benefit from a tourism network. A majority of these initiatives have a common goal of achieving a sustainable tourism plan; however, they currently work as separate entities rather than as a cohesive unit (H. Villalobos, personal communication, November 10, 2017). The Corridor is having difficulties attracting tourists to the more rural areas where the initiatives are operating due to the lack of connectivity between them, as well as the lack of effective marketing strategies. In order to enhance the allure and optimize the effectiveness of the separate initiatives, a tourism coalition is in the process of being implemented. By creating a coalition throughout the corridor, members with differing services and products could work together in order to broaden the base of advocacy and increase collaboration and support among the various initiatives (How to Form a State Tourism Coalition, 1984). The goal of our project is to develop a promotional plan that will enable local actors and organizations along the corridor to develop a strategic marketing plan that will both maintain the environmental integrity of the region as well as assist in helping the local communities establish economic stability.
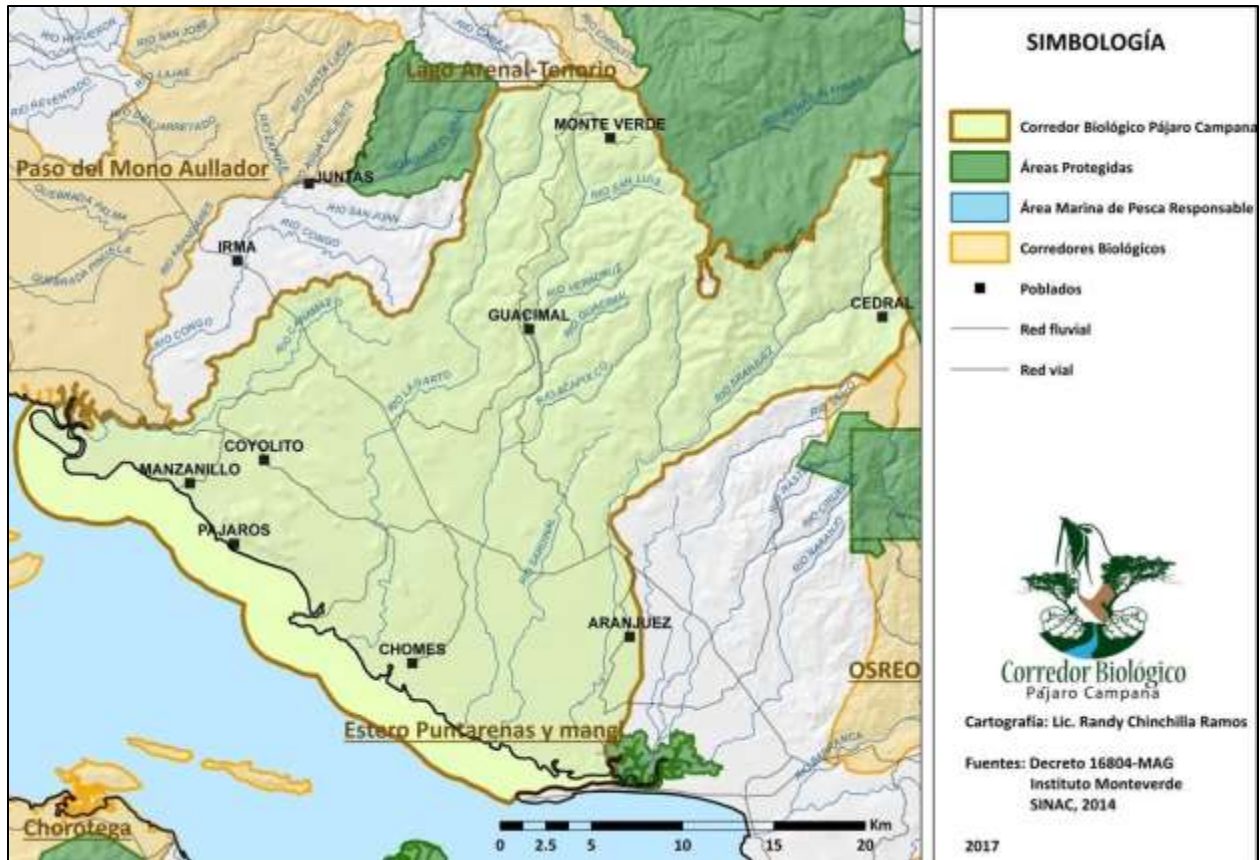
Figure 1: Map of the Bellbird Biological Corridor (Our Projects: Biological Corridors, n.d.)

2. Methodology

The goal of our project was to develop a marketing plan to increase tourism in the rural areas of the Bellbird Biological Corridor while offering tools to enhance the initiatives' marketability to stimulate growth of the local economies.

We completed the following four objectives to accomplish this goal:

Objective 1: *Determine the distinguishing attributes of each initiative*.

Objective 2*: Identify which attributes to emphasize when marketing the initiatives.*

Objective 3: *Assess each initiative and provide recommendations for improvements.*

Objective 4: *Design an optimal marketing strategy for rural tourism development.*

2.1. Objective 1

Determine the distinguishing attributes of each initiative.

To better understand the initiatives, main attractions, and their goals and missions, we conducted observational studies and semi-structured interviews with the initiatives' operators and personnel (Peeters, Serres, & Gundrum, 2013; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The observational studies and interviews took place within our first five weeks in Monteverde. We completed both the observational studies and interviews in one, inclusive visit. Once completed, we organized the data in a matrix based on specific criteria that were common attributes important to tourists throughout all the initiatives, which can be found in Appendix A.

Conducting observational studies of each initiative helped us better understand the impressions that the tourists have when they visit the initiatives. To conduct these studies, we visited the separate initiatives to get an outsider perspective and walked around prior to talking with the operators or other personnel. We noted anything that was of importance to our study, such as how many tourists were at the initiatives while we were there, if there were any noticeable promotional materials already in place, and what attractions, products, or information the initiatives offer (Singer, House, Juster, & Kahn, 2014). We also looked for aspects where the initiatives needed improvement. Examples of potential improvements are safety concerns or procedures currently in place, products and services offered to tourists, operations, facilities, environmental management protocols, and technological advancements (Leslie & Sigala, 2005).We assessed the following attributes at each initiative: location, products & services, visitor experience, future goals, number of visitors in a given period of time, current advertising, accessibility, languages spoken by initiative operators, transportation, product prices, and owners' future marketing plans.

We then conducted semi-structured interviews with the initiatives' operators and personnel. The questions, found in Appendix B, helped us better understand what the initiatives offer tourists, what they think they do well to attract tourists, where the majority of their tourists come from, what their plans are for future growth, and what they need to improve upon (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To gather the most credible and useful data during the interviews, we remained as objective as possible so that we could be unbiased (Reinharz, 1992). After we

completed all the interviews, we analyzed each response and coded the data in order to identify common themes and crucial ideas.

At this stage, we developed a general understanding of what each initiative had to offer to tourists, coded the data to find common themes, and organized it into a matrix. We coded the data based on information that tourists would want for each of the sites before visiting them. Some of the attributes we considered were accessibility to the location, transportation options, languages, and the products or services offered. The conclusions that we drew from this analysis were crucial when we began to develop the marketing strategies, which we discuss further in Objective 4.

2.2. Objective 2
Identify which attributes to emphasize when marketing the initiatives.

While visiting the initiatives, we intended to conduct interviews with the tourists that were present. However, the initiatives we visited did not have any tourists during the times we were there. To compensate for this obstacle, we surveyed 19 tourists in other areas, such as the Santa Elena town center, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, and Montezuma town. The survey questions can found in Appendix C, and were asked in a manner that did not lead tourists to a particular answer in order to receive honest feedback to aid in the design of the marketing model (Reinharz, 1992). We asked about their opinions on rural attractions to gain a wider range of perspectives (Bratucu, Chitu, Dinca, & Stefan, 2016). The tourists' responses can be found in Appendix D.

The data obtained from the tourists' responses was coded in order to identify common ideas and themes. This allowed us to recognize common tourist demands and expectations, which indicate what tourists desire when searching for an attraction to visit (Kianicka, Buchecker, Hunziker & Müller-Böker, 2006). The responses also gave us information about how to market to specific tourists. With this information, we developed a matrix that organized the vital information that was used for the marketing strategy, as seen in Appendix E. The matrix helped us emphasize the desired aspects that each initiative already has in order to market them accurately and effectively.

We then analyzed the information gathered from the tourists with the code created for the initiative attributes in Objective 1, which allowed us to compare and contrast what the initiatives already had versus what the tourists are looking for in an attraction (Bratucu, Chitu, Dinca, & Stefan, 2016). This process helped us identify the major similarities and discrepancies between the two codes (Yu & Lee, 2013). Through these findings, we were then able to create a rubric defining various states of an initiative, ranging from an almost ideal initiative that needs minimal improvements to a recently established initiative that would benefit greatly from improvements.

Before designing the rubric, it was important that we knew what we were looking for in an ideal tourist attraction in the rural regions of the Corridor (Gallo, 2004). We visited Don Juan Coffee Tour and the Bat Jungle, which are examples of two well-developed tourist attractions in Monteverde to give ourselves a baseline for a successful site. The categories we included for assessment in our rubric were dependent on our own observations about what made an initiative successful, as well as what the tourists mentioned was important to them. Upon reviewing the comparisons between tourists and initiatives, we were able to identify the aspects and attributes of the initiatives that could be evaluated on a progressive scale, as seen in Appendix F. For example, an attribute such as the number of languages spoken at the initiative can be evaluated as more than three, three, two, and one (Gallo, 2004). Each progressive level was assigned a numerical value between 4, which in the previous example was categorized as more than three languages spoken,

and 1, which was categorized as only one language spoken. The 4-point rating would contain the most desired state for each attribute while the 1-point rating would contain the least desired state. At the end of the evaluation process, the points for each attribute could be added up in order to assign an overall "score" to show where the initiative is compared to an ideal initiative. An ideal initiative would score a 4 in every category. The evaluations for each initiative were used to make recommendations for improvements, which are discussed further in Objective 3.

2.3. Objective 3
Assess each initiative and provide recommendations for improvements.

Once we evaluated the initiatives using the rubric described in Objective 2, we identified areas of improvement based on categories in which the initiatives received lower scores. A major factor taken into consideration before we gave recommendations was the degree of development that the different initiatives wanted to grow their business towards. Many of the initiatives varied in the levels of development that they wanted to achieve. For example, a developmental goal in one of the newly established initiative was to create a logo or brand name for themselves while another initiative's developmental goal was to build cabins for their visitors. Development in lacking categories will assist the initiatives to attract more tourists once they improve the quality and/or variety of products and services they offer, which will then be advertised through their marketing and promotional material (Peters & Weiermair, 2003). It is important that the improvements the initiatives want to implement focus on both the needs of their clients and their personal goals. Most of the initiatives are looking to further their business through developmental projects for their sites in order to better market themselves, and these developmental goals can be based on the recommendations provided by the rubric system in Objective 2.

Through the research findings and evaluations, we provided the main contact for our sponsor, Hugo Villalobos, with well-informed recommendations on different approaches for developmental aspects for each of the initiatives (Bonita, 1998). Within the recommendations, the lacking attributes of each initiative were emphasized through the rubric system in order to assist the businesses in their personal developmental growth. Then, once we give Mr. Villalobos the finalized report, he will potentially give out the different recommendations for each initiative. He will do this by going through the rubric explaining all the different criteria and attributes that the initiatives can improve upon in order to reach their goals and priorities for their businesses (Stange, Brown & International, n.d.). The recommendations are important for development because they will potentially enhance the initiatives' attractiveness of the area through an increase of services provided.

2.4. Objective 4
Design an optimal marketing strategy for rural tourism development.

During our last two weeks in Monteverde, we began developing the promotional plan for our sponsor. The promotional plan depended on the target audience, the various attributes of the initiatives, and the marketing strategies the initiatives throughout the Corridor could implement (Stevens, Loudon, & Nykiel, 2003). All of these characteristics were vital to the development of the plan because the strategies catered to the needs of the initiatives as well as the tourists (Hurst, Niehm, & Littrell, 2009).

To develop a foundation for the marketing strategies, we analyzed previously-used marketing plans in similar cases. Many of these strategies included utilizing database and internet

marketing (Stevens, Loudon, & Nykiel, 2003). Through our research and the discussions we had with our sponsor, we decided that an effective marketing strategy to address a lack of advertising throughout the Corridor was by applying internet marketing. We used the Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana website to promote the initiatives online by enhancing the website so that it included initiative information on an online interactive map. At each initiative we visited, we pinpointed the coordinates using a mobile application called *maps.me*. After we gathered all the coordinates of the visited initiatives, we placed their exact location on a virtual map of the Corridor. Along with the locations, the map also displays the products and services that each initiative has to offer their tourists. This map can be used by tourists to help them better visualize the locations of the initiatives and plan a route to the areas and attractions that they want to visit throughout the Corridor (Beckendorff, 2000). We developed the map by using GPS locations of the initiatives, Geographic Information System software, and other mapping software (Kariotis, Panagiotopolos, Kariotou, & Karanikolas, 2007).

Another successful promotional strategy we are implementing is for the initiatives to market themselves through a collaborative effort. Through the virtual map created, we developed a physical template with just the locations and names of the various initiatives marked with icons throughout the Corridor. The map will also help tourists easily discover initiatives around the area they are in that they may not have known of originally. This collaborative effort will not only aid tourists in identifying new places, but further increases the promotion of the initiatives within the Corridor.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Summary of the Rural Tourism Initiatives

Figure 2: Rural Tourism Initiatives in the Bellbird Biological Corridor

Rural Tourism Initiatives in the Bellbird Biological Corridor

Mujeres de la Montaña Coyolito
A women's group that produces bread and hosts cultural events.

Mariposas del Gulfo
A women's group that has a soda, a butterfly garden, cabins, and boat tours.

Finca Ecológica (Zelmi's Pizza)
A farm with trails, birdwatching, and pizza.

Restaurante Cedral
A restaurant with an organic farm and cabins.

Café el Bueyerito
A coffee manufacturer that offers tours.

El Cafetal
A coffee manufacturer that offers tours and has an Airbnb.

EcoArancibia
An artist who builds, repairs, and paints full-sized & souvenir-sized ox carts.

Lestsi
A small, home-based artist who creates Costa Rican-themed souvenirs.

Clara's Embroidery
A small, home-based artist who creates Costa Rica-themed embroidered goods.

Finca AgroEcologica las Hortensias
A sustainable farm that explains the process of organic farming.

Finca Girasoles
An integrated organic farm that offers tours.

Proyecto de Cedro Alto
An organic farm with hiking trails and a cabin with 8 rooms.

Rancho de Lelo
A sustainable, organic farm with a restaurant and cabins.

In order to complete our observational studies, we visited three different locations within the Corridor, which were San Luis, Costa de Pájaros, and Cedral. As seen in Figure 2, we visited two coffee farms, which provided tours and tastings to their visitors. Both farms have brand names for themselves and sell coffee to various clients, and Café el Bueyerito caters to international clients. We also visited five sustainable farms and four out of the five provide meals for their visitors after the tour for the tourists to experience the freshness of the food created from the products of their farms. The sixth farm, Finca Girasoles, does not provide meals, and currently has no entry fee for tourists. The owner focuses on teaching people how to run and live off a completely sustainable farm in order to promote his passion of sustainable farming. Additionally, we visited two restaurants that vastly differed from one another. Zelmi's Pizza has a restaurant that sells pizza for their visitors, but the property also contains an ecological farm with various outdoor activities for their tourists to take part in, including hiking and camping. However, Restaurante Cedral provides a farm tour, food cooked from the farm, and has accommodations for overnight visitors. We also visited three initiatives that were solely based on creating souvenirs that help revive cultural and regional symbols.

3.2. Defining the Audience

Rural tourists can be defined as people who participate in paid tourist activities in rural areas that focus on maintaining the area's culture, values, history, and land (Loureiro, 2010). Through the interviews with initiative operators, we discovered that *initiatives want to attract rural tourists who appreciate the natural environment and Costa Rican culture*. During surveys with tourists, 17 out of the 19 total tourists explained that their reasoning for coming to Costa Rica was to experience the diverse nature and culture, as seen in Appendix D. These responses aligned with our definition of rural tourists mentioned previously. As seen in Figure 3, 12 of the 13 initiatives answered that they aspire to provide tourists with experiences that allow them to be completely immersed in the nature and culture of Costa Rica.
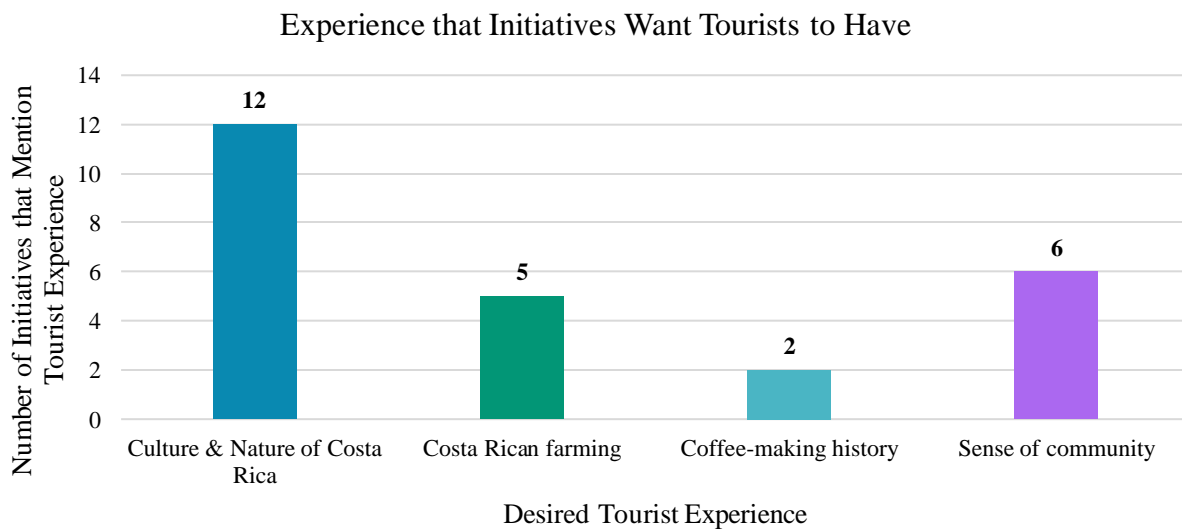
Figure 3: Desired Tourist Experience

The strong emphasis on Costa Rican culture and nature validates that the initiatives want to attract tourists who appreciate the natural environment and do not want an overdeveloped tourist experience because that is not what they are offering. This goal aligns with the tourists' responses during surveys, as seen in Appendix D, indicating that they were most interested in the nature and

culture of Costa Rica and represent the initiatives' target audience. It is also important to note that although rural tourists seek out rural tourism initiatives, they also engage in other tourism types such as adventure tourism and leisure travel.

In addition, during the interviews and observational studies with initiatives, we discovered that each initiative provides rural tourists with a Costa Rican cultural experience in various ways. For example, two of the initiatives, El Cafetal and Café el Bueyerito, offer coffee tours that provide their visitors with Costa Rican coffee culture that includes an experience of how traditional coffee farmers lived and produced coffee. Conversely, three souvenir shops, Lestsi, Clara's Embroidery, and EcoArancibia, harness Costa Rican culture in their handicrafts. Both Lestsi and Clara's Embroidery create their own souvenirs and handicrafts with typical Costa Rican symbols, such as local birds, flowers, and landmarks. EcoArancibia also creates its own souvenirs; however, these crafts mainly incorporate traditional Costa Rican ox carts. These are a few examples of how the embodiment of typical Costa Rican culture at each initiative is being dynamically adapted.

Figure 4: Handicraft with Costa Rican Symbols

Figure 5: Traditional Coffee Drying Area

3.3. Considering Tourist Expectations

While visiting the initiatives and conducting observational studies and interviews, we identified that ***there is a vast range of development among the initiatives.*** This range depends on aspects such as the variety of products and services initiatives offer to tourists and their capacity and desire for growth and development. As seen in Figure 6, only five out of the 13 total initiatives scored in the 4-category for Products & Services, indicating that they already have a wide range of products and services offered to tourists. Seven initiatives scored in either the 2-category or 3-category, signifying that they do not offer tourists more than just some products and services. There is one initiative in the 1-category because of their lack of products and services offered to tourists. This initiative is currently in the developmental stage; therefore, they are unable to provide a tourist experience, but are working towards that goal.

Iniatives' Products & Services Scores
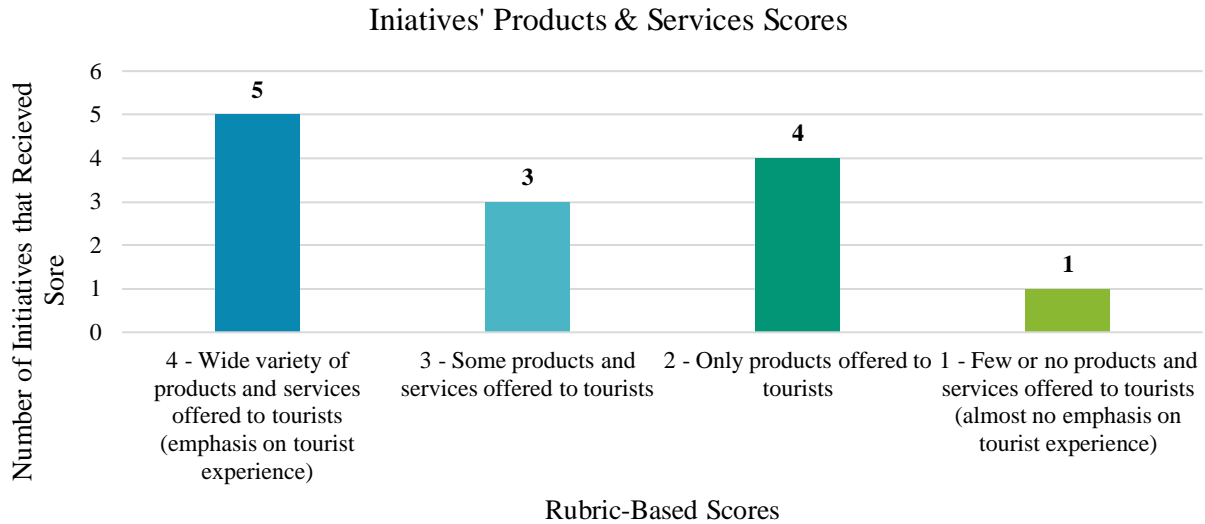
Figure 6: Initiatives' Product & Services Score

Each initiative's level of development can also be represented by their desire and capacity to improve themselves. As seen in Figure 7, only three out of the 13 initiatives scored in the 4-category for Development & Growth, indicating that they are currently in the process of expanding and/or developing their initiative. Seven of the initiatives scored in the 3-category, displaying that they have the desire and capacity to expand and/or develop themselves but are not currently in the process of doing so. The remaining three initiatives scored in the 2-category, signifying that they have the desire to expand and/or develop themselves but do not have the capacity to do so. None of the initiatives scored in the 1-category.

Initiatives' Development & Growth Scores
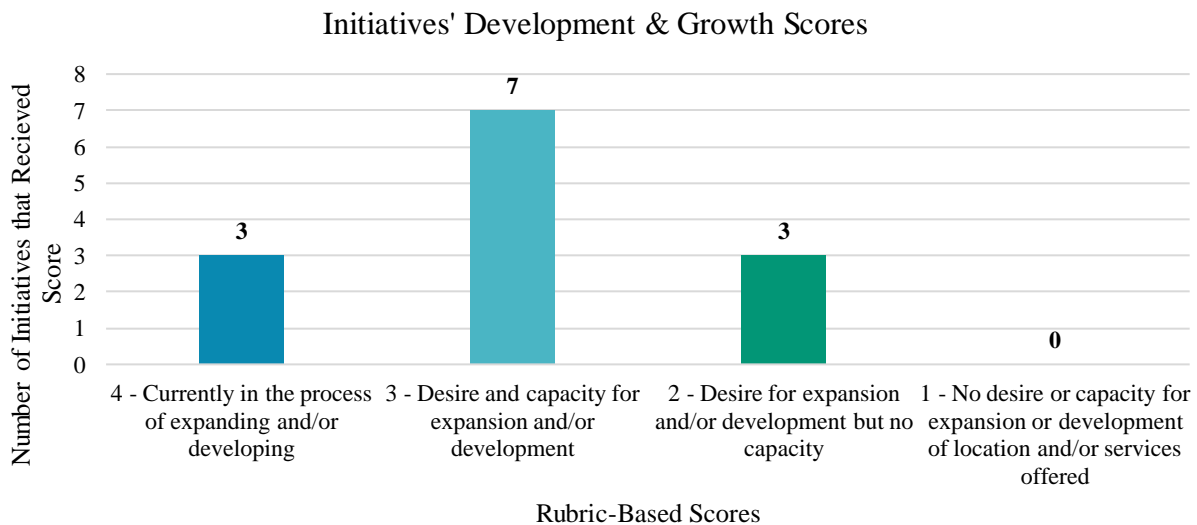
Figure 7: Development & Growth Score

During our visits, we also noted other aspects that varied greatly among the initiatives, which can be seen in our rubric, located in Appendix F. As seen in Appendix G, each initiative was assigned a total score that was determined by the rubric. For example, Mujeres de la Montaña Coyolito received an overall score of 12 points, due to their low scores in categories such as current promotional materials, overall attractiveness, and transportation. Conversely, Rancho de Lelo received an overall score of 23 points, due to their high scores in current promotional materials,

products and services offered to tourists, and overall attractiveness. This is one of many examples of the contrasting initiatives in the Corridor, which makes it exceedingly difficult to find connections, besides their common goal of reviving Costa Rican culture.

Before visiting the initiatives, we did not expect the gap in development within them to be this evident. The vast range that exists between the initiatives makes it difficult to form a simple connection between the products and services that they offer to tourists. Their discrepancies must be made clear to tourists because if they were grouped together, there would be misconceptions about what they offer. Their varying levels of development should also be emphasized to tourists so that they do not expect an unrealistic experience from any of the initiatives. For example, tourists who plan to visit Rancho de Lelo and Mujeres de la Montaña Coyolito must understand that Rancho de Lelo is much more developed than Mujeres de la Montaña Coyolito so that they are not shocked by the apparent differences during their visits. If the differences between the products and services offered and development of the initiatives are not highlighted, visitors may have a negative experience if they have expectations that differ from what is being offered. This may result in negative reviews or feedback, which could hinder the growth of the less-developed initiatives.

Figure 8: Less-Developed Community Center   *Figure 9:* More-Developed Soda

We also observed during our visits that ***the majority of initiatives are difficult to access and distant from town centers***. As seen in Figure 10, none of the initiatives are located on a main road. Additionally, nine of the 13 total initiatives are not located near a town center.

Figure 10: Map of Initiatives

The figure above displays the various locations of the initiatives and how they are all distant from each other and central towns. For example, all initiatives located in Cedral are located at least 20 kilometers away from a main road and the furthest initiative is located 24 kilometers from the nearest main road. While we were at the initiatives, we were able to pinpoint their locations using a mobile application called *maps.me*. This application allows the user to navigate using only latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates. However, it is not guaranteed that all the initiatives' locations can be navigable on other applications, such as *Google Maps* or *Apple Maps*, due to their locations on unmarked or underdeveloped roads. This can become problematic because tourists may not be able to reach the initiatives if they cannot obtain accurate directions. If tourists are unable to reach an initiative on their own, they may choose not to visit the initiative at all. Therefore, the inaccessibility of the initiatives may prevent them from receiving an increase in business from tourists.

3.4. Marketing the Corridor

Through interviews with the initiatives and surveys with tourists, we found that ***initiatives have a misconception about how tourists seek information.*** As seen in Figure 11, every initiative that was interviewed utilizes a word-of-mouth strategy when marketing their initiative. Business cards, brochures, and Facebook are other popular promotional strategies frequently used by initiative operators.

Current Promotional Strategies of Initiatives

Number of Initiatives that use Promotional Strategy (y-axis, scale 0 to 14)

- Internet: 5
- Word-of-mouth: 13
- Hotel Endorsements: 4
- Facebook: 8
- Business cards & brochures: 9
- Email & phone: 1
- Tourism & government…: 2
- Fairs: 2
- Local radio & TV…: 1
- Promotional video: 2

Promotional Strategy (x-axis)

Figure 11: Current Promotional Strategies of Initiatives

Throughout history, small businesses have relied on a word-of-mouth strategy for marketing because it does not cost any money and it has been successful (Confente, 2014). Currently, the word-of-mouth strategy is used throughout the tourism industry and is considered one of the most reliable sources of advertising (Confente, 2014). During our interviews, a majority of the initiative operators believed that their current promotional strategies are effective for them and, therefore, they are not focused on creating new marketing plans. For example, while visiting one of the initiatives, Finca AgroEcológica las Hortensias, the owner mentioned that their main source of advertising is from their business cards and word-of-mouth amongst locals and the community members. Their only online presence is through their daughter's Facebook page, which they do not have access to on a regular basis and it only reaches out to a small, select audience.

Ideally, we would have been able to compare how tourists heard about the initiative with how the initiative currently advertises itself in order to analyze the success of their current promotional strategies. However, this was not possible because there were not any tourists visiting any of the initiatives at the time that we were there. In order to compensate for this obstacle, we conducted surveys with tourists in other locations, such as the Monteverde Reserve, Santa Elena Town, and Montezuma Town. The survey questions can be found in Appendix C and the tourists' responses can be found in Appendix D. As seen in Figure 12, most tourists that were surveyed did not receive information about tourist attractions through word-of-mouth. Instead, every tourist who answered the question regarding which resources they used to seek information about attractions mentioned that they used search engines or travel websites on the Internet. Out of the 16 tourists who answered the question, only five tourists mentioned hearing about attractions from locals or other tourists.

Resources Used to Find Attractions by Tourists
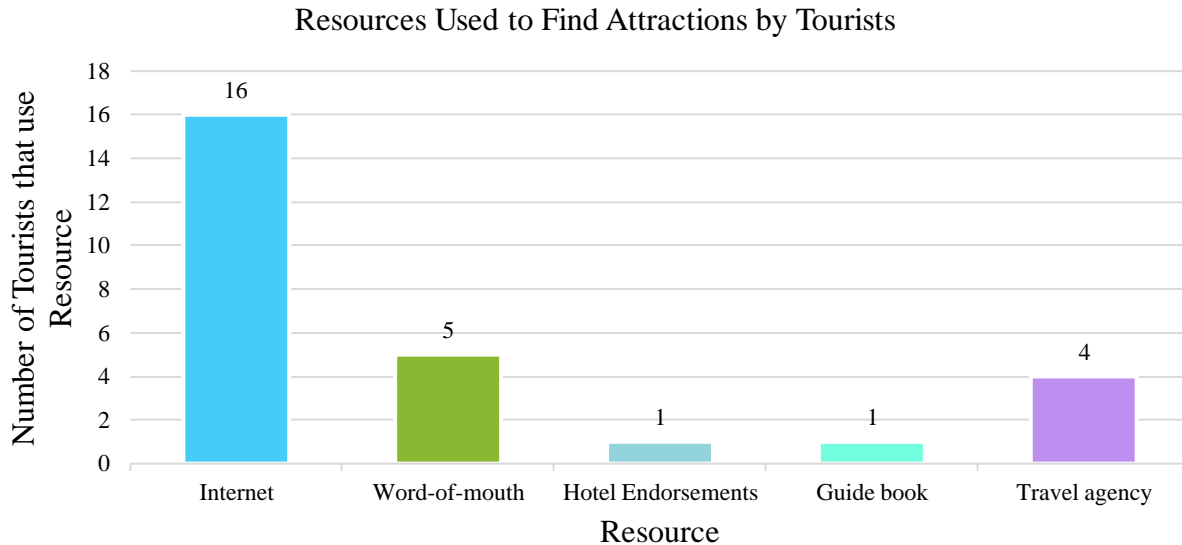
Figure 12: Resources Used to Find Attractions by Tourists

Although the tourists who were interviewed had not visited the initiatives, we concluded that most initiatives would benefit from having a stronger web presence due to the tourists' survey responses. In addition, many tourists mostly conduct a quick Internet search and do not use any particular website. This is beneficial for the initiatives because they might not have to pay to be on a travel agency website as long as they have some online webpage, which they can create with a website builder such as *Weebly.com, Wix.com,* or *Webnode.com.* Currently, eight initiatives utilize *Facebook.* However, in order for this form of Internet presence to be successful for the initiatives that are either already utilizing *Facebook* or are considering using it, their page must be up-to-date with current information about prices, locations, and tourist offerings. The gap between what the initiatives are advertising and how the tourists are finding information about them can be bridged by displaying this information on their own online webpage.

During our observations and interviews at the initiatives, we also discovered that ***all initiatives wanted to be included on the map in order to gain the potential benefits, despite some being reluctant of a potential increase in clientele that they may not be prepared for yet.*** For example, as seen in Appendix A, 9 of the 13 initiatives have limitations on the number of tourists they can accept or manage due to factors such as limited space, resources, and products and services. Four of these initiatives are only able to accept a slight increase in tourists, three do not have the capacity to accept more tourists than they currently have, and two do not have the capability to accept any tourists currently.

There are many reasons that initiatives lack the capacity to grow their tourist numbers. For example, a shortage of products and services initiatives offer is one possible constraint for tourist growth, as seen in Figures 6 and 7 above. Out of the nine initiatives that have restrictions on an increase in tourists, seven received a score of 2 or 3 points in the products and services that they offer. This demonstrates that in order for an initiative to be able to accept a higher number of tourists, they must have sufficient offerings for tourists. Café el Bueyerito also scored 3 points in the Products & Services category, however, it is still able to accept more tourists because it is currently in the process of expanding the variety of products and services offered to tourists by creating a visitor center where they will display exhibitions on how coffee is grown and manufactured. Because it is currently in the process of improving itself, the initiative received a

score of 4 points in the Development & Growth category. Additionally, the potential to develop and grow influences an initiative's capability to accept more tourists. For example, there are two initiatives that received 4 points for the products and services that they offer but are still considered initiatives that have tourist constraints. However, they both scored 3 points in the Development & Growth category because they have plans to develop themselves but have not yet begun doing so. If they do not begin working towards their goals of development, they will either only be able to accept a slight increase or no increase in tourists. Specifically, both initiatives should expand their site in order to comfortably hold more visitors.

Figure 13: Developing Tilapia Farm

Figure 14: Already Developed Tilapia Farm

Although there are initiatives that are not yet ready for tourists, as previously explained, all the 13 initiatives want to be included on online map. This can become a problem for the nine initiatives that have restrictions on a tourist increase because if the online map is successful, it could potentially produce an increase in clientele that they are not yet prepared for. The increase could result in negative consequences because some initiatives may not have the time or resources required to satisfy the needs of tourists. Many tourists at any initiative could have negative repercussions because it can damage the natural beauty of the initiative, or if the initiative is not prepared for tourists, it can make tourists less likely to recommend the attractions to friends and family (Royo-Vela, 2009).

The interviews with the initiatives also revealed that every initiative was interested in displaying a map at their location that displays all the rural initiatives throughout the Bellbird Biological Corridor in order to gain reciprocal marketing benefits. As seen in Figure 15, 10 of the 13 initiatives expressed their own reasons for wanting to be included on the map. Six initiatives explained that they wanted to be included so that they could increase public awareness about their existence and location. Five of the initiatives mentioned that they wanted to be included on the map because they wanted to collaborate with other initiatives to help promote the Corridor as a whole. One initiative owner communicated that he wanted to be included on the map in order to increase awareness about his own passion of sustainable farming. Only three initiatives responded to the question as a polar question (yes-no question) and did not state a specific reason for wanting to be included on the map.

Initiative's Reasons for Being Included on Map
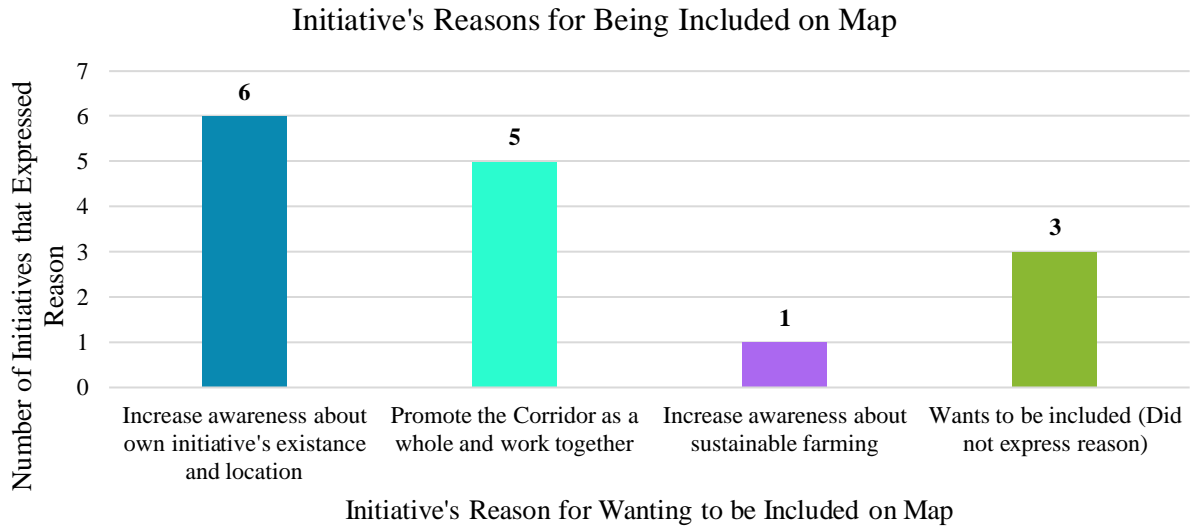
Figure 15: Initiative's Reasons for Being Included on Map

For rural tourism, working together as a community yields higher tourist numbers and more success due to sharing materials, marketing strategies, and clients (Selin, 2017). When all the initiatives display a poster with the locations and names of all the other initiatives in the Corridor, tourists will be able to see what other attractions are available to visit. This will potentially show tourists attractions that they did not know existed and will increase business of the other initiatives.

3.5 Deliverables

Through the analysis developed from the rubric in the previous section, we identified the main attributes for each initiative that make them unique in order to promote them. To market these initiatives successfully, we created a poster of a collaborated map with all of the initiatives labeled. Once we gathered the coordinates of each initiative, we created different icons based on what they have to offer. This was vital because it allowed us to differentiate between initiatives that provide experiences for tourists verses the initiatives that provide products for their visitors to buy (Deardorff, Harm, Hennessy, Truitt, & Smith, 2007). The goal of this deliverable is that the initiatives will post a copy of this map on their walls and when tourists come to see their initiatives, they can familiarize themselves with other attractions in the area that they can potentially visit. We will also provide our sponsor with smaller versions of this poster to place in the initiatives, similar to a brochure, so that tourists can take the map with them in order to visit the other surrounding initiatives.

In order to build further upon the map, we aimed to increase the internet presence for the initiatives by placing all of them on an interactive map on the website of the Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana. All of the data for this was compiled by our team to utilize such as locations of the initiatives, prices, and products or services offered. In the interactive map, each initiative was marked with a specific icon, similar to the poster mentioned previously. Tourists can view this map on the website and click on any of the initiatives that they are interested in to display important information about each of the initiatives. Through our observational studies and interviews with the initiatives, we determined the most important features and details to display based on the information that tourists want to know before planning a visit. Some of the main features and details we determined were: experiences offered, transportation to the area, and prices. This is an important marketing strategy because we found, through our surveys, that many of the tourists

heard about the different attractions that they visited through the internet. Therefore, increasing the web presence of these initiatives will help them attract a larger number of tourists (Kariotis, Panagiotopolos, Kariotou, & Karanikolas, 2007).
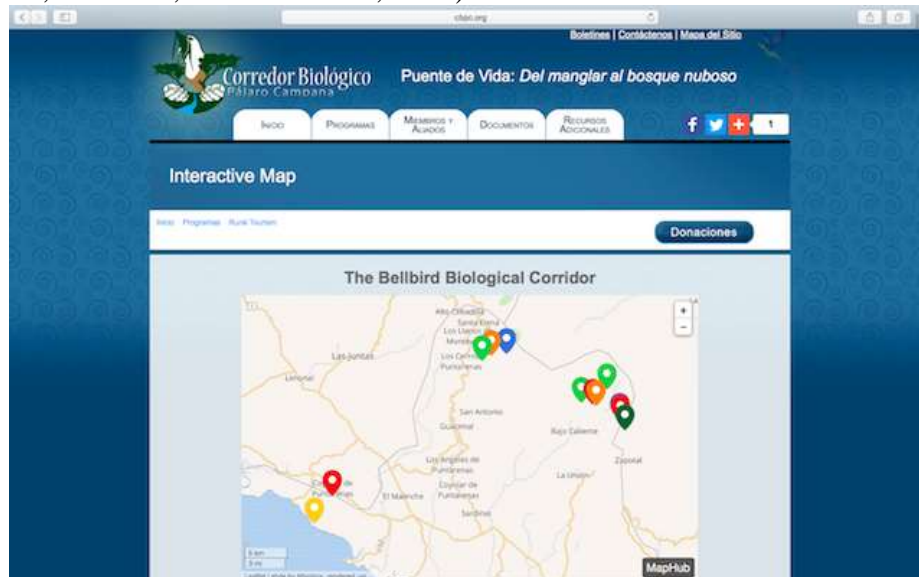
Figure 16: Interactive Map on Corridor Biológico Pájaro Campana Website

   If the initiatives would like to develop themselves further, we will be providing recommendations based on the rubric, which can be found in Appendix G**.** These recommendations will be evaluated through an analysis of what the initiatives have to offer their visitors currently versus what improvements they can make in order to better their infrastructure. We will be providing a finalized rubric of recommendations to our sponsor from the Bellbird Biological Corridor, Hugo Villalobos, which he will then present to the various initiatives showing them the scale that determines the desirable criterion that would help attract tourists. The initiatives can then analyze the rubric to see where they stand and use the initiatives with higher scores as an example to gauge tourist expectations in order to further develop their attractions. Along with this, we would also like continuous communication between our sponsor and the initiatives so the initiatives can provide updates whenever they accomplish goals or add more to their initiative. These recommendations are explained further in Chapter Four.

4. Recommendations

We recognize that the assessments and deliverables we have created are only the first step in the development of a rural tourism network throughout the Corridor. In order to further assist the Bellbird Biological Corridor, we have compiled various recommendations to continue the process of developing rural tourism. These recommendations are provided to the Coordinator of the Bellbird Biological Corridor, Hugo Villalobos, in order to provide some direction for the future.

4.1 Recommendation I

Describe and explain each category of the rubric to initiative operators and use the rubric to provide recommendations for improvement to the initiatives.

Upon completion of the project and the rubric, our sponsor, Hugo Villalobos, will be delivering the recommendations, due to travel and time constraints for our team. As described in **3.3 *Considering Tourist Expectaions*,** the initiatives vary from one another in levels of marketability, number of tourists, types of attraction, and numerous other variables that need to be taken into consideration. Therefore, we would spend too much time suggesting different recommendations for every initiative, which is why the rubric is a valuable tool for both our sponsor and the initiatives. This rubric allows our sponsor to make specific, personalized recommendations for each initiative in order to help them make improvements that are most realistic and beneficial for their initiative based on their own personal developmental goals. Mr. Villalobos will be able to visit the initiatives, explain the rubric, and describe how we scored them in each of the categories.

The rubric will be useful for the initiatives because the owners can clearly see what the next level of every category is and will be able to identify how the initiative should develop to become more successful. Out of the seven different categories, only one-category rates the initiatives on marketing, however, when the initiatives improve their score, they will be more marketable to tourists. Therefore, after our team has left Costa Rica, this recommendation will be contributing to the overall marketing plan of the Bellbird Biological Corridor.

We are suggesting to Mr. Villalobos that when he visits the initiatives and explains the rubric, he should focus on aligning the recommendations with the initiatives' current developmental goals. It would be best if Mr. Villalobos evaluates the categories to identify the areas where the specific goals of the initiatives align, in order to see if all the categories will be useful for the initiatives currently and in the future. The initiatives' goals, as seen in Appendix A, all vary, which means that the rubric must be adaptable to reflect the differences. For example, Rancho de Lelo scored a 2 in Transportation and a 4 in Product & Services, but currently it is the operator's goal to add more attractions. Through the scores, we see that it would better the initiative if their scores for the Transportation category improved, but it is more important that the recommendations for the initiatives align with their needs, in order for them to be more effective. The effectiveness of the recommendations relies on the initiatives' taking ownership and responsibility for them, which is more attainable when they coincide with what they are currently working towards.

Although we attempted to make the rubric as standardized as possible, there are still some limitations and drawbacks to it. For example, there are some initiatives that primarily focus on reviving Tico culture; therefore, they do not speak any other languages besides Spanish. As a result, the initiative is more likely to not incorporate another language into their initiative and

consequently will receive only 1 point in the Language category of the rubric. If we review the rubric and the initiatives' responses with Mr. Villalobos before he visits any initiative, we can explain this drawback of the rubric, so he can have the option to only review the applicable categories with each of the initiatives. In this situation, it might be best for Mr. Villalobos not to discuss the Language category because adding a language may not align with the initiative's mission.

4.2 Recommendation II

We recommend that the Bellbird Biological Corridor organizes trips for the less-developed initiatives to visit the more developed initiatives in order for them to better visualize their future potential.

We recommend that our sponsor, the Bellbird Biological Corridor, conducts a tour for the less-established initiatives to visit the well-established initiatives in order to gain perspective on developmental ideas. The tour will allow the developing initiatives to better understand the ranges for each category on the rubric and potentially provide them with new ideas on how to improve their own initiative based on what they see at the well-established ones. Before the tour, there should be a meeting with all the initiatives explaining what initiative they will be visiting and what types of services it offers. This meeting will ensure that only initiatives with similar goals and values as the showcased initiatives will attend in order to provide the most beneficial experience. Because this will be a costly trip for both the Corridor and the initiatives, it would be necessary for there to be a rotation of the initiatives that are being showcased so that there are different projects with varying products and services being shown. This will ensure that initiatives only go on the specific visits that appeal to their project to help their development. Currently, the San Luis Community Center hosts similar tours, which can be a useful guide if the Bellbird Biological Corridor would like to implement this recommendation.

4.3 Recommendation III

Continuously evaluate each initiative in order to identify progress that has been made, as well as new potential areas of improvement.

As shown in **3.3 *Considering Tourist Expectations***, the level of readiness and establishment among the different initiatives contrasts greatly. Because of this disparity of development, we recommend that the initiatives keep our sponsor updated on their progress and state of business. When the initiatives feel as though they accomplished a previously discussed goal, they can contact our sponsor with pictures and updates to keep the map and the Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana website up-to-date. Having the initiatives reach out to Mr. Villalobos will give the initiatives more accountability for their progress, which will hopefully alleviate some of the workload for Mr. Villalobos.

Through the updates from the initiatives, Mr. Villalobos will be able to analyze their responses and if time permits, he can continue to reevaluate the rubric. Reevaluating each initiative will also allow our sponsor to identify new potential areas of improvement for each initiative so that the initiatives will be motivated to enhance themselves continuously. Although this step will be useful to track the progress of the initiatives, it is not a crucial step if it is too time consuming for our sponsor. The most important aspect is the continuous communication between our sponsor and the initiatives and it is also vital to have someone responsible for uploading new information onto the Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana website. We are recommending that the website

stays up-to-date because some of the initiatives are not yet ready to accept tourists; therefore, when the initiatives are ready for tourists, tourists will be able to find the most accurate and updated information that will market the initiatives best. This could potentially begin their marketing campaign and will allow them to open their business successfully for visitors.

4.4 Recommendation IV

Continue to visit and evaluate more initiatives in order to add their information to the map.

Due to time constraints, our group was unable to visit every initiative throughout the Corridor. However, we were able to visit 13 and determine that all of those initiatives are interested in advertising on the map that displays other rural initiatives throughout the Bellbird Biological Corridor and are willing to post it in their own initiative to gain reciprocal benefits, as explained in **3.4** *Marketing the Corridor*.

A limitation we discovered in two of the initiatives was that they are currently not prepared and established enough to accept tourists to their site. For example, Proyecto de Cedro Alto was one of the initiatives that stated that they are not prepared to accept tourists for another few months because they would like to develop their trails and cabins further to accommodate their visitors more comfortably. However, initiatives such as Proyecto de Cedro Alto are still eager to be included in the map to encourage collaboration between the initiatives to increase marketing within the Corridor. We would like to suggest to our sponsor to wait to print the map until all the initiatives that are labeled have reached a state of readiness to accept tourists. This will help save resources because there will be limited reprinting of the map if they are all updated when the first versions of the maps are distributed to the different initiatives. However, we also suggest that Mr. Villalobos implements a time limit for how long the initiatives have to prepare themselves until the map is printed. We recommend that he prints as soon as funding is available, or set a deadline for a year. This will potentially ensure that all 13 initiatives will be prepared to accept tourists in a way that the initiatives are proud of. Although the poster is an important marketing strategy, they will still be located on the interactive map with a description stating an approximate time of opening.

Following our departure from Costa Rica, we also recommend that our sponsor continues to visit other initiatives throughout the Corridor, as well as new ones that develop in the future, in order to obtain information about them so that they, too, can be included on the map. Although the constant expansion and growth of the map would be beneficial for both initiatives, tourists, and communities, it may have some limitations. For example, if the poster of the map is reprinted every time a new initiative desires to be included on the map, it may become extremely costly and environmentally damaging. Therefore, to conserve costs and materials, the map should only be reprinted if more than ten initiatives are included in the Corridor, or if a year passes and less than ten initiatives need to be added to the map. This constraint will allow a systematic way to update the poster map and will give a concrete time for the initiatives to know when they can see themselves on the poster. Therefore, it is important to put a year on the map so that users know they are looking at the most updated version.

In addition, we will create two different maps: one with only the 13 initiatives that we visited marked on the map, and the other with the 13 initiatives, as well as markings of the other San Luis initiatives that we were unable to visit due to transportation. Our main contact at the San Luis Community Center provided us with the names, locations, and key information about all projects in San Luis, which allows us to add all San Luis projects on the poster. It is important to note that there are currently other initiatives in other locations in the Corridor, but we were unable to receive information about their locations and products. If we were given this information, we

would also have added them to the second map to lessen the amount of time it would take to develop the later maps. By adding the San Luis initiatives to the map now, there will be less work for our sponsor to do later; however, he would still need to visit the projects to receive information about their goals and current state of affairs. Once the visits to the San Luis projects are complete, our sponsor can update the website with their information.

4.5 Conclusion

An important aspect of rural tourism is attracting the right number of tourists to the area to promote the local initiatives and further increase their business growth. While attracting more tourists, it is vital to preserve the rural areas since over saturation of tourists can negatively affect both the environment, and the tourists expectations. The Bellbird Biological Corridor is implementing a plan for successfully promoting rural initiatives through major collaboration efforts amongst the initiatives. The organization selects initiatives to participate in the project if they are working towards environmental and cultural preservation of the Corridor. A cohesive map of the corridor has been developed with all the initiatives labeled in order to help the owners of the attractions increase promotion while also showing tourists the wide range of attractions available nearby. With this information, the Corridor will be better advertised for tourists while enhancing the established connections amongst the organization. An increase in tourism is one proven way to stimulate economic growth in the rural areas that also encourages continued environmental preservation efforts within the biological corridor.

Through our efforts, we hope that the initiatives work together to develop themselves further and increase the tourist population within the Corridor. A research finding that can be explored further is why some initiatives have the power to grow but do not pursue this development, and what factors are limiting their desire to grow. In the future we hope that the implemented marketing plan is expanded upon with more established connections and is well kept by annual updates to the map and to the initiatives themselves. Through these developments, the rural areas will gain more tourists which in effect will help the rural communities put an emphasis on the preservation of the environment throughout the Corridor.

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Appendix A

Initiative Information Gathered During Interviews and Observational Studies

Attribute	El Cafetal	Rancho del Lelo	Finca Ecológica (Zelmira's Pizza)	Mujeres de la Montana Coyolito	Mariposas del Golfo	Proyecto de Cedro Alto	Finca Girasoles	Café el Bueyerito	Lestsi (Sonya's Handicrafts)	Clara's Embroidery	Restaurante Cedral	EcoArancibia	Finca AgroEcológica las Hortensias
Location	San Luis	San Luis	San Luis	Sardinal	Sardinal	Cedral	Cedral	Cedral	Cedral	Cedral	Cedral	Cedral	Cedral
Products & Services	Coffee, History, Nature tour, Airbnb	Ecolodge, Organic Fishing, Organic Farming, Restaurant, Coffee plantation, Dance Lessons	Pizza, bird watching, hiking, camping, river swimming	Sold bread, make souvenirs with trash, host cultural events with food and traditional games	Restaurant, cabins (12 people), visitor's center, boat trip to Gulf of Nicoya	Organic farm, hiking trails, cabins, [future: trout pools, butterfly garden]	Organic sustainable farm, helps with climate change, biodigester, animals, coffee	Coffee	Keychains, souvenirs, etc	Handicrafts, embroidery, paintings	Organic farm, typical CR food restaurant, cabins, bat room	Ox cart paintings, ox cart trinkets, key chains, coffee makers, etc	Sustainable farm tour. Sugar cane demonstration, feed fish, see animals and biodigestor
What they want tourists to gain from visiting	Provide education of the history of coffee-making culture in Costa Rica	Life of a Tico on a sustainable farm	Experience tranquil nature of Costa Rica (& birds!)	Feel welcome, relax, eat, and return; revive Costa Rican traditions	Culture and traditions of people in the village town, appreciate natural resources	Tranquility of nature, show people how to use farm resources	Learn how to live on sustainable farm, appreciate nature	Process of obtaining coffee, explain history of ox carts, learn about coffee-making culture	Revive culture of area	How she makes her embroidered products, capture culture and nature of area	Better understand where food comes from, people can participate in process	Culture	Wants tourists to feel welcomed and come back again. Wants people to feel hospitality
Future Goals	Expanding Tour and Land	Adding more attractions like horseback riding	Fixing infrastructure, cleaning up trails, and having consistent # of clients	Better connections with stores to sell bread, build walls around patio area, get better tables and chairs, involve community, cabins	More cabins with private bathrooms, smaller rooms for smaller groups, add garden of vegetables	Trout pool, butterfly garden, more cabins, improve trails, more animals	Cabins, fix trails, make bridge over creek (damage from storm), improve presentation of farm (labels, etc.), finish 2-purpose green house	Visitors center (exhibitions on how coffee works/is made), promote to more clients outside of CR	To have her own shop where she can give classes	More resources to make better and more professional versions of handicrafts, make bags and tablecloths, sell in souvenir shops	More cabins, improve restaurant but keep essence, improve bakery, more products on farm	To have her own shop in Mirimar and reach out to more souvenir shops	Add viewpoint, get a new biodigestor, new cabins, use soccer field for camping
# Visitors	1200/year	50/week high season, 800/year	50/week; can accept a slight increase in tourists	30/week; can accept a slight increase in tourists	100/month; cannot accept more tourists at this time	Students (no number); not accepting tourists at this time	8 groups of 10-20 people (2017); not accepting tourists at this time	30-40/season (student groups)	Varies, depends on the groups that visit Cedral; cannot accept more tourists at this time	Varies; cannot accept more tourists at this time	300-350/month (restaurant), 20/week (cabins)	Varies; can accept a slight increase in tourists	100-130/year; can accept a slight increase in tourists
Current Advertising	Hotels, Flyers, Word-of-mouth, website, established brand	Hotels, Flyers, Word-of-mouth, TripAdvisor, Booking.com	Word-of-mouth, hotels, business card, Facebook	Word-of-mouth	Word-of-mouth, cards, brochures, website, Facebook, email, phone calls	Association of tourism, word-of-mouth, brother uploads info onto website (unknown), daughter uploads info about project on Facebook page	Ministry of Agriculture, member of Chamber of Tourism, word-of-mouth	Facebook, website, established brand (stickers, logo), brochures in hotels, word-of-mouth	Business cards, word-of-mouth, social media	Word-of-mouth, fairs, locals	Facebook, local radio, video, TV programs, word-of-mouth	Word-of-mouth (through the 30 women program), Facebook, business cards, fairs in San Jose, Puntarenas, Mirimar	Business cards, word-of-mouth, daughter's Facebook
Accessibility	Kind of a hike- harder to get through	No paved walkways but easy to walk through	Narrow, unpaved hiking trails	Easy/moderate	Easy to navigate, paved pathways	Difficult	Moderate	Moderate	Usually travels to customers, but house easy to get to	Easy	Easy	Visitors do not go to her house	No paved walkways, narrow, rocky trails
Languages	Spanish, English (when needed)	Spanish, English	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish & English	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish & English	Spanish	Spanish
Transportation	Provided	Can be arranged	Not available	Buses, cars	Not available	Own cars, can pick people up from Cedral and Miramar	Own cars	Own cars	N/A	N/A	Own cars, can pick people up from nearby areas	N/A	Can be arranged from Cedral or Mirimar
Prices	$35/person including transportation	Rooms: $71/night	Trails: $10/person & $5/student, Camping: $20/night & $5/person for trails	N/A	N/A	N/A	Free, might start charging now that he is part of Chamber of Tourism	N/A	Varies (approx. 3000 colones for small keychain)	N/A	5 mil/night**	Varies	N/A
Slogan	N/A	N/A	N/A	Women fighting for a better future	Unique and Authentic Costa de Pajaros	Peaceful and Quiet Paradise	Integrated Sustainable Farm	Something different for the area	Passion and hobby	Handmade from the North End	Our flavor. A tradition.	To rescue the cultural history and nature of Costa Rica	A paradise for rest and enjoyment
Future Marketing Plans				Facebook page, show people how to make the souvenirs	Advertised all over (hotels, airports, other websites)	Signs on road, brochures, upload info onto other websites, Facebook page	Social networks, QR codes on business cards that he can distribute	Coffee tasters, connect with other countries, produce and promote a specific quality of coffee	New cards and increased social media	Sell to souvenir shops	Promotions on local and national radio, tv channels, signs along road	More relationships with souvenir shops	Brochures and more Facebook and business cards
Inclusion on Map	Working together to see each other's goods and services	Want to show that they exist	Better if we work together, web presence would help her business	Broadcast goods and services to other areas, people hear about her in other locations	Wants to be part of network, better show how many great things there are throughout Corridor	Want people to be aware of them for when they are ready	More people will know about sustainable farms like his	Increase accessibility of his own initiative's information	Wants to be included	Wants to be included	Wants to spread information about other initiatives and themselves	Want to be included	Want to be known, wasn't able to make an internet presence for himself
Notes						Not ready for 7-8 months	Franklin				**5 mil/night may have been a discount		

Appendix B

Initiatives Interview Questions – English

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts and we are working with the Bellbird Biological Corridor to develop a commercial plan to connect the local initiatives in the corridor. Currently, we are conducting interviews with the local initiatives to better understand the attractions that they are providing to tourists and how to best include these resources into our marketing plan.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Names or identifying information will not appear on the questionnaires or in any of the project reports or publications without your consent. If desired, we can protect your identity by using a different name. If interested, we can send you a copy of our project with our results once the study has been concluded.

1. What is your main attraction that draws tourists to the area?

2. Could you tell us a little bit about how your business began?

3. How did you get involved with the business?

4. What experience do you want tourists to have at your attraction?

5. On average, how many tourists come to this attraction in the length of a week?

6. Currently, how do you attract tourists?
    a. Do you currently have a web presence? Has it proven to be effective/useful?
    b. Where are most of your customers coming from?

7. Do you have any specific goals for your business in the coming years? If so, what are they?
    a. How would you accomplish these goals?

8. What improvements or additions would you like to make in the future?

9. How do you think an increase in tourists to the area would affect your business?
    a. Would the development of new tourist attractions in the area be seen as competitors or contributors to your business?

10. Do you provide transportation? If not, how do most tourists get to your business?

11. How do you feel about being a part of the Bellbird Biological Corridor?

12. How would you feel about your attraction being featured on a map with other tourist attractions in the Corridor? Would you be okay with a map like this being displayed in your business?

Initiative Interview Questions – Spanish

Somos un grupo de estudiantes del una universidad Worcester Polytechnic Institute de Los Estados Unidos y trabajamos con el Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana para desarrollar un plan comercial para conectar las iniciativas locales en el corredor. En este momento, entrevistamos con las atracciones de turísticas rurales para entender las atracciones que están allí por los turistas y cómo incluir estos recursos en nuestro plan de marketing.

Su participación en esta entrevista es completamente voluntaria y usted puede retirar en cualquier momento. Su nombres o la información de identificación no aparecerán en los cuestionarios o en cualquiera del trabajo o publicaciones del proyecto sin su consentimiento. Si lo desea, podemos proteger su identidad usando un nombre diferente. Si está interesado, le podemos enviar una copia de nuestro proyecto con nuestros resultados después de concluido el estudio.

1. ¿Cuál es su atracción principal que atrae a los turistas a la zona?

2. ¿Cómo comenzó su negocio?

3. ¿Cómo usted empezaste a trabajar con el negocio?

4. ¿Qué experiencia quiere que tengan los turistas en usted atracción?

5. Generalmente, ¿cuántos turistas vienen a esta atracción en la duración de una semana?

6. Ahora, ¿cómo atrae a los turistas?

    a. ¿Ahora tiene una presencia en la web? ¿Ha demostrado ser efectivo?

    b. ¿De dónde viene la mayoría de sus clientes?

7. ¿Tiene algún objetivo específico para su negocio en los próximos años? Si es así, ¿Que son?

    a. ¿Cómo va a satisfacer estos objetivos?

8. ¿Qué mejoras o adiciones le gustaría hacer en el futuro?

9. ¿Cómo cree que un aumento de turistas en el área afectaría tu negocio?

    a. ¿Cómo su afectarían más negocios en el área?

10. ¿Proporciona transporte? Si no, ¿cómo llegan la mayoría de los turistas a su negocio?

11. ¿Cómo se siente acerca de ser parte del Corredor Biológico Bellbird?

12. ¿Cómo se sentiría acerca de que su atracción aparezca en un mapa con otras atracciones turísticas en el Corredor? ¿Estaría bien con un mapa como este que se muestra en su negocio?

Appendix C

Tourists Survey Questions- English

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts and we are working with the Bellbird Biological Corridor to develop a commercial plan to connect the local tourism attraction throughout the corridor. Currently, we are conducting surveys with tourists to better understand the attractions that enticed them to come to the area.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Names or identifying information will remain anonymous in our final report

1. Are you here to experience the nature, hiking, or the culture of Costa Rica? If so, which ones?

2. How did you hear about this attraction?

   a. (Hotel, Online, Word-of-Mouth, Tourist Agency, or Other)

3. Where are you from?

4. Where are you staying in Costa Rica, and for how long?

   a. What is the name of the accommodation you are staying at?

5. Were you provided with transportation for this attraction?

   a. If not, how did you get here?

Tourists Survey Questions – Spanish

Somos un grupo de estudiantes de una universidad, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, en los Estados Unidos. Estamos trabajando con el Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana para desarrollar un plan comercial para conectar las atracciones turísticas locales a lo largo del corredor. Actualmente, estamos realizando encuestas con turistas para entender mejor qué atracciones los atrajeron a venir al área y por qué.

Su participación en esta encuesta es completamente voluntaria y puede retirarse en cualquier momento. Su nombre y su información de identificación permanecerán anónimos en nuestro trabajo final.

1. ¿Está aquí para experimentar la naturaleza o la cultura de Costa Rica? Si es así, ¿cuáles?

2. ¿Cómo oyó sobre esta atracción?

3. ¿De donde es usted?

4. ¿Dónde visita en Costa Rica, y por cuanto tiempo?

   a. ¿Qué es el nombre de su alojamiento?

5. ¿Fue proveído del transporte para esta atracción?

   a. Si no, ¿cómo llegaste aquí?

Appendix D

Tourist Survey Responses

Tourist #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Location	Monteverde Reserve	Monteverde Reserve	Monteverde Reserve	Monteverde Reserve	Monteverde Reserve	Monteverde Reserve	Monteverde Reserve	Monteverde Reserve	Santa Elena	Santa Elena	Santa Elena	Santa Elena	Santa Elena	Montezuma	Montezuma	Montezuma	Montezuma	Montezuma	Montezuma
Reason for Visiting Costa Rica	Nature, hiking, culture	Searching for retirement home	See country, nature, "everything"	Nature, culture	Experience underdeveloped nature & tropical rainforests, visit country that has people who care about the environment	Wildlife & beaches	Nature, hiking, culture	Nature, hiking, culture	Escape winter, diversity of environment, culture	Culture, visit country	Nature, animals, recommended by friends	Vacation	Studies - Volcano, nature research, uninterested in visiting beach	Loves culture of Costa Rica, nature	Loves culture of Costa Rica, nature	Relax, nature	Break from college, wanted to visit country, traveling alone	Culture, nature	Traveling alone, meet new people, culture
Attractions									Zip lining, kayaking, volcano	Relaxing	Walked in jungle, night walk	Coffee tour, hanging bridges	Rainforest, bridges, birds, wildlife	Farm excursion (1.5 months) - learn about sustainable farming, festival	Farm excursion (1.5 months) - learn about sustainable farming, festival	Snorkeling, hiking	Ziplining, hiking, snorkeling, surfing	Ziplining, hiking, snorkeling, surfing	Snorkeling, hiking
Resources Used to Find Attractions	Hotel, Internet (Lonely Planet)	Internet (Browsing)	Internet, word-of-mouth	Internet, word-of-mouth	Internet (Search engine)	Internet (Lonely Planet)	Internet, French guide	(Internet) Frommer's	Internet, travel agency		Internet, word-of-mouth		Germany	Internet, word-of-mouth	Internet, word-of-mouth	Internet, travel agency	Internet, travel agency	Internet, travel agency	Internet
Country of Origin	Netherlands (German & Romanian)	Canada	Canada & United States (TX)	United States (CA)	United States (MI)	United States (MA)	France	United States (ID, WA)	United States (IL)	United States (CA)	Belgium	United States (MD)	Germany	United States (MD)	Canada	Canada	Beligium	United States	Canada
Accommodation	Airbnb	El Bosque	Airbnb	Rainbow Valley Lodge	Playa de Coco	Green Paradise	Monteverde Country Lodge	Airbnb	Hotel Belmar	El Establo	Santa Fe	Monteverde Country Lodge	El Establo	Airbnb	Airbnb	Hostel	Hostel	Hostel	Hostel
Length of Visit in Monteverde		3 nights			8 Days		2 days	2 days			2 days	3 nights	2 days				2 nights	2 nights	
Length of Time in Costa Rica	17 days	3 months		3 weeks		3 weeks		2 weeks			2 weeks			2.5 months	2.5 months	7 days	2 weeks	2 weeks	
Transportation	Cab	Rental car	Rental car & shuttles	Rental car	Rental car	Rental car	Rental car	Walking	Taxis, private shuttles, boats	Taxis, local commercial flights, boats	Bus	Gate 1 Transportation (large group bus)	Tour bus (25 tourists & 1 guide)	Public bus, scooter	Public bus, scooter	Shuttle	Shuttles	Public bus	Rental car

Note: Word-of-mouth refers to a combination of conversations with locals and other Costa Rican tourists.

Appendix E

Marketing Strategy Matrix

Marketing Attribute	El Cafetal	Rancho del Lelo	Finca Ecológica (Zelmira's Pizza)	Mujeres de la Montana Coyolito	Mariposas del Golfo	Proyecto de Cedro Alto	Finca Girasoles	Café el Bueyerito	Lestsi (Sonya's Handicrafts)	Clara's Embroidery	Restaurante Cedral	EcoArancibia	Finca AgroEcológica las Hortensias
Main Attraction	Coffee Tour	Sustainable Farm	Pizza Restaurant	Souvenirs	Outdoor Tours (Butterfly, fishing, and mangroves tours)	Hiking (Not yet fully completed)	Sustainable Farm	Coffee Tour	Souvenirs	Souvenirs	Restaurant	Souvenirs	Sustainable Farm
Supplemental Attractions	AirBnb	Cabins, Restaurant, Dance Lessons, Pool, Soccer Field, Coffee Plantation	Hiking Trails, Bird Watching, Camping	Cultural Events, Homemade Bread	Cabins, Restaurant	Cabins. Coming soon: sustainable farm tour, butterfly garden, tilapia farm with fishing)	Trout Farm	Additional coffee farm tour upon request			Organic Farm, Cabins, Bat Room	Process of how to make ox cart souvenirs	Food prepared using only food found on farm.
Transportation	Provided	Can be arranged	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Provided from Cedral or Mirimar	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Can arrange transportation	Not Available	Provided from Cedral and Mirmar
What to Bring	Comfortable walking shoes	Comfortable walking shoes	Hiking shoes, Rain Jacket,	Wear light clothing	Wear light clothing	Hiking shoes, Rain Jacket	Hiking shoes, Rain Jacket	Comfortable shoes			Comfortable shoes		Hiking shoes, Rain Jacket
Languages	Spanish and English	Spanish and English	Spanish (English Menu)	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish and English	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish and English	Spanish	Spanish

Appendix F

Initiative Recommendation Rubric Guidelines

	4	3	2	1
Transportation How tourists can reach the location	Transportation is always provided if needed	Transportation is sometimes provided to nearby areas if needed	Transportation is not provided but can be arranged with an outside company	Transportation is never provided; tourists must find their own transportation
Languages Number of languages that are spoken	Spanish & 2 other languages	Spanish & 1 other language	Spanish & some of another language	Spanish only
Accessibility Level of difficulty to navigate location	Easy – Paved walkways, smooth/even terrain, railings	Easy/Moderate – Unpaved walkways, mostly even terrain, some railings	Moderate/Difficult – Some pathways, mostly uneven terrain, few railings	Difficult – Minimal to no pathways, rocky/uneven terrain, minimal to no railings
Products & Services Number and quality of products and services offered to tourists	Wide variety of products and services offered to tourists (emphasis on tourist experience)	Some products and services offered to tourists	Only products offered to tourists	Few or no products and services offered to tourists (almost no emphasis on tourist experience)
Development & Growth Capacity and desire to grow and expand products and services offered	Currently in the process of expanding and/or developing	Desire and capacity for expansion and/or development	Desire for expansion and/or development but no capacity	No desire or capacity for expansion or development of location and/or services offered
Promotional Materials Current promotional materials and strategies	Already established brand with internet presence with other promotional materials	Some internet presence with other promotional strategies and materials	Some promotional strategies and materials in place but mainly utilizes word-of-mouth	No current promotional strategies or materials in place besides word-of-mouth
Attractiveness Overall attractiveness of location	Extremely visually appealing	Highly visually appealing	Moderately visually appealing	Somewhat visually appealing
Total: ___/28				

Appendix G

Initiatives' Rubric-Based Scores

Initiative	Attribute	Attribute Score	Final Score	Initiative	Attribute	Attribute Score	Final Score	Initiative	Attribute	Attribute Score	Final Score
El Cafetal	TR	4	23	Café el Bueyerito	TR	1	18	Proyecto de Cedro Alto	TR	3	16
	LA	3			LA	2			LA	1	
	AC	2			AC	2			AC	1	
	PS	4			PS	3			PS	1	
	DG	3			DG	4			DG	4	
	PM	4			PM	4			PM	3	
	AT	3			AT	2			AT	3	
Rancho de Lelo	TR	2	23	Lestsi (Sonya's Handicrafts)	TR	1	14	Finca Girasoles	TR	1	16
	LA	3			LA	1			LA	1	
	AC	3			AC	4			AC	2	
	PS	4			PS	2			PS	3	
	DG	3			DG	2			DG	4	
	PM	4			PM	3			PM	2	
	AT	4			AT	1			AT	3	
Finca Ecológica (Zelmira's Pizza)	TR	1	17	Clara's Embroidery (Handmade from the North Zone)	TR	1	13	Finca Agroecológica las Hortensias	TR	3	18
	LA	1			LA	1			LA	1	
	AC	2			AC	4			AC	2	
	PS	4			PS	2			PS	3	
	DG	3			DG	2			DG	3	
	PM	3			PM	2			PM	2	
	AT	3			AT	1			AT	4	
Mujeres de la Montaña Coyolito	TR	1	12	Restaurante Cedral	TR	1	21				
	LA	1			LA	2					
	AC	3			AC	4					
	PS	2			PS	4					
	DG	3			DG	3					
	PM	1			PM	4					
	AT	1			AT	3					
Mariposas del Golfo	TR	1	19	EcoArancibia	TR	1	14				
	LA	1			LA	1					
	AC	3			AC	4					
	PS	4			PS	2					
	DG	3			DG	2					
	PM	4			PM	3					
	AT	3			AT	1					

Key	
TR	Transportation
LA	Languages
AC	Accessibility
PS	Products & Services
DG	Development & Growth
PM	Promotional Material
AT	Attractiveness