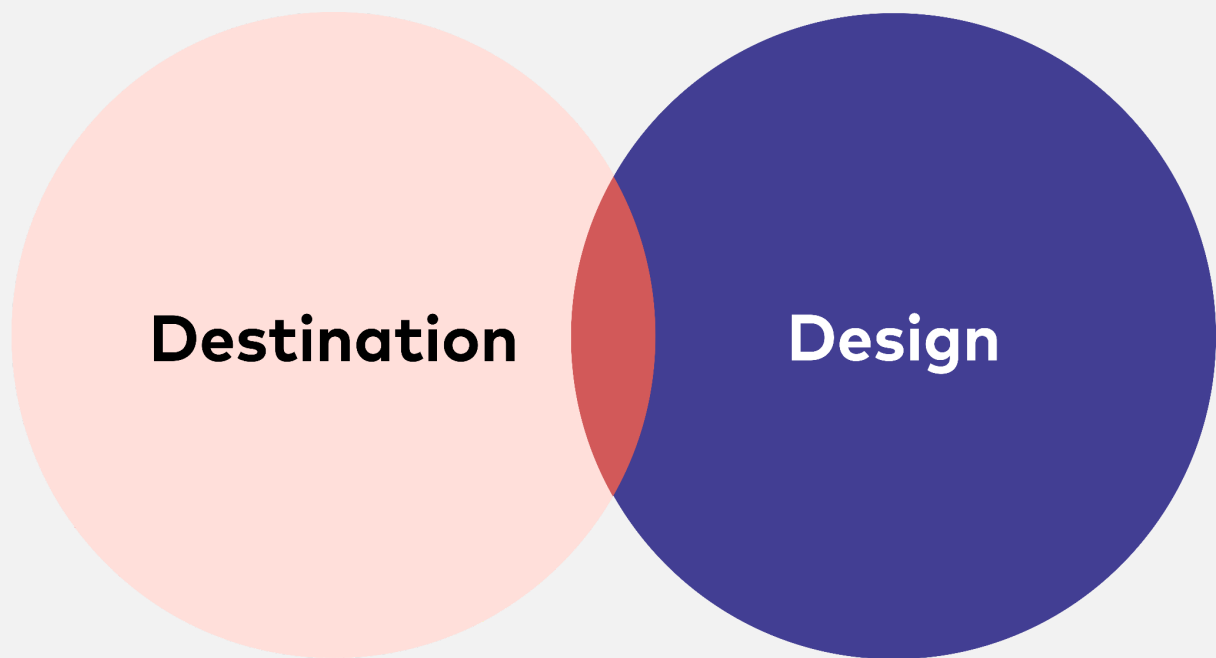


# Destination Design

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A design thinking approach to tourism development through the evolution of Destination Management Organizations



**By: Matthew Thomas & Jonathan McNeice**

Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design in Strategic Foresight & Innovation

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2021

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# Abstract

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The effects of COVID-19 have shown that tourism is a fragile industry, but vital to the economic health of communities. Tourist destinations are developed through a complex system made up of a large number of stakeholders. This destination development system is ripe for innovation, as drivers of change in technology and the experience economy are opening up new opportunities for communities, while challenging the operations of legacy institutions.

This paper explores how communities might adapt to these changes by utilizing design thinking and co-creation methodologies to create resilient destinations which attract tourists and improve the lives of locals.

Through research into the traditional destination development system, we identify that Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) play a crucial role in the information exchange between stakeholders. However, DMOs are becoming less relevant in this exchange. We find that by taking a reactive approach to their work and attempting to manage increasingly more complex relationships, DMOs are not meeting the needs of tourism operators or their local communities.

Destination design, in contrast, is an emerging area of study which seeks to understand how elements of design thinking may be used to creatively solve problems in the tourism and destination development fields. This project explores the potential for DMOs to become designers instead of managers of destinations. In doing so, they can reassert their relevance by adding value to their stakeholders, which could result in better outcomes for tourists and locals.

The authors propose a Destination Design Methodology & Toolkit, which includes a process and workshops to help communities co-create resilient destinations.

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# Glossary of Terms

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The following terms will be used throughout this paper and can be easily confused. For clarity purposes, we are providing the following definitions:

## **Destination development:**

Destination development is the strategic planning and advancement of defined areas to support the evolution of desirable destinations for travellers, with a sole focus on the supply side of tourism, by providing compelling experiences, quality infrastructure, and remarkable services to entice repeat visitation (Province of British Columbia, n.d.).

## **Tourism development:**

Tourism development is the process of establishing and maintaining a tourism industry in a particular location. Tourism development can be defined as the process of developing strategies and plans to increase tourism in a particular destination.

## **Destination design:**

An emerging perspective for gaining fresh understandings of challenges in tourism destinations, rooted in design thinking as a methodology for offering innovative solutions.

## **Destination Management Organizations (DMOs):**

An organization that is under the jurisdiction of the local, regional or national government with the mandate to manage a destination's reputation and tourism stakeholders. DMOs may cover jurisdictions covering a country, province/state, region, or city. Their purpose is to make their destination attractive to potential visitors and to provide economic benefit to the community and its members. DMO stakeholders may include hospitality-related entities (hotels & restaurants), tour operators, attractions, and governmental bodies.

## **Destination Marketing Organizations:**

A destination marketing organization promotes a location as an attractive travel destination. These organizations use marketing and communications techniques to reach audiences, with the goal to develop local economies as a result of increased tourism. Many Destination *Marketing* Organizations have evolved into Destination *Management* Organizations.

## Project Context

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Before the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was a growing sector of the economy. As the industry rebuilds, new approaches are being considered to ensure communities are more resilient to unexpected changes, and are also environmentally and financially sustainable.

Destination development is the strategic planning and advancement of specific areas and is used to support the evolution of desirable destinations for visitors and local residents. The development of destinations exists within a complex system that includes multi-level government administrations, the needs of local citizens, the ventures of businesses, and the expectations of tourists, among many others (Province of British Columbia, n.d.). Destination development can take many forms — from large scale undertakings to neighbourhood-sized solutions. In St. Petersburg, Florida (population: 261,000), the City transformed an under-used pier bordering its downtown area into a gleaming new destination, complete with places to dine, drink, shop, swim, bike, and attend concerts. The St. Pete Pier is a shining example of the power a municipality can harness when it pulls together the right ingredients to develop a magnetic destination. Each weekend, thousands of visitors convene in the district, which is celebrated by both locals and tourists.



Image 1. St. Pete Pier (<https://stpetepier.org/>)



Likewise, the small town of Mystic, Connecticut (population: 4,200) climbed rankings as a top food destination by leveraging the 1988 romantic comedy, *Mystic Pizza*, that was filmed there (Squires, 2021.). The strategy Mystic employed was smaller in scope, yet still highly effective.

The examples of St. Pete Pier and Mystic, Connecticut provide contrast in the scale and scope of contemporary destination development. In the case of St. Pete Pier, a master plan approach was taken. The St. Petersburg municipality utilized the services of landscape architecture firms as well as multiple municipal and state-level departments. These entities worked together in developing a cohesive attraction to manage the large number of visitors to the beach community and create economic and quality of life improvements for local citizens. In the example of Mystic, Connecticut, the destination was formed organically over decades, although it only became an attractive destination for visitors after marketing and place branding techniques were introduced. The development of destinations can therefore take many forms, but almost always involves a large network of collaborators.



**Image 2.** *Mystic Pizza, Connecticut* (<https://www.ctpost.com/>)

Research into how design principles can be used to develop destinations is a new topic that is just beginning to surface in academic circles. In Erschbamer's recently published piece: *Destination Design: New Perspectives for Tourism Destination Development* (2021), the author introduces the concept of destination design and frames it as a

transdisciplinary approach. Furthermore, the authors point out that decision making processes at the destination level are completed without participatory approaches and instead concentrate on the needs of traditional stakeholders. Traditional approaches to destination development take a limited number of stakeholders into consideration, only including entities such as tourism offices, economic development departments, and DMOs.

As a result of the authors' assertions, we believe destinations have the potential to address community needs while balancing the input from stakeholders within and outside the traditional tourism approach. Like the authors, we hypothesize that a design approach to destination development can take multifaceted perspectives into consideration by providing:

- A focus on problem-solving
- A mixture of creativity and analysis
- A way to break through conventional knowledge structures in order to learn and develop
- The ability to integrate disruptive approaches into a coherent whole

## Research Question

*As the tourism industry recovers from COVID-19, how might communities create resilient destinations by utilizing design thinking and co-creation methodologies that consider the needs of all stakeholders?*

The business and technology worlds have already embraced design thinking as a way to solve complex problems using creativity and innovative mindsets. Some of the world's leading brands (such as Apple, Google, Samsung and GE) have rapidly adopted the design thinking approach (Chang, Kim & Joo, 2013). Design thinking is a creative problem-solving process in which we seek to understand the user, challenge assumptions, and redefine problems. No longer just the domain of savvy businesses, design thinking is becoming more popular with public sector leaders who are realizing that it is an efficient way to generate solutions and create change.

Through a process based on the Systemic Design Toolkit (2016), we have developed a suite of tools designed to help communities and tourism practitioners improve the processes and outcomes of destination development, using design thinking and strategic foresight methodology.

In this research project, we explore the use of contemporary design thinking and foresight tools in destination development, which is an industry built on traditional systems that are ripe for innovation and change.

By taking a systems-level approach to understanding current destination development practices, we map the destination design processes. We use a six-step process to help

communities adopt a destination design approach. Through the use of design thinking, innovation, and foresight tools, we aim to bridge the gap between academic writing about destination design and its community-based application. Through the use of these tools, we aim to develop tourism destinations and local economies in order to improve the outcomes for all stakeholders, including locals, tourists, and businesses.

## The Evolution of Tourism Development

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was a growing sector of the economy. As stated in statistics published by the World Travel & Tourism Council, travel and tourism generated about \$7.6 trillion (about 10% of the world's entire GDP, or GWP) and was responsible for 277 million jobs (roughly one in 11) in 2014 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). According to United Nations World Trade Organization (UNWT) estimates, worldwide tourist arrivals were expected to reach 1.4 billion in 2020 and rise to 1.8 billion by the year 2030 (UNWT, 2014).

By 2030, an estimated five billion people will live in urban areas. Considering these two projections as well as the notion that people who live in cities are more likely to take city trips, it is very likely that urban tourism is going to experience a sharp growth in the future, adding millions of tourists to a growing urban population.

Due to the changing nature of city tourism, tourists are increasingly looking for the same or similar experiences and amenities as local residents, and are using the same resources as city inhabitants. Therefore, when developing future city plans or city visions, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of tourism, and to integrate tourism into economic and community development. In turn, this will improve citizens' quality of life.

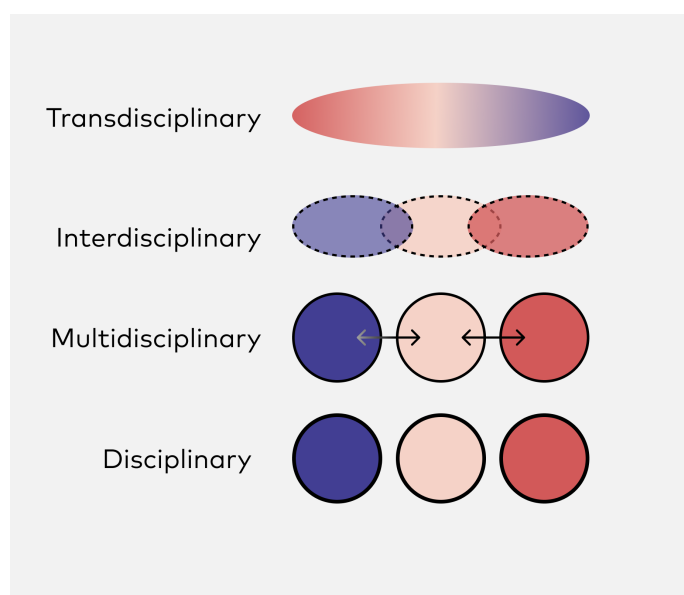
Cities have become important tourism destinations due to the density of cultural offerings, as the amount of options to choose from in a city surpasses those of other destination types. The perception of cities as tourist destinations has been changing. Although cities were once entry or exit points for many travellers on their way to other destinations they have become destinations in their own right (Dunne G, 2010).

Destination design could help all cities create magnetic places that are resilient, authentic, and appeal to a broad range of audiences, especially considering these audiences would be involved in the design process.

## The Potential for Destination Design

If we accept that destination design is an emerging practice with the ability to offer a transdisciplinary approach to destination development, it becomes clear that an understanding of the existing system, its methodologies, and tools are necessary for practitioners to apply the theory in real scenarios. The introduction of design thinking into destination development presents an opportunity for communities to break through conventional knowledge structures, applying a transdisciplinary approach to designing their communities.

Destination design can facilitate a process that incorporates the disciplines of different stakeholder groups, such as tourism planning, destination and product development, destination management, and government and community leadership. Likewise, a design approach to destination development can be participatory in nature and allows for the inclusion of tourists and residents in the development process, so that the needs of both groups are considered. Therefore, destination design requires a transdisciplinary approach. This approach allows for an integrative view of destinations, which merges separate disciplines into a whole, as seen in Figure 1. A design process can incorporate multiple perspectives in order to foster new solutions that are co-created, participatory, and authentic.



**Figure 1.**  
*Transdisciplinary Mode*  
(Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2016)

Destination design may support the transition from communities and practitioners, taking a multidisciplinary approach to destination development towards transdisciplinary methods and a destination design approach.

# Methodology

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## Literature Review

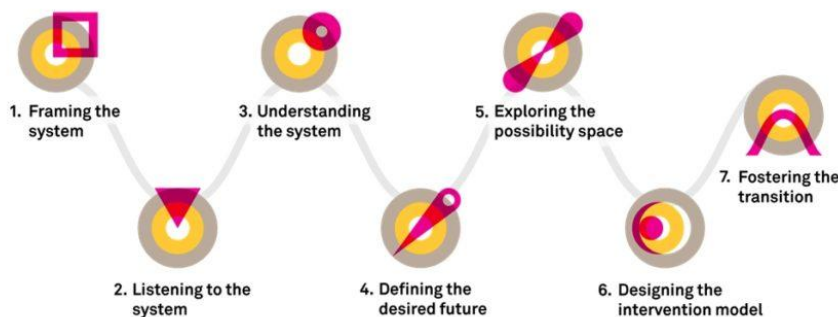
To ground our research of destination design, we conducted a literature review of works rooted in the fields of tourism, destination development, and other disciplines (such as the experience economy). We took this approach to help us gain a deeper understanding of the current research in destination development and other related disciplines, which helped inform a transdisciplinary perspective of the need for design thinking within destination development.

## Practitioner Interviews

To broaden our understanding of destination development and the key players from across disciplines, we interviewed five practitioners representing a wide spectrum of stakeholders in tourism. The interviews were conducted by phone or video, due to COVID-19 restrictions. We used a semi-structured format to gather consistent data from each participant, while also leaving space for open-ended discussion. Through the open-ended portion of the interviews, we were able to uncover insightful ways to frame destination design through the lenses of stakeholders who have traditionally existed outside of the scope of standard destination development approaches.

## Sensemaking and Analysis

With an understanding of the research into destination development and related fields and a compilation of practitioner interview data, we turned to the process of sensemaking. Through this process, our aim was to identify the areas where design thinking tools and methodologies would be helpful to destination development practitioners, while moving towards the goals of a transdisciplinary approach. Using tools from the System Design Toolkit (Systemic Design Toolkit, 2016) , we moved from simply understanding the system of destination development towards defining a desirable future and creating the space for the innovative approach of destination design.



**Figure 2.**  
*Systemic Design Toolkit (Systemic Design Toolkit, 2016)*

# Understanding Traditional Destination Development

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## The Four As of Tourism

Tourism operators play a role in developing tourism destinations by providing the experiences and accommodations for visitors. In order to develop a location into a tourism destination, there are four components which must be nurtured into attractive features. The four areas are: attractions, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary (Andrianto & Sugiyama, 2016).

### Attractions

Attractions can be natural features, such as mountains, water resources, flora and fauna, wildlife, beaches, safaris, or caves. They can also be man-made structures or events, such as historical buildings, monuments, music, festivals, temples, or leisure parks.

### Accessibility

Cultivating both the transportation network and the necessary infrastructure is key to developing a destination. There are three types of transportation that may be used, all of which include multifaceted arrangements between stakeholders such as business owners, regulators, and the construction industry. Adding further complexity to this, transportation networks are often established using private-public partnerships, and between stakeholders representing different communities. For example, Iceland's airlines have played an essential role in the country's tourism boom, using its strategic location between North America and Europe and stunning natural features as selling points.



**Image 3.**

*Tourists visit Iceland's Blue Lagoon spa (Jeff Sheldon, <https://unsplash.com>)*

Accessibility in tourism development can be broken down into three categories: surface (including roads and railways), air transportation, and water transportation. As travel has become more affordable, the proliferation of low cost transportation has had a major impact on the popularity of urban destination development. This is mainly due to the fact that flights have become more affordable to the masses, but also because flight networks have been expanded and improved. As a result of this, more destination options are now offered and are made more accessible through a growing number of departure points.

### Amenities

Lodging is an important factor in the development of destinations. Traditional hotels wield power as visible and important tourism stakeholders. Airbnb's ability to flexibly scale instantaneous supply in response to seasonal demand has significantly limited hotels' pricing power during periods of peak demand. In a paper by Zervas et al, the authors show that accommodating surges during periods of high demand (such as during large conferences) through flexible scaling of supply is difficult for incumbent firms, such as hotels, to directly counteract (Zervas, Proserpio & Byers, 2017).

A study conducted by HVS Consulting and Valuation in association with the hotel association of New York estimated that Airbnb had a negative impact of \$2 billion on the lodging industry and New York City economy (HVS Consulting & Valuation, 2015). The report also estimated that \$200 million was lost in direct labour income, which resulted in declining taxation revenue for the state government. Through its disruptive innovation in the accommodation sector, nearly 2,800 jobs were lost due to the emergence of Airbnb, as the company has removed demand from the market.

### Ancillary

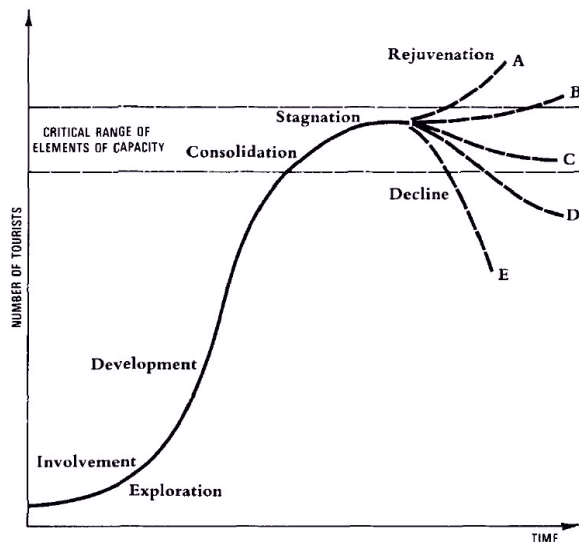
The extra facilities and services that visitors may use during their time at a destination are important to creating an enjoyable experience. Amenities can be natural, such as sightseeing lookout points, beaches, and forests. They can also be man-made, such as public access to high-speed wifi, parks, public seating, and outdoor lighting. These amenities often benefit both the local population by increasing their quality of life, as well as ensuring the proper elements are in place to accommodate the needs of tourists.



**Image 4.**  
*Playful urban seating  
as an amenity in  
Detroit, Michigan  
(<https://pps.org/>)*

## Traditional Methods of Destination Development

The most popularly applied theory used to explain tourism growth within a destination is the life-cycle concept (Butler, 1980). Although the life-cycle model does offer a general and adjustable means for describing past destination changes, it does not consider tourism as a complex and dynamic system. Butler identified the cycle of tourism, which led to the creation of destination development as a concept. The stages of the cycle and their characteristics are as follows, and are seen in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.**  
*Cycles of Destination  
Development (Butler, 1980)*

1. Exploration – few adventurous tourists begin to visit, planning individual itineraries; visitation patterns are irregular; interest is rooted in nature/culture; close interaction with local people occurs; effects on social, cultural and physical environments are minimal; use of local facilities.
2. Involvement – tourist numbers increase; provision of tourist facilities begins; some advertising is present; tourist market and season are introduced; interaction stays high; some changes in social life of locals are noticeable; pressure on the public sector to provide infrastructure is created.
3. Development – tourist numbers rapidly increase to equal or exceed local population; new tourist markets are attracted; extensive advertising and links to the generating region(s) are introduced; loss of local control decreases through rise of foreign-owned facilities; planning and provision of infrastructure occurs regionally; promotion of artificial attractions.
4. Consolidation – growth rate declines; tourism has become a major economic sector; heavy advertising aims to extend tourist season and market(s); some opposition to tourism; clear recreational business districts; old facilities have deteriorated.
5. Stagnation – tourist capacity has been reached/exceeded; reliance on repeat visitation and conventions forms; surplus hotel capacity and changes in ownership occur; focus on the



package tourist becomes common; new developments peripheral to the existing destination emerge; established, but out-of-fashion image; social, environmental and economic problems exist.

6. Decline and Demise – the tourist market is lost; vacationers decline; reliance on weekenders and day visitors increase drastically; high property turnover and conversion of many facilities occur; local involvement increases; attractions and image change completely; public and private sector efforts combine; a new tourist market is found, often a special interest group.

The Cycles of Destination Development (Figure 3) revealed the process that places use to transform into destinations. This process elevates low-growth tourism to high-growth bulk markets, and results in many destinations embracing modern marketing and communications strategies to attract tourists throughout each stage.

Butler's observations reveal that the process of destination development follows a predictable pattern. This process resulted in the belief that the benefits which tourism can bring to a community as well as any potential negative effects should both be planned for. The recognition of this pattern towards stagnation and decay led researchers and practitioners to apply business management methodologies to tourism destination development.

## Balancing the Needs of Tourists and Locals

In destinations that are not “famous for being famous”, such as Paris, Venice, and New York, tourism gets a small amount of attention and budget in economic development strategies and plans created by the government. When developing tourism strategies, issues arise between the needs of locals and the priorities of tourists. The balance between tourists' and locals' needs are often in opposition.

In order for tourism strategies to be successful, it is important to: involve the local population and businesses in decision making; develop an understanding of the importance of keeping tourist activities in balance with the local context; and to clearly communicate the benefits that tourism contributes to cities and their residents. Not only does this include the general economic factors, it also indirectly supports locals' quality of life through the creation of more diverse cultural offerings, improved public transport, regeneration projects, and increased safety measures.

The cities of Venice and Barcelona have both undergone a process described as “museumization” (Galla & Paulo, 2015). The parts of the city that are being enjoyed and consumed by tourists can usually not be utilized by locals any longer. Moreover, tourism development can slowly lead to the loss of unique identity and character in residential areas. This is due to businesses increasingly adapting their offerings to suit the lucrative tourist demands. Although this trend can be damaging it also has the potential to pose development and amenity opportunities for deprived areas.

Amsterdam serves as an example of both the Cycles of Destination Development (Figure 3) and the need to balance the needs of locals. Beginning in the 1990s, the Amsterdam Travel and Tourism Office, tourism businesses, and local council were eager to promote the city as a brand and believed that adjusting the city for visitors automatically had a positive influence on the local residents as well (Gerritsma, 2019). Their work was successful, which resulted in a large increase in the numbers of tourists and day trippers. This led to an issue of overtourism, with locals voicing concern about the impact tourism has on their community (Gerritsma, R. 2019).



**Image 5.** *Amsterdam tourists pose with the Amsterdam sign (Nacho Rascón, <https://www.flickr.com/>)*

## DMOs: Destination *Marketing* or Destination *Management* Organization?

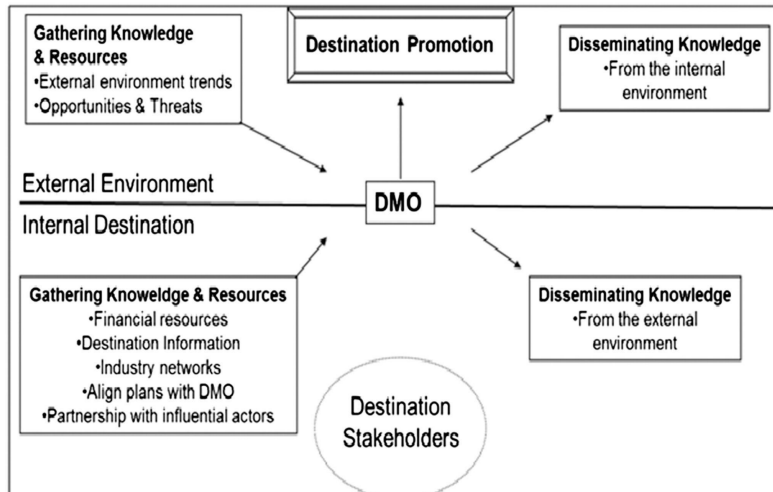
The structure of Destination Management Organizations was implemented throughout the 1990s in an attempt to plan the development of tourism destinations, with the aim to manage resources and stakeholders. These types of organizations are referred to as DMOs. The acronym is changing due to the nature of the work of these organizations, as some are destination *marketing* organizations, while others are destination *management* organizations. There are five levels of DMOs operating in most countries:

1. National Tourism Office (NTO): This level of DMO is an authority on the central state administration tasked with tourism development at the national level.
2. Provincial (or State) Tourism Offices (PTO): The organization is responsible for marketing and managing a state, province, or territory as a tourism destination.
3. Regional Tourism Organization (RTO): This level of DMO can be defined as a concentration of tourism areas such as cities, towns, villages, resorts, and rural areas. It is responsible for marketing and managing concentrated tourism areas as destinations.
4. Local Tourism Office (LTO): This level of DMO can be municipally run as a local government authority, or as a cooperative association of tourism businesses through a membership structure.
5. Members-only Trade Association (MOTAs): At a micro level, a coalition of businesses may take on the role of a DMO. In most cases, this is through a local chamber of commerce, hotel association, business improvement area (BIA), or downtown business association.

DMOs play an important role in tourism marketing and destination development by acting as organizers and facilitators. Fyall argues that DMOs need to anticipate and plan for future needs in the marketplace, especially in the context of ongoing political and economic change. DMOs need to reflect the expression of all groups within the destination by developing, managing, and promoting the destination (Fyall, A., & Garrod, B., 2004). Likewise, governments and NGOs attempt to manage the impact of destination development in order to mitigate issues of overtourism, gentrification, and digital disruption (such as Airbnb and Online Travel Agencies (OTAs)).

Dredge and Jenkins (2007) noted that destination marketers and managers tend to operate within administrative boundaries that may prevent a fully accurate conceptualization of a destination. DMOs, therefore, work against one another in counter productive ways when developing and marketing destinations within their physical boundaries.

As identified in the Destination Development System Map (Figure 5), DMOs play an intermediary role between stakeholders. DMOs operate at the centre of the information exchange between tourists, government entities and networks of tourism operators, and attractions (Figure 4). The result of this arrangement is that DMOs serve as gatekeepers in this exchange of information, even as new models for information exchange and the availability of capital have changed.



**Figure 4.**  
*DMO as Intelligent Agent*  
(Sheehan,  
Vargas-Sanchez,  
Presenza & Abbate ,  
2016)

## Key Findings

- The destination development process should be anticipated and planned accordingly.
- The 4As of Tourism continue to be a useful categorization method in understanding the vast stakeholders directly involved in tourism development.
- DMOs struggle with allocating their resources. They are at a crossroads, unsure if they are Destination *Marketing* Organizations or Destination *Management* Organizations.
- Marketing is an essential activity of destination development. However, it's only one of many functions performed by DMOs in an area.
- The needs of community members are not usually addressed in the development of tourism destinations.
- Disruptive digital platforms are challenging traditional structures faster than the existing stakeholders can react cooperatively.

## System Map for Destination Development

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After reviewing the existing destination development literature and speaking to practitioners in the field, a system map was developed. The system map (Figure 5) served as a powerful tool to understand the relationship between elements of the destination development system. We aimed to identify leverage points within the system where design thinking and co-creation methodology could be used.

This map shows that the economic advantages of creating destinations in communities is clear. Communities who invest in destinations create the potential to receive a considerable financial return on their investment through increased employment and taxes.

In this system, DMOs focus on attracting tourists from outside regions. Although destinations can exist for many audiences, DMOs focus primarily on travellers who are visiting for pleasure and recreation purposes. This narrow focus on attracting tourists causes DMOs to overlook opportunities to develop destinations for other audiences. These audiences can include local residents, who are ultimately meant to benefit from the development of destinations. When DMOs shift their attention towards these areas, they are able to better attract and retain citizens in the community.

The priorities of tourists and locals can fall in direct opposition of one another. Within this system, there is an opportunity to involve the local population in decision-making to ensure that a balance is struck between tourist activities and local priorities. Design thinking and co-creation can help address the needs of tourists in parallel with the needs of residents. For example, the needs of tourists and locals can both be addressed through the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities. In addition, quality of life can be improved for both groups by introducing new cultural offerings, improved public transit, neighbourhood regeneration, urban beautification, and enhanced safety measures.

A key aspect of this system is the role multi-level governments play in funding and setting policy direction among the stakeholders. Various levels of government interact with stakeholders, which results in inefficient and sometimes confusing decision making. Likewise, the overlap in marketing activities between all levels of DMOs results in mixed messaging to tourists. Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs), for example, devote resources to marketing to domestic tourists. Provincial Tourism Organizations (PTOs) and Local Tourism Organizations (LTOs) also devote resources towards reaching these same audiences.

Although rapid innovation is happening in the tourism space, this system map reveals that DMOs are at a strong disadvantage to address this innovation. DMOs are funded primarily by governments. This reliance on a single funding source results in scarce resources, which disincentivizes new approaches.

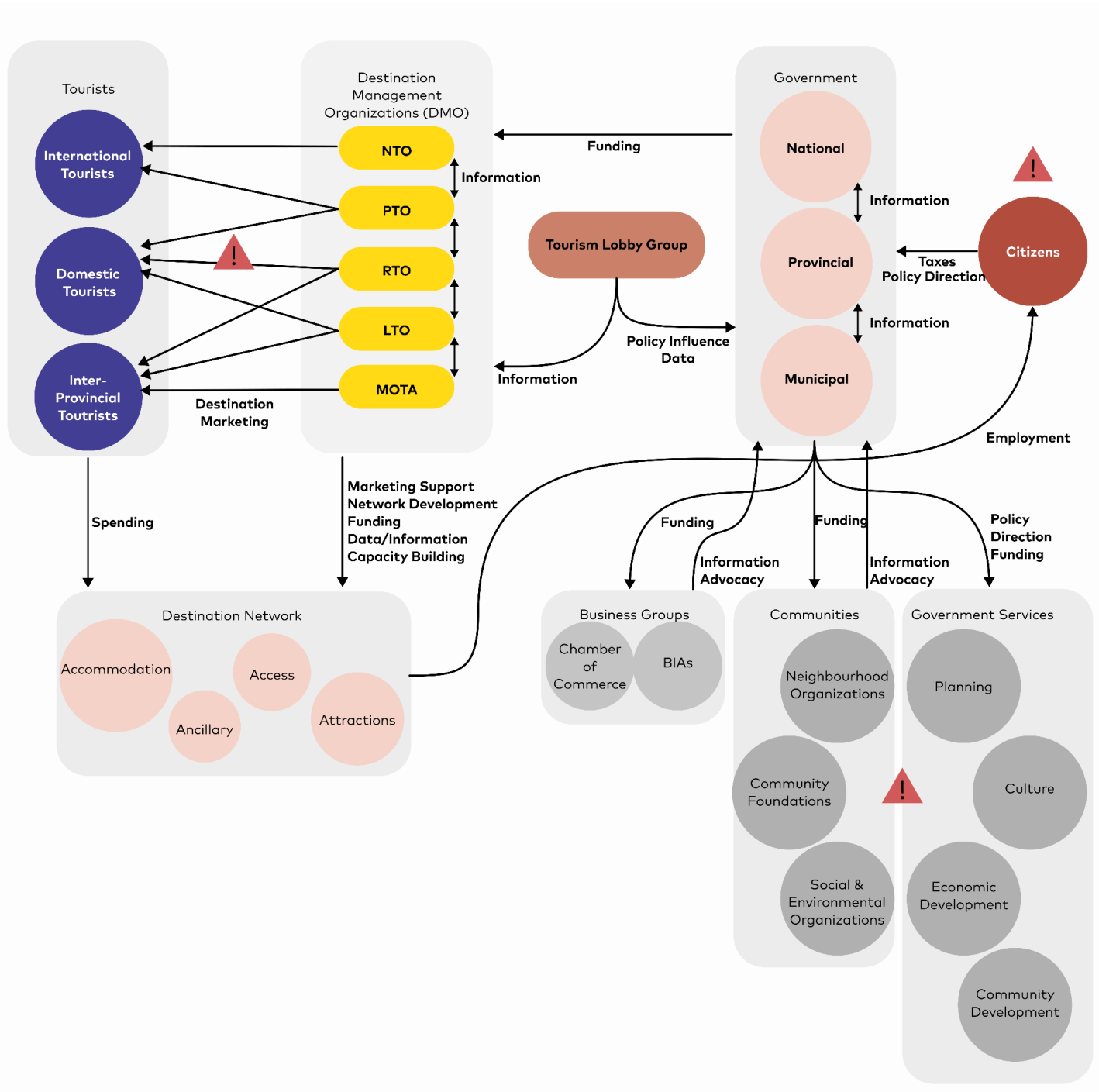


Figure 5. Destination Development Systems Map (Source: Authors)

Stakeholder management plays a key role in this system. This system map also demonstrates the exchange of information between DMOs, government departments, and business stakeholders. Throughout the system, information such as visitor demographics, performance metrics, and stakeholder needs are shared between entities. This information exchange is usually unstandardized, which means that valuable information can be lost or not communicated to all stakeholders in a timely fashion.

## Leverage Points Within the System

- DMOs are inefficient in reaching tourists through marketing activities.
- Community organizations and government services do not directly interact with DMOs or the destination network.
- Citizens do not provide direct input into the development of destinations. Input from citizens can ensure the destination works to address the needs of the community. Likewise, their input can result in community buy-in, which may bolster successful outcomes.
- Opportunities for disruptive innovation are increased by the DMOs inability to adapt its model.

## Case Studies

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Four case studies were developed to add context to our practitioner interviews and apply the observations from the system map to real scenarios. The case studies represent destination development activities from a wide variety of contexts, such as small communities, large cities, ambitious destination projects, and moderate activities. These case studies provide us with examples of how stakeholders interact in real situations, pointing us to human factors which we did not pick up on when studying the needs of individuals and the system level analysis from our research. These human factors later informed the creation of the Destination Design Methodology and its accompanying toolkit.

### Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada

Workers often enjoy working in unique destinations like Prince Edward County (PEC) and are willing to make sacrifices to do so. In interviews with creative workers in Prince Edward County (2005) the DMO (RTO) found that residents often claimed that their decision to move to the region was due to the improved quality of life, despite the lower income. This reinforces the point that it is the quality of a community that attracts creative workers, and not necessarily attractive job opportunities which offer higher wages in larger metropolitan centres.

A major catalyst that attracted many Torontoites to the area was the opening of the Drake Devonshire, a sister hotel to the infamous Downtown Toronto Drake Hotel. Ryan Williams, president of Bay of Quinte Tourism (RTO), a collective of companies and municipalities in the region, stated: "we've had similar smaller boutique hotels in the country ... but The Drake is a whole other calibre. We hope it is a catalyst for a lot more change not just for Prince Edward County, but for the region of the Bay of Quinte" (Dixon, 2014).



**Image 6.**  
*Drake Motor Inn in PEC*  
(<https://www.visitpec.ca/>)

"It's about creating an overall experience. So we speak to the experiential brand," said hotelier and Drake owner, Jeff Stober. "We're curating way more than our art. We're curating our interior spaces. We're curating our menus. We're curating our mixology. We're curating our playlists" (Dixon, 2014). This uniquely designed and curated experience helps the Drake Devonshire stand out in addition to helping set the tone for the uniqueness of the region.

### **Key Takeaways**

- The pioneering work of Drake Devonshire's founders served as a catalyst for further destination development in the region.
- The destination offered a high quality of life, which was attractive to tourists in nearby Toronto.
- The destination attracted tourists as well as citizens looking to relocate.
- Once there was a catalyst for change, the DMO applied leverage through capital investments and strategy.
- PEC developed innovative experiences, such as wineries and boutique hotels to engage with existing tourism markets.



## Fogo Island Inn, Newfoundland, Canada

In 2014, the Fogo Island Inn opened its doors and welcomed international guests to the small rural community. Fogo Island is located off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada. Fogo Island Inn is an excellent case study in destination development, and has received international recognition for its novel, place-based approach to economic development and community development (Slawinski, Natalie et al., 2021).

For centuries, Fogo Island's economy relied on cod fishing. This was challenged in the 1960s, when industrial sized off-shore trawlers diminished the cod population to near extinction. In 1992, the Canadian Government announced a moratorium on cod fishing, eliminating the livelihood of 40% of the population on Fogo Island.



**Image 7.** *Fogo Island Inn* (<https://fogoislandinn.ca/>)

In 2006, Zita Cobb returned to the Island after a profitable career in the telecommunications industry. Cobb and her two brothers founded the organization Shorefast with the aim to rebuild the island's economy while honouring its history. In 2010, the organization began work on an "economic engine" for the community — the development of the Fogo Island Inn.

The Inn is a luxury hotel designed by Newfoundland-born architect, Todd Saunders, and is supported by capital from Cobb along with provincial and federal government economic development and tourism partners (PTO; RTO).

The Inn is run as a social enterprise, where all profits are reinvested into the community. It uses locally sourced materials and labour when possible. The furniture and textiles in the Inn were designed and crafted on the Island, using a unique approach which involved bringing internationally renowned designers to Fogo Island to draw inspiration from the place, and to work with local furniture makers and craftspeople to co-create the pieces. These pieces are sold internationally to collectors through the Fogo Island Shop, and all revenue supports the local economy. The Inn also hosts a contemporary artist residency program and art gallery.

Shorefast's mission is "cultural and economic resilience on Fogo Island." Shorefast leaders espouse the "importance of place" and have developed a unique place-based approach to help the Island become relevant in a globalized world. There is evidence that Shorefast's mission has been successful. For example, as of 2016, the social enterprise had created over 100 jobs on the island, whose population was less than 2,500 (CBC News, 2015).

### Key Takeaways

- Destination development was a result of altruistic risk-taking by a local resident with strong connections to the place and its people.
- The destination set out to solve particular purposes in the community: to globally connect the Island and to provide economic opportunities for its residents.
- The destination was used to strategically reach new tourist markets (wealthy, global tourists) through a perceived new offering (the Inn).

## Bilbao, Biscay Spain

Landmark buildings are attractive projects for urban planners and architects, and many government officials see them as a means to revitalize cities and destinations. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (GMB) and the Pompidou Centre Metz are popular examples of landmark architecture projects that have renewed cities in decline through destination development and tourism. Bilbao was an industrial city in decline. In the 1990s, Spain's Basque country decided to spend \$228.3 million on a modern art museum. The museum now attracts an average of 800,000 non-Basque visitors a year, compared to less than 100,000 before GMB opened (Plaza, 2007).

Bilbao was the first of many "culture-led urban regeneration" projects (Evans, 2003; Miles and Paddison, 2005). Culture-led urban regeneration is a regional economic strategy that involves the development of cultural amenities, for the purpose of attracting investors, tourists, and skilled migrants (Heidenreich and Plaza, 2015).

"The Bilbao Effect," as it has come to be known, has faced significant criticism and skepticism among numerous architects and urban planners. Despite attempts to emulate the Bilbao effect elsewhere in the world, very few destinations outside capital cities have succeeded in attracting visitors through use of this strategy.



**Image 8.** *The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain, designed by Frank O. Gehry. (<https://shutterstock.com/>)*

**Key Takeaways:**

- Destinations can be used for transformational innovation in a community. The strategy of attempting to attract new markets through new experiences is a high-risk endeavour, but can pay off for some communities.
- Smaller-scale, iterative approaches that test the need for infrastructure investments may create an appropriate solution for communities.
- Master plans can lead to successful destination projects. However, they must be co-created with locals in order to succeed. Established “master plan” organizations can contribute large amounts of capital towards projects as well as towards stability. These endeavours should be tested to ensure the project will work in the local context.
- Ambitious destination development projects are more likely to succeed if there is “skin in the game” with local leaders and business owners.

## Guelph Farmers' Market, Ontario, Canada

For nearly 200 years, the Guelph Farmers' Market has been a cornerstone in the community of Guelph, Ontario. The small city is known for its agricultural traditions and commitment to locally sourced food. Until 2021, the Farmers' Market was a Saturday-only event. Run by the City, it served as a destination that connected farmers with community members.



**Image 9.** *Guelph Farmers' Market is a destination for the city's unique food scene*  
(<https://guelphfarmersmarket.ca/>)

Through public consultation, it was observed that local residents wanted the market to be a central hub in their local food community – a connection to their food's producers, a business incubator, a place to learn about food, and a community gathering place (Guelph Farmers' Market: Refreshing Our Local Tradition, 2021). In response, the City recognized that the market building and grounds held tremendous potential to fulfill this vision, becoming the focus of local food and business growth for Guelph and its surrounding region throughout the entire week. The City of Guelph issued a Call for Ideas, Proposals and Potential Partners to explore new opportunities to make the market facility more than just a unique, once-a-week shopping experience. A local placemaking non-profit organization won the bid to develop “a multi-purpose, indoor-outdoor community market that is thriving with new partnerships, enterprises, and active uses 7 days per week” (Bueckert, 2021). After a successful summer pilot project, the non-profit organization is taking over operation of the market and beginning to activate it multiple days of the week, through public programming and extended operations.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- Innovation can come from non-governmental organizations who take calculated risks.
- Community input can be used to identify destination opportunities and provide development activities.
- Destination innovation can come in a measured consolidation strategy where the community “doubles down” on their existing market position, with a focus on encouraging return visitors, brand loyalty, and incremental change.

# New Factors Challenging Traditional Destination Development

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We grounded our knowledge of the current destination development system in the literature review, system map, and case studies. Through practitioner interviews, we discovered emerging factors that are adding pressure to this system. These factors appear from outside of the current system, which is challenging the way destination development has traditionally been accomplished. Using foresight methodology, we explored these factors further by categorizing them into drivers of change.

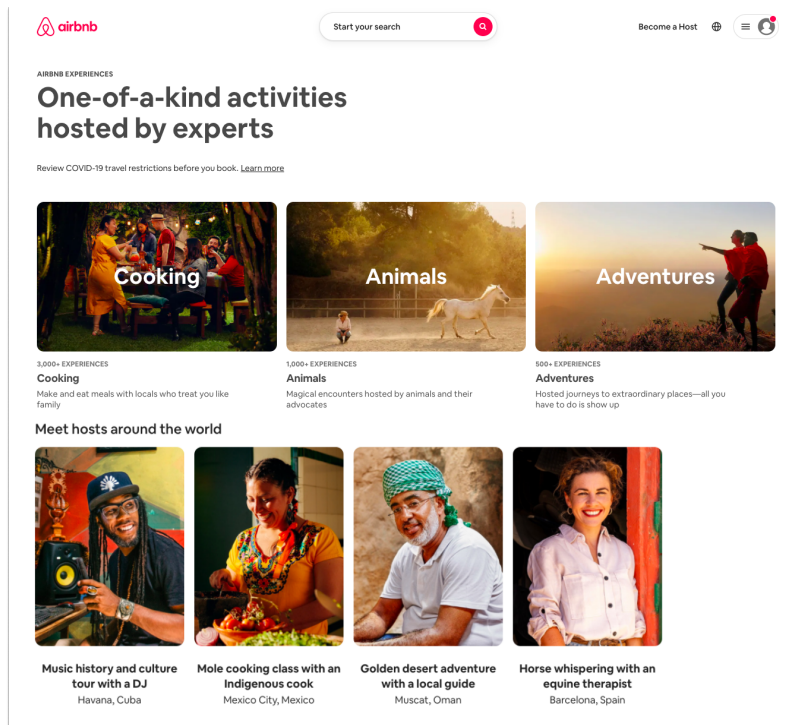
## The Experience Economy

In 2017, Airbnb launched the ambitious new initiative Airbnb Experiences. The service offers boutique experiences to tourists — such as craft workshops, local cooking classes, horseback riding, and yoga sessions — with local guides that have specialized knowledge in these areas.

Researchers Franke, Piller, and Schreier (Franke & Schreier, 2008) have shown that tourists are willing to pay more for co-created products and services than for standardized products. Additionally, studies have proven that an increasing number of people want to travel on a deeper emotional and more personal level, and are not taking advantage of pre-arranged package holidays (Neuhofer B, et al, 2013). Airbnb Experiences (Image 10) is an excellent example of how co-creation can be used in tourism to create memorable experiences and upsell existing tourists. Furthermore, Airbnb Experiences acts as a case study of the ways Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) are vertically integrating to control and monetize all aspects of the tourism experience. Because of their advanced technology, paired with the ability to reach tourists and hosts, OTAs dominate the digital marketing space. Therefore, DMOs are at a major disadvantage when allocating resources in this space.

In their research, Stamboulis (2003) compared the differences between traditional 'endowment' tourism approaches and those that incorporate experience tourism and co-creation. When viewing their findings through a destination development lens, there are a number of important findings to consider. The first is the distinction between comparative and competitive strategic intent. Tourism strategies should include the creation of distinctive and non-reproductive 'myths', which are malleable and nimble as opposed to focusing only on tourism infrastructure.

In a 2019 interview, entrepreneur and tourism industry thought leader, Zita Cobb spoke about the myths that led to the creation of the Fogo Island Inn (Service Design Network, (2019). Although the Inn is a building and considered traditional tourism infrastructure, the small island's tourism innovation strategy is centred on the stories and myths of the industrious nature of the residents, their connection to the ocean, and relationship to artists. The Inn, therefore, becomes part of a larger story that visitors participate in. Tourists are drawn to experience the rugged landscape, ocean views, craftsmanship, and folk culture of the island, from the comfort of the pampered Inn.



**Image 10.**  
*Airbnb Experiences bring hosts and tourists together (www.airbnb.ca)*

Further, Stamboulis (2003) argues that innovation through infrastructure leads to improved attractions and lower costs for tourists. However, many of these attractions can be reproduced in competing destinations, For example, a boutique hotel in Toronto is a similar experience to a boutique hotel in Austin, Texas. In contrast, a well developed story, or myth, built around a destination can differentiate it from all others and create memorable experiences for visitors.

**Takeaways:**

- DMOs must have tools to help them identify their unique offering.
- OTAs are effective at helping tourists discover and book trips. Instead of concentrating on marketing activities, DMOs are better positioned to craft and steward the destination's brand.

## Co-creating Experiences with Stakeholders

The experience economy is a well understood idea in 2021 and the theory was adopted widely throughout the tourism industry. According to Pine and Gilmore (2013), while prior economic offerings were external to the customer, experiences are personal and exist only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or spiritual level. Experiential purchases are made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience and cause positive emotions and pleasure. Simply put, tourism is perfectly positioned to take advantage of the experience economy. This change in perspective is commonly referred to as 'experiential travel'.

Co-creation has emerged as an important factor in the experience economy. Co-creation refers to the mixture of consumption and production by the consumer. In the logic of co-creation of tourism, tourism operators have worked with tourists in the creation of the product and the tourist experience and not as mere spectators (Campos, 2009). In destination development, co-creation is specifically about integrating tourists as active partners in designing their experiences together with their hosts, with the ultimate goal of achieving tourists' overall well-being. Co-creation can involve tourists' participation in the design, production, and consumption of experiences. This approach can also be defined as tourism product development in collaboration with local residents. Therefore, co-creation in tourism is about being open to new ideas, experiences, and concepts proposed by clients, but this strategy can only be effective if providers are open to innovative ideas, changes, adaptations, and viewpoints.

Co-creating experiences is at odds with the destination management perspective of DMOs. As identified in Figure 4: *DMO as Intelligent Agent*, DMOs gather input from external partners and relay this information to stakeholders. Destination design provides an opportunity to facilitate co-creation.

### Takeaways:

- The destination experience can be co-created with locals through a facilitation process, as opposed to an expert-led approach.
- The design solution should encourage co-creation by involving tourists' participation in the design, production, and consumption of experiential travel.

## Transitioning from Destination Marketing to Place Branding

"AirSpace" is a term coined by the online publication The Verge to describe the homogeneous geography that has been created by technology. The proliferation of images from Facebook and Instagram, the essay argues, has resulted in ancillary destinations, coffee shops, bars, and co-work spaces around the world sharing the same hallmarks and aesthetic (Chayka, 2016).

The globalization of tourism has led to a paradox. The appeal of tourism is the opportunity to see something novel, however, in an effort to attract visitors, cities end up becoming more alike. A seemingly endless proliferation of 'me-too' tourist attractions have popped up in destinations around the world. Place branding has emerged as a popular way to differentiate one destination from others.

In a 2019 lecture, Zita Cobb blamed the "flattening of the specific" as the root of the homogeneity that exists in most communities (Service Design Network, 2019). In her view, technology is contributing to the loss of identifying within physical communities, heritage and culture. Her work rebranding Fogo Island is an attempt to create an authentic identity that is in-line with contemporary ideas of place branding.

Place branding professional Simon Anholt writes that regions that are not already global tourism hubs must garner global attention by changing the culture within and around the government, improving coordination between private and public sectors, and creating substantial commitment to the brand (Anholt, 2010). Branding a destination, therefore, is more complicated than branding a consumer good, as it must be the responsibility of a carefully managed coalition of government, civil society, and businesses (Anholt, 2010). Anholt points out that forming a brand strategy for a destination is far easier than policy-based approaches. Implementing policies to differentiate a destination consists of proving the vision, rather than just communicating it.

The traditional role of DMOs as destination marketers is therefore outdated. The value added that DMOs can provide in the destination development system is through working with stakeholders on a vision, rather than simply the communications function.

Furthermore, destination marketing is increasingly being controlled by a small number of OTAs. Digital platforms such as Expedia and Booking.com specialize in the sale of travel products to consumers. Some OTAs sell a suite of travel products, including flights, hotels, car rentals, cruises, activities, and packages. Other digital platforms specialize in the sale of tours and activities. Therefore, it is increasingly challenging for DMOs to control a marketing message when the services of their tourism providers are sold by OTAs, and are not vertically integrated into their tourism strategy.

### **Takeaways:**

- DMOs can work more effectively by collaborating with OTAs and marketing agencies, instead of devoting resources towards marketing initiatives.
- For true destination differentiation, design should be used to change policies, rather than simply communicating to audiences.



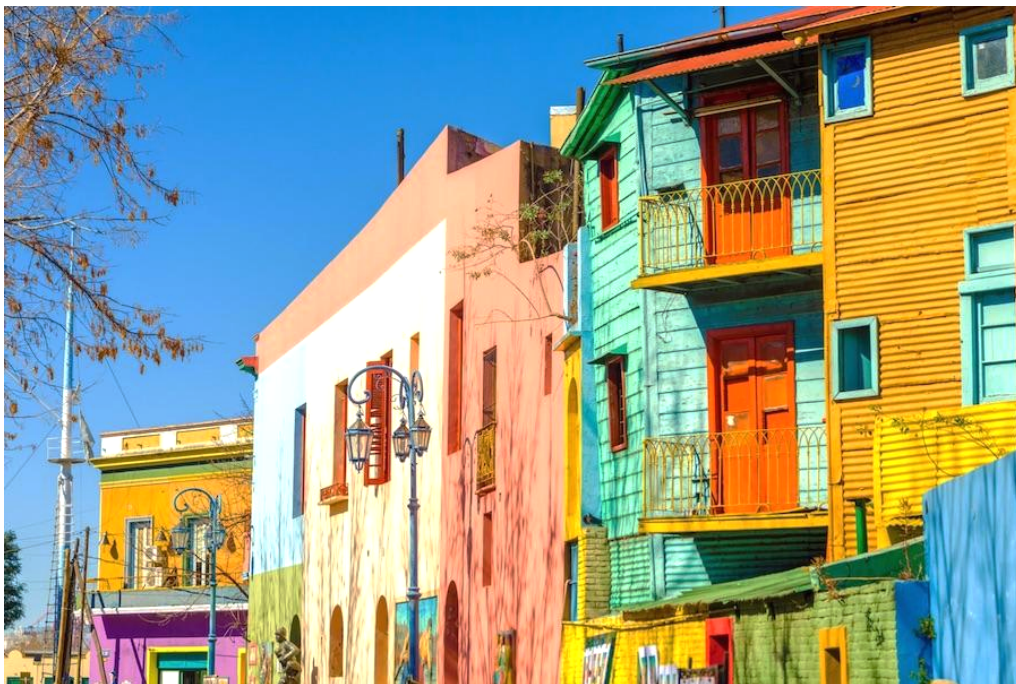
## The Changing Definition of a Tourist

A tourist is defined as a person visiting a destination for pleasure. Emerging trends such as “Digital Nomads” and the “Untethered Class” (Lufkin, 2021) are disrupting this understanding. These fluid and flexible mobilities stand in between tourism and migration, and have been collectively framed as lifestyle mobility (Cohen, Duncan & Thulemark, 2015).

Traditionally, DMOs concentrate on attracting leisure-seeking and/or business travel tourists, however, a large number of people are attracted to destinations as places to live for short periods of time. To attract Digital Nomads, Argentina now offers a 12-month visa for remote workers while strategically marketing the country’s weak currency and capital city’s warm weather, good food, and safety (Bloomberg.com, 2021).

### Takeaways:

- The goals of destination development should expand beyond traditional tourists as target audiences.
- Destination design may help communities reach new markets.



**Image 11.** *Bright colours of Caminito street in Buenos Aires, Argentina attract Digital Nomads (<https://www.travelpulse.com/>)*

# Destination Design: A New Approach for DMOs

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## DMOs as Leverage Points for Change

Drawing from our System Map (Figure 5), case studies, and practitioner interviews, we identified that the role of DMOs is in a precarious state of fluctuation. Our system map shows that DMOs act as an intermediary between the destination network, the tourists, and governmental partners. We see this role as an information exchange provider is the bottleneck in the system, which causes unnecessary steps towards destination development goals. The rate of information exchange is moving faster than DMOs' ability to keep up with it. As we heard in our practitioner interviews, DMOs are not meeting the needs of tourism operators or the needs of the community.

Through our research, we identified that marketing is an activity that is essential to tourism development. Even so, it is not an area where DMO resources are best used. Efforts to draw visitors into communities should be made only once the foundation of the destination is established. A DMOs resources are best used when strategically developing the destination as an attractive place to visit. DMOs attempt to do this by "managing" the destination. However, the reality of "managing" destinations is that practitioners often feel like they're supervising stakeholders, and attempting to control tourism activities instead of attempting to manage a complex system. DMOs can maintain their relevancy by adopting a design-driven approach to their work.

## A New Destination Design System

We propose that, by taking a destination design approach to their work, DMOs can re-establish their relevance by providing additional value to their stakeholders. Figure 6 shows this proposed system. In this model, DMOs work in tandem with their destination network to develop projects that respond to both community needs and opportunities from the external environment. Marketing activities, such as website advertising and direct marketing, have been replaced with place branding and experience marketing.

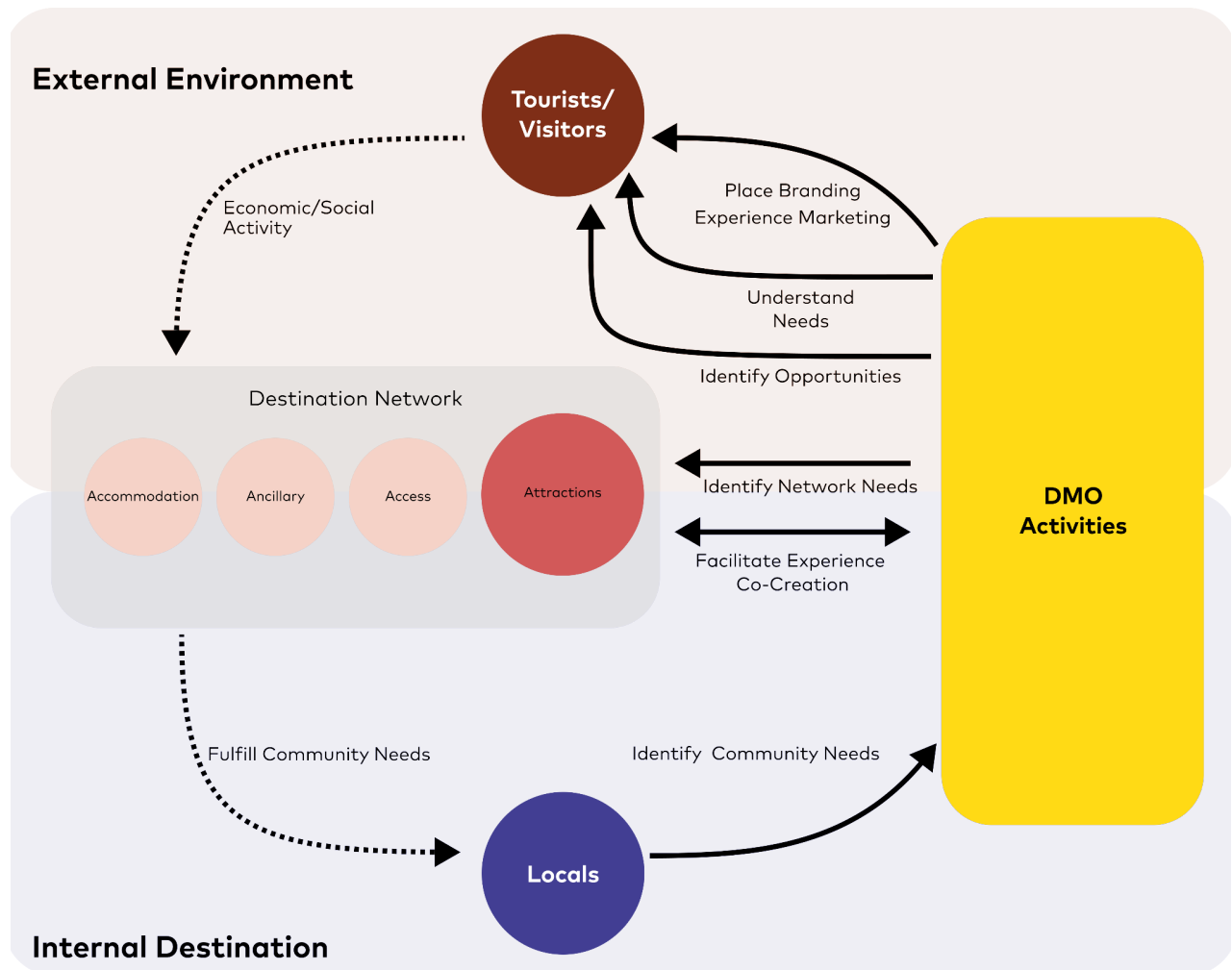


Figure 6. Model of DMO Activities as Destination Designers (Source: Authors)

To understand how DMOs can transition into destination designers, we used the Three Horizons Framework, a foresight technique developed by Baghai, Coley, and White (2000). The framework aims to “connect the present with desired futures” (Curry & Hodgson, 2008). The Three Horizons Model shows “three conditions of the same system, over time, against its level of viability in its changing external environment” (Curry & Hodgson, 2008, p. 2). Time is shown along the x-axis and the level of a systems strategic fit with its environmental context, as it relates to political, economic, organizational, and cultural norms, is shown along the y-axis (Curry & Hodgson, 2008).

As shown in Figure 7, horizon one (H1) represents the current system and its associated paradigms, assumptions, data, and infrastructure, which are losing compatibility with the current external context, and is therefore seen declining. As outlined earlier in this report, the role of DMOs as marketing organizations who are tasked with promoting a destination is in decline. Factors such as the success of OTAs, and the increasing specialization for digital marketing results in a decline of the value DMOs can provide as marketers to their stakeholders.

Horizon three (H3) represents one of a number of potential futures that serve as proposals for transformative change. Evidence of these can be found as “small pockets of the future embedded in the present” (Curry & Hodgson, 2008). We propose that the role of DMOs as designers of their destination is a potential future that will extend their relevance in the tourism and destination industry. The examples of co-creation and facilitation from our case studies - most noticeably in the Fogo Island and Guelph examples - provide a glimpse into those “small pockets” of that future.

Horizon two (H2) is the transition stage between the present of horizon one and the future of horizon three. It is a “turbulent and ambiguous” space, where the status quo can be challenged and alternatives can emerge (Curry & Hodgson, 2008). The industry’s transition towards destination marketing encapsulates this horizon perfectly. DMOs are struggling with the ambiguity of what managing a destination entails. Ultimately, destination marketing may serve to help while DMOs transition into effective destination designers.

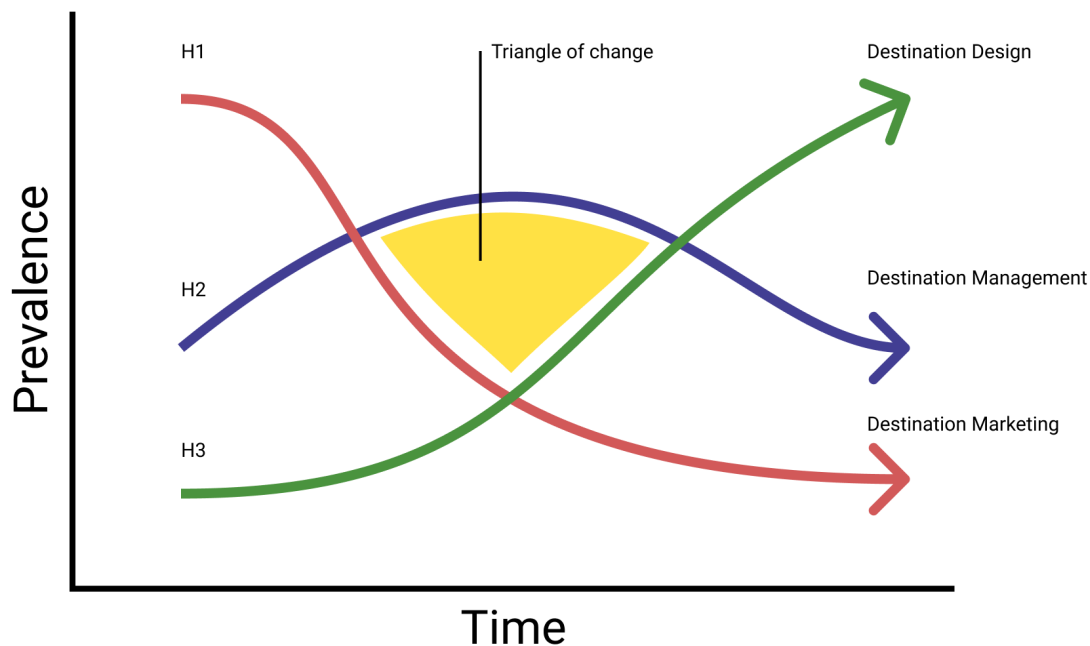


Figure 7. Three Horizons for the Role of DMOs (Source: Authors)

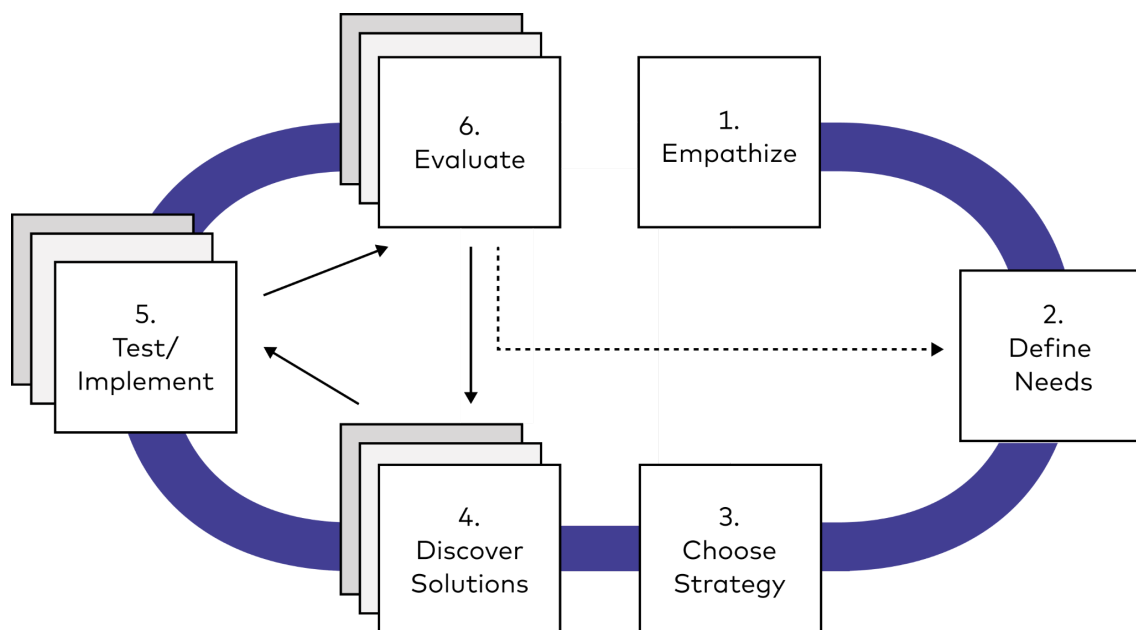
The Triangle of Change “is the space where the first horizon has started to fall away, the second horizon is close to its apex, and the third horizon is still gaining influence” (Curry & Hodgson, 2008, p. 11). Our proposed Destination Design Methodology (Figure 8), and our design toolkit (Figures 15-18) are developed to assist with the emergence of destination design, enabling it to gain influence among DMOs so they can use it to help usher in a third evolution of their role.

## Proposed Destination Design Process for DMOs

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The proposed Destination Design Methodology provides a framework for the strategies destination design could offer communities, in order to help them adapt to the factors that are challenging the existing destination development system. Through the use of this methodology, the DMO adapts to become an intentionally lean organization.

The six steps of this methodology are followed through by stakeholders. The methodology is intended to help DMOs transition through the Triangle of Change and become designers of destinations, as opposed to managers. The DMO as a designer works alongside community partners in order to understand the needs of stakeholders, develop a strategy, prototype solutions, and evaluate the results.



**Figure 8.**  
*Proposed Destination Design Methodology (Source: Authors)*

The Destination Design Methodology seeks to address the challenges to the destination development process which have been outlined in this paper:

1. Destinations should be co-created with stakeholders, members of the community, and tourists.
2. DMOs should focus on designing authentic experiences, and developing the brand of their destinations.
3. Destinations should be used to address community needs.
4. An iterative process should be utilized.
5. DMOs should facilitate the development of destinations so that stakeholders are invested in their success.

The Destination Design Methodology is an iterative process which validates ideas before large investments are made. Much like Google Ventures' Design Sprint process (Knapp et al. 2016), the Destination Design method uses prototyping and user feedback to inform next steps. Instead of relying on ten-year strategic plans, this method moves DMOs into the role of facilitating short-term tests which compound into long-term success.

Functions such as marketing are not a part of their core function. As outlined previously, traditional marketing functions can be performed by OTAs, with unique campaigns being developed by marketing, public relations, and advertising agencies as needed.

## Methodology Stage 1: Empathize

In design thinking, empathy is seen as the ability to be aware of, understanding of, and sensitive to another person's feelings and thoughts, without having had the same experience (Battarbee, Suri & Howard, 2015). These insights inform our design process.

The first stage of the Destination Design Methodology helps DMOs empathize with the users and stakeholders of the destination. The Destination Innovation Profile Inventory (Figure 9) is a tool that is used to ensure a balanced mix of stakeholders are included in the process.

Through our case studies and practitioner interviews, we identified four types of tourism innovators, who have vastly different approaches to their work, yet compliment each other when working together. This 2x2 matrix is organized with four quadrants, each representing a distinct approach to destination innovation.

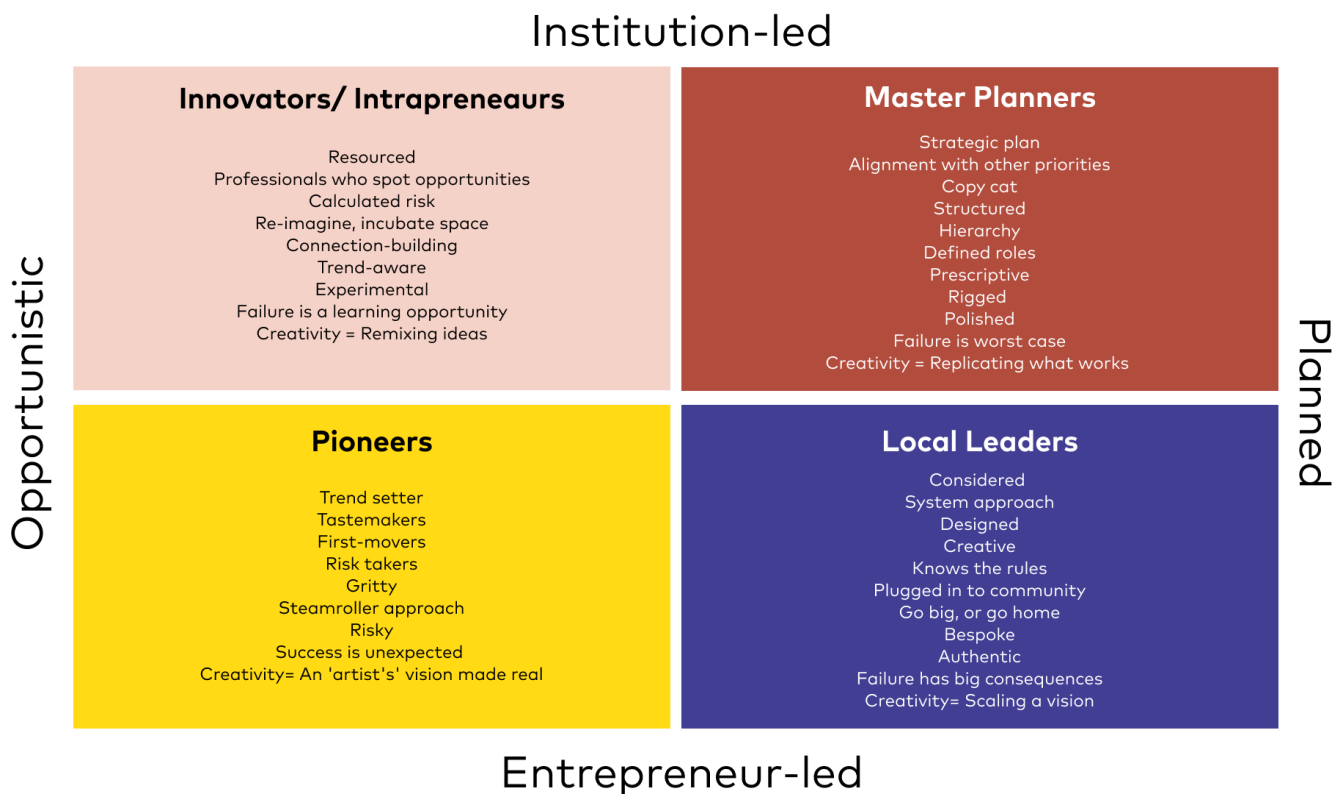


Figure 9. Destination Innovation Profile Inventory (Source: Authors)

Institution-led destination development (top of the quadrant) represents the large (or established) organizations, such as governmental organizations. In contrast to institution-led entities, the entrepreneur-led destination development (bottom of the quadrant) approach represents the grassroots innovators.

Opportunistic destination development (left side of the quadrant) is the approach used by nimble individuals or organizations who spot trends or changes and attempt to capitalize on them. This approach tends to be resourceful. In contrast, planned destination developers (right side of the quadrant) represent the measured approach to destination development, which is often slow to progress and considers external factors in the decision making process. From these four parameters, we developed four archetypes of destination innovators who should be involved in the destination design process. Figure 9 essentially outlines the contrasting approaches to destination innovation seen across each quadrant.

**Master Planners** represent the DMOs and government departments who plan large attractions, such as the Bilbao Museum. These projects can take decades to complete, but have the potential to foster massive change through capital investments backed by institutional security and leadership.

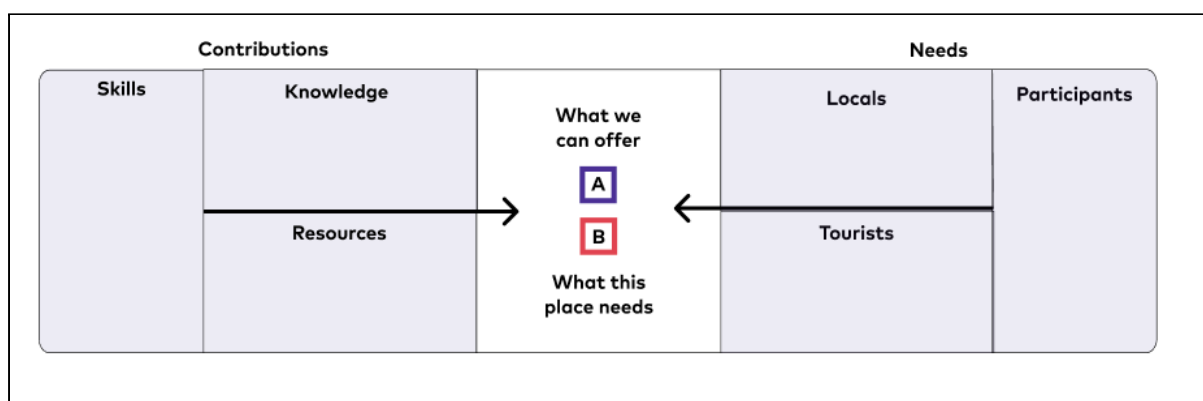
**Innovators/Intrepreneurs** break down barriers within institutions to help make projects a reality. They are opportunistic, and often work along with the community to help navigate bureaucracy. The work done in the Guelph Farmers’ Market case study is an example of this type of innovation.

**Local Leaders** represent the innovators who take a planned approach to their work with institutions in order to realize destinations. Zita Cobb’s work on Fogo Island captures the approach of Local Leaders, who invest their own capital and work alongside established partners to realize ambitious projects.

**Pioneers** represent the entrepreneurs and community members who intentionally or unintentionally work outside of the boundaries of strategic plans. They are often the tourism operators who spot a gap in the market and fill it quickly, or fulfill projects as hobbies or passion projects. In our case studies, the founders of Drake Devonshire in Prince Edward County encapsulate the approach of Pioneers. They are willing to take on risk with the potential to open up brand new markets to destinations.

## Methodology Stage 2: Define Needs

The Destination Design Methodology helps DMOs understand what their community needs in order to thrive, and then shapes their definition of success around those community-informed indicators. If a community requires more entrepreneurial opportunities for residents, then a design-based metric will track the popularity of the destination’s new businesses. Similar metrics can be used if communities require heightened food security, spaces for youth, or a greater sense of diversity and inclusion.



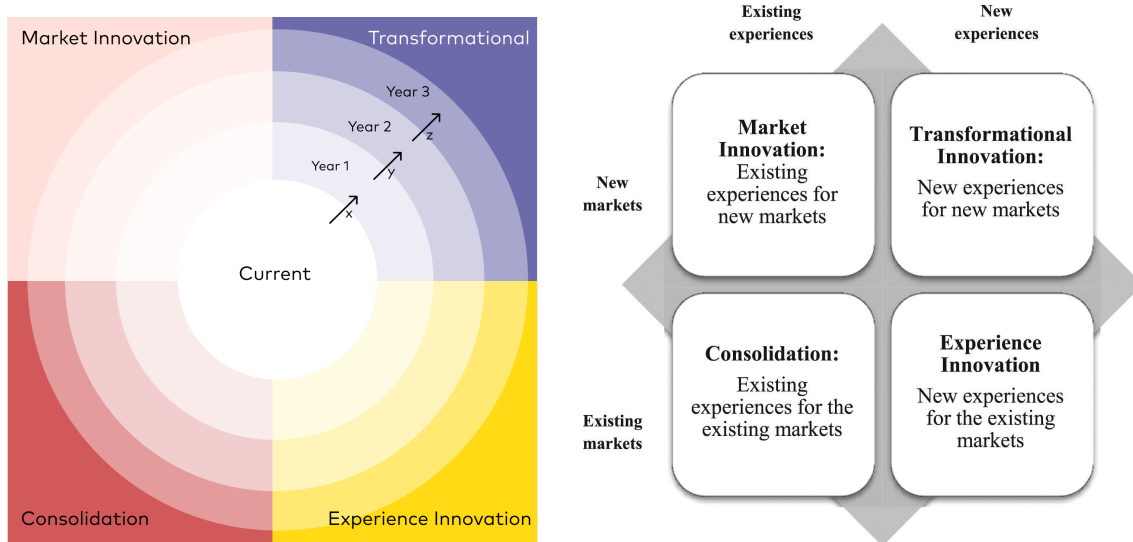
**Figure 10.** Define Stakeholder & Community Needs (Source: Authors)

The Destination Design methodology empowers DMOs to facilitate goal-oriented initiatives (Figure 10). These goals should be based on the needs of the community, and agreed upon by a stakeholder network made up of many disciplines and perspectives.



## Methodology Stage 3: Choose Strategy

The Destination Design Innovation Matrix (Figure 11) proposes four considerations when assessing a destination’s prototyping strategy. This design tool is based off of the Destination Innovation Matrix (Gardiner & Scott, 2018). Both models provide a 2x2 matrix. The left side of the matrix presents incremental options: consolidation and market innovation. On the right side of the matrix are the radical innovation options: experience innovation and transformational innovation.



**Figure 11.** Left side - Destination Design Innovation Matrix (Source: Authors)  
Right side - Market and Experience Innovation Matrix (Gardiner & Scott, 2018)

When communities use a **consolidation strategy**, resources are concentrated on strengthening the destination’s existing position in the marketplace. This is accomplished by attracting return visitors. In the Destination Design Toolkit, we include the Boston Consulting Matrix (Boston Consulting Group, n.d.) as a tool to help communities decide how to prioritize their tourism products and services to support a consolidation strategy.

**Market innovation** seeks to incrementally attract new visitors through the destination’s existing product, resulting in incremental change to the destination’s visitor profile. In our toolkit, we developed an interactive board (Figure 16) to help workshop participants identify their current experiences as well as their current market. The tool then has participants identify which audiences could fall into the “zone of opportunity” which will increase their visitor profile.

The **experience innovation** strategy should be taken by communities seeking to create new experiences that will appeal to the destination’s existing visitor markets. In our design toolkit,

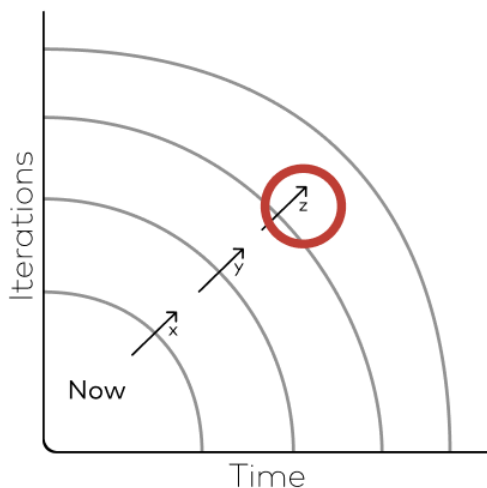
we chose the brainstorming technique, SCAMPER, to help communities re-think their tourism experiences.

**Transformational innovation** is a strategy where destination stakeholders depart from their present product offering and create new experiences to attract new markets. This strategy involves stakeholders seeing their destination in a new way. Therefore, we developed a destination inventory tool (Figure 16) to help workshop participants identify their community assets and position them to develop transformational change.

## Methodology Stage 4: Discover Solutions

The Destination Design Methodology takes the guesswork out of planning by generating a series of short-term tests. With this methodology, DMOs can test new destination concepts through low-risk initiatives, like special events, pop-up activities, and pilot projects.

The results from these tests validate the direction of further development, before costly infrastructure is used.



*Figure 12. Destination Design Iterative Process (Source: Authors)*

Figure 12 demonstrates the interactive process from the Destination Design Toolkit. Workshop participants are encouraged to imagine a desired destination (z), yet work towards it using iterations (x and y).

This methodology helps to ensure that the right problems are being addressed. By testing assumptions, DMOs can develop a deep understanding of our stakeholders' genuine needs, as opposed to the ones we imagine they might have.

## Methodology Stage 5: Test

The testing stage of the methodology provides evidence to destination designers whether their solutions are meeting the stakeholder needs. The implications of this testing stage help to inform the next steps. The solutions that show promise can be iterated rapidly until they take sufficient shape to be developed further. Those that fail to show promise can quickly be abandoned. This is a cost-effective approach for destinations.

### Impact Checklist

As a test to achieve **Z** \_\_\_\_\_,

we will test if this benefits the community by

**B** \_\_\_\_\_.

We will test if we're reaching visitors by

\_\_\_\_\_.

We validate this by

\_\_\_\_\_.

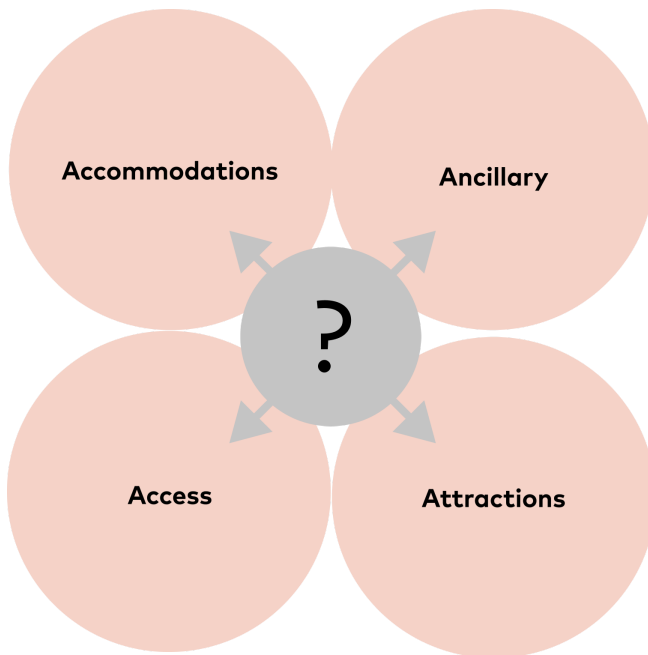
**Figure 13.**  
*Prototype Impact Checklist*  
(Source: Authors)

We developed the Impact Checklist for community members to gather evidence to show them if their prototype was successful or not. With this checklist, participants write down what their desired destination is (Z) from Stage 4. They then identify how they will test the benefits to the community (B) from Stage 2 of the methodology.

By using this checklist, communities can ensure that their work is being measured in a way that will validate or invalidate their prototypes. By performing these tests, destination designers will work on only projects that benefit their stakeholders.

## Methodology Stage 6: Evaluate

To be successful, destinations need the right mix of elements. As indicated previously, destination elements are typically broken down into the four As: attractions, accessibility, accommodations, and amenities. These tourism elements span the responsibilities of many stakeholders.



**Figure 14.**  
*Evaluate the System*  
(Source: Authors)

In this stage, we want to determine what additional support is needed for the destination to be successful.

The Destination Design Methodology encourages a collaborative process to guide stakeholders in improving all areas of the system. Using this process, stakeholders are able to identify areas that would benefit from further investment, allowing innovation to flourish within their projects. It's important to understand which members of the community can help to improve the next iteration.

# Destination Design Toolkit & Workshops

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The Destination Design Methodology can be used in communities, through a series of workshops. The Destination Design Toolkit provides templates for the facilitated workshops. Great workshops produce tangible and actionable outcomes. You can use the tools and processes from this toolkit to design destinations in your community.

## Who should participate?

The best outcomes are formed through the consideration of many perspectives. Stakeholder buy-in at an early stage is crucial to the successful design of a destination. The role of a destination designer is to facilitate innovative thinking. Considering a wide variety of perspectives increases the chance that innovative ideas will emerge, as multiple existing ideas can be combined into more compelling innovations.

The inclusion of multiple perspectives also:

- Creates community buy-in.
- Encourages 'skin-in-the-game' to improve the odds of success.
- Finds insights from a variety of lived experiences and perspectives.
- Brings expert knowledge from many disciplines.

## Facilitation

This toolkit has been created to guide DMOs through the Destination Design Methodology, even if they are not familiar with design thinking concepts. The intent behind this toolkit is to empower DMOs to transition into a destination design role. Nevertheless, the use of a skilled facilitator is encouraged to guide participants through the steps in a workshop setting. A knowledgeable facilitator will be familiar with many of the steps in the toolkit, which will aid participants in idea generation and decision making. Openness to ideas is fundamental to the workshop process. Therefore, a facilitator can help to ensure participants engage in the process equally, regardless of roles or seniority.

## What is needed to complete this toolkit?

The Destination Design Toolkit includes canvas that can be printed and posted in the facilitation room. Other items that are needed include sticky notes and markers. If the workshop is taking place online, collaboration software such as Figma FigJam boards is recommended.

## What is the timeline?

There are six stages in the Destination Design Methodology. Steps one through four require workshops within a short period of time. Stages five and six should be completed at a later date, once a destination begins to take shape. This toolkit batches the steps into three workshops, which take three hours each. We recommend that workshops one through four take place over the course of one week.

## Toolkit Stages 1 & 2: Empathize & Define Needs

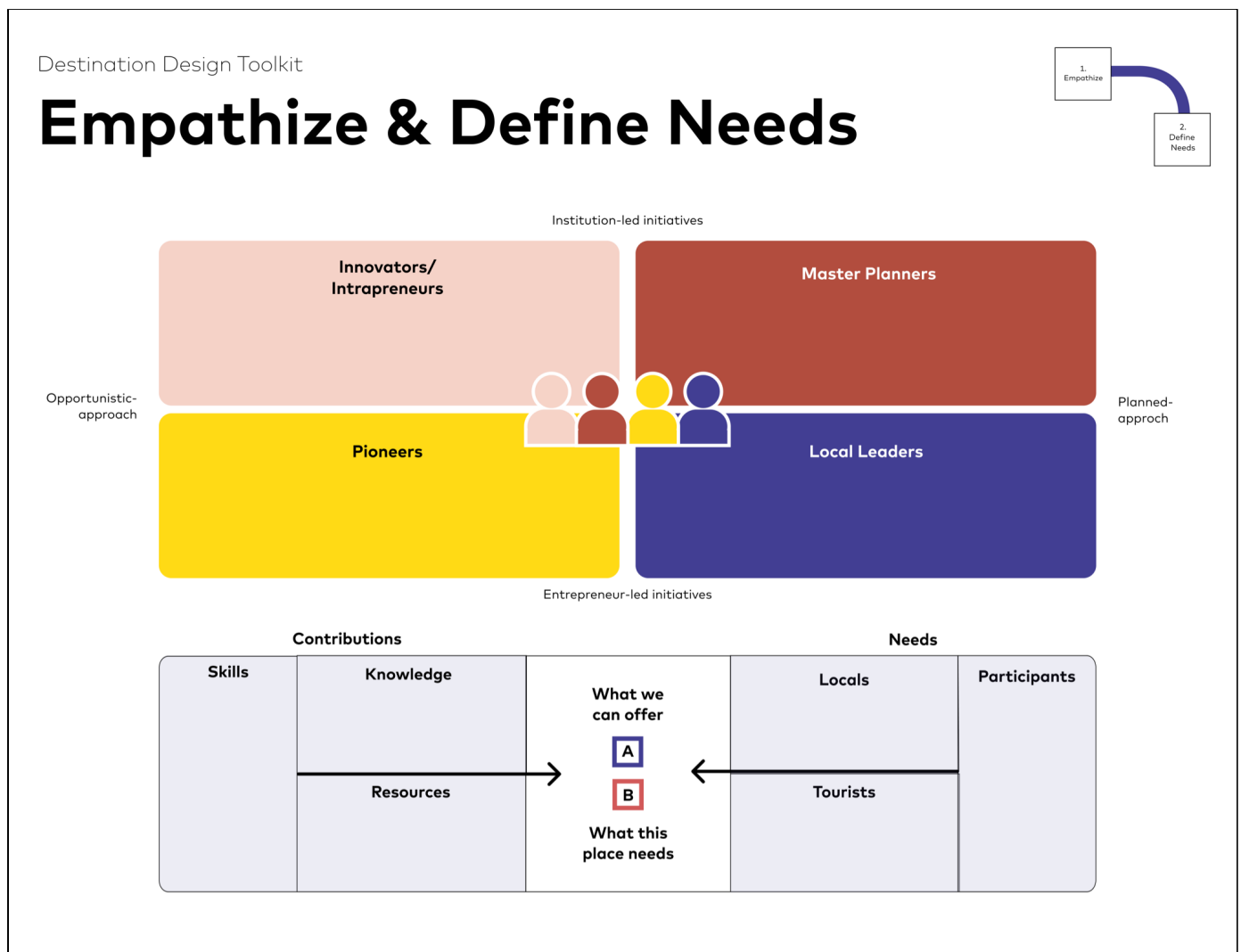


Figure 15. Destination Design Toolkit: Empathize & Define (Source: Authors)

### Step 1: Assess Participants

The best destinations come by combining the work of many people in the community. The Destination Innovation Profile Inventory will help you identify the four different approaches which will be a key aspect of your destination designing process. Have participants self-organize into one of the four quadrants.

#### Assessment Question: What's your approach?

Master Planners: "I work strategically to develop destinations for the long term. I work within, or with organizations that have complex systems which must be navigated with political acumen."

Innovators: “I’m a practitioner who likes to spot new opportunities and work with others to change the system.”

Pioneers: “I have a knack for spotting new opportunities, and use my entrepreneurial know-how to make projects happen.”

Local Leaders: “I work within the community to bring about change. I know how to organize members of the community to help make big plans happen.”

## **Step 2: Organize Participants**

Once all participants have determined where they fit in the inventory, develop working groups. These groups should be four to six members and include a mix of all four profile types. Ensure that a participant from each category is included in each group.

## **Step 3: Define Needs**

Magnetic destinations attract tourists to a community, which gives the locals something to celebrate. Designing a destination begins by understanding the needs of the people in the community and those visiting as tourists. When we understand what the desired destination needs to accomplish, we can then reframe them into an opportunity.

### *What we can offer*

In your group, determine what skills, knowledge, and resources you can contribute to the destination.

### *What this place needs*

Put yourself in the shoes of visitors to your region. What are they looking for? Which part of their experience is difficult? What do members of your community need? What are your needs as a stakeholder in this process?

## Toolkit Stage 3: Choose a Strategy

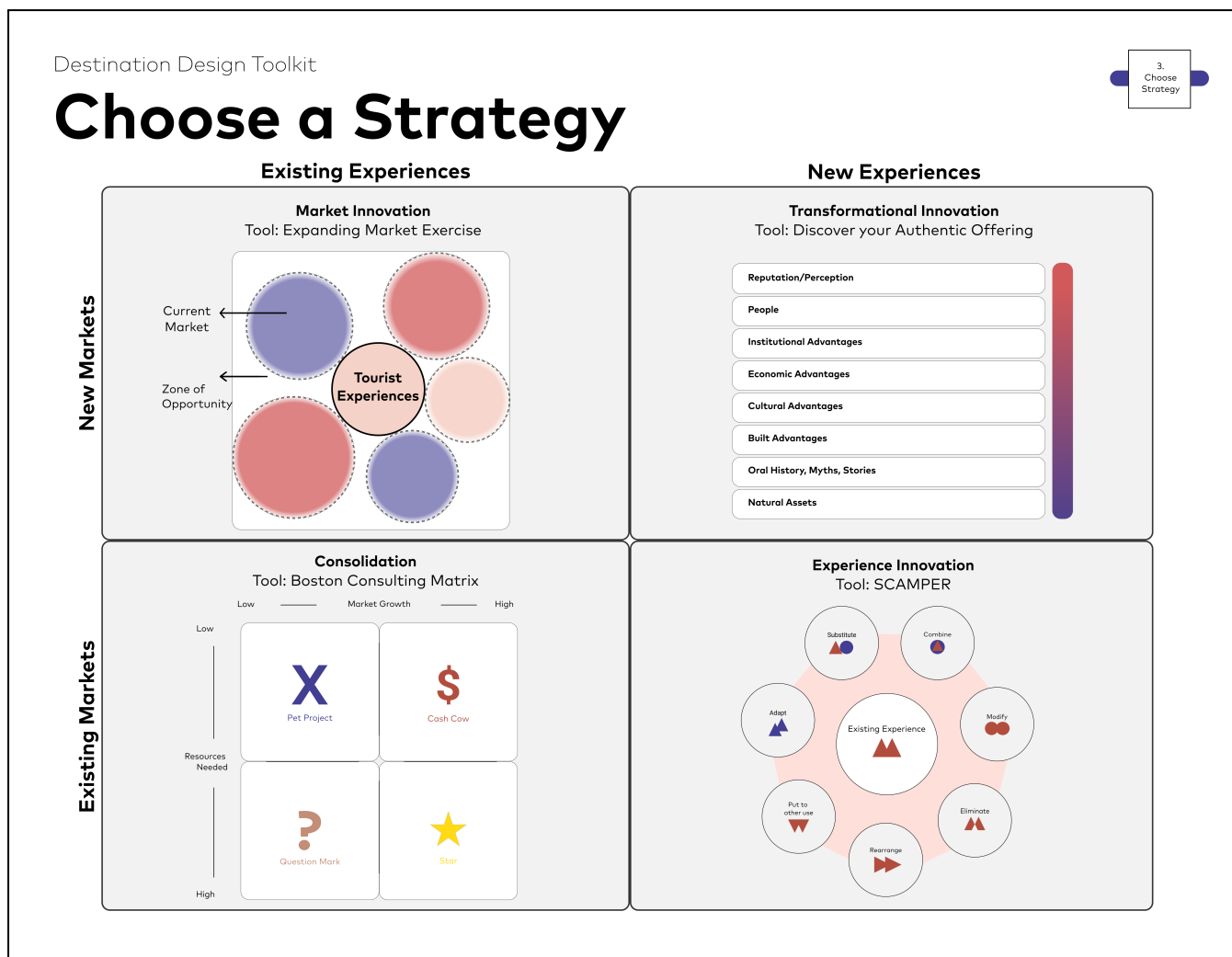


Figure 16. Destination Design Toolkit: Choose a Strategy (Source: Authors)

### New Experiences and New Markets: Transformational Innovation Strategy (top right)

#### Tool: Discover your authentic offering

To truly achieve transformational innovation, we need to begin with an authentic offering. What is distinct about your destination that no other place can claim? By beginning with that baseline, we can then give form to a unique destination that is shaped by your community's authenticity. These assets can be hidden gems that few people know about, or obvious advantages that are celebrated by everyone. The first step in choosing a strategy is to understand what you have to work with. To do this, take an inventory by engaging the knowledge of your participants.



Begin at the top of the activity and work your way down. As you go lower with each category, you begin to uncover the deep-rooted parts of your destination that separate it from all the others.

Participants should use sticky notes to capture their ideas. A Transformation Innovation Strategy often results in the development of brand new structures, such as organizations, businesses, infrastructure, and/or networks.

### **New Experience with Existing Markets: Experience Innovation (bottom right)**

#### *Tool: SCAMPER*

This tool is designed to help you innovate your destination experiences by ideating new ways to reach your existing audiences. If you need to breathe new life into your destination to encourage repeat visitors, then this strategy is best for you.

Begin by identifying your existing experiences. Then, in a group, work your way around the circle to re-think them. As you complete this activity, new experiences will emerge. Some will be viable, others will not be. The trick is to ideate as much as possible with everyone's input to result in something enticing to your current market.

### **New Markets with Existing Experiences: Market Innovation (top left)**

#### *Tool: Expanding Market Exercise*

This tool will help you identify new markets for your destination. Begin by using sticky notes to post your existing experiences in the centre circle. Consider all the products you already offer tourists. Once these experiences have been identified, use the surrounding circles to label your current markets. Who do you already attract to your destination? Next, expand on those markets further. Use the white space on the activity to label markets who are similar to your existing ones. What groups are similar to the ones you already attract, but aren't the same? This white space is your "zone of opportunity."

As a team, discuss each of the markets in this zone. Is there an audience that you have been missing? Think about niche groups, what groups are a subculture of your existing markets? Also consider massive markets in emerging areas, such as demographic groups and geographical areas. Can emerging markets be reached to visit your destination? By understanding who you may be able to attract, you can begin to develop your destination for new markets.

## Existing Markets with Existing Experiences: Consolidation (bottom left)

### *Tool: Boston Consulting Matrix*

Sometimes simplifying your destination is the best way to help it succeed. This framework helps companies decide how to prioritize their existing tourism experiences. The activity is split into four quadrants, each with its own unique symbol: question mark, star, pet project, and cash cow. Use this framework to assign each of your tourism experiences to one of these four categories. Once completed, discuss where to focus your resources and capital to generate the most value, as well as where to cut your losses.

- Low Growth, High Resources: Destinations should ‘milk’ these “cash cows” to provide financial resources to invest in “stars.”
- High Growth, High Resources: Destinations should significantly invest in these “stars” as they have high future potential.
- High Growth, Low Resource: Companies should invest in or discard these “question marks,” depending on their chances of becoming stars.
- Low Resources, Low Growth: Destinations should divest or reposition these “pets.”

## Toolkit Stage 4: Discover Solutions

Destination Design Toolkit

4.  
Discover  
Solutions

# Discover Solutions

**Step 1**  
**What if we?**

Conceiving a destination in any community can be challenging. "What if" questions break us free of the constraints that hold destinations back.

Envision what your destination could look like. How would it improve the community? Who is it attracting?

By completing the statement "what if we," you can discover an idea that could improve your destination.

**Step 2**  
**Picture It**

Making an idea visual helps others to see your vision. Encourage participants to storyboard what the destination could be. Just as architects add images of people to renderings of their buildings, draw how visitors will experience your destination.

Sketch your idea for z

**Step 3**  
**Develop Impact**

Making an idea visual helps others to see your vision. Encourage participants to storyboard what the destination could be. Just as architects add images of people to renderings of their buildings, draw how visitors will experience your destination.

**Impact Checklist**

As a test to achieve z,

we will test if this benefits the community by

B

We will test if we're reaching visitors by

\_\_\_\_\_

We validate this by

\_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 17.** Destination Design Toolkit: Discover Solutions (Source: Authors)

To discover destination solutions, we will take an action-oriented approach. Instead of creating a plan, we'll create a prototype. During this stage, you will rapidly prototype possible solutions. All solutions should address the defined needs from step two, and be aligned with the strategy identified in step three (Figure 17). Other than those requirements, it's important to allow participants to express all possible solutions. Don't fall in love with the first ideas. Keep early models rough enough to throw away so that they can evolve and improve.

### Step 1: What If We?

Creating an attractive destination in any community can be challenging. "What if" questions break us free from the constraints that hold destinations back from perfectionism to find creative solutions. Refer back to the work from Stage 3.

The inclusion of the word "we" here is intentional. Buy-in from participants is key to designing your successful destination. Encourage collaboration between participants.

## **Step 2: Picture It**

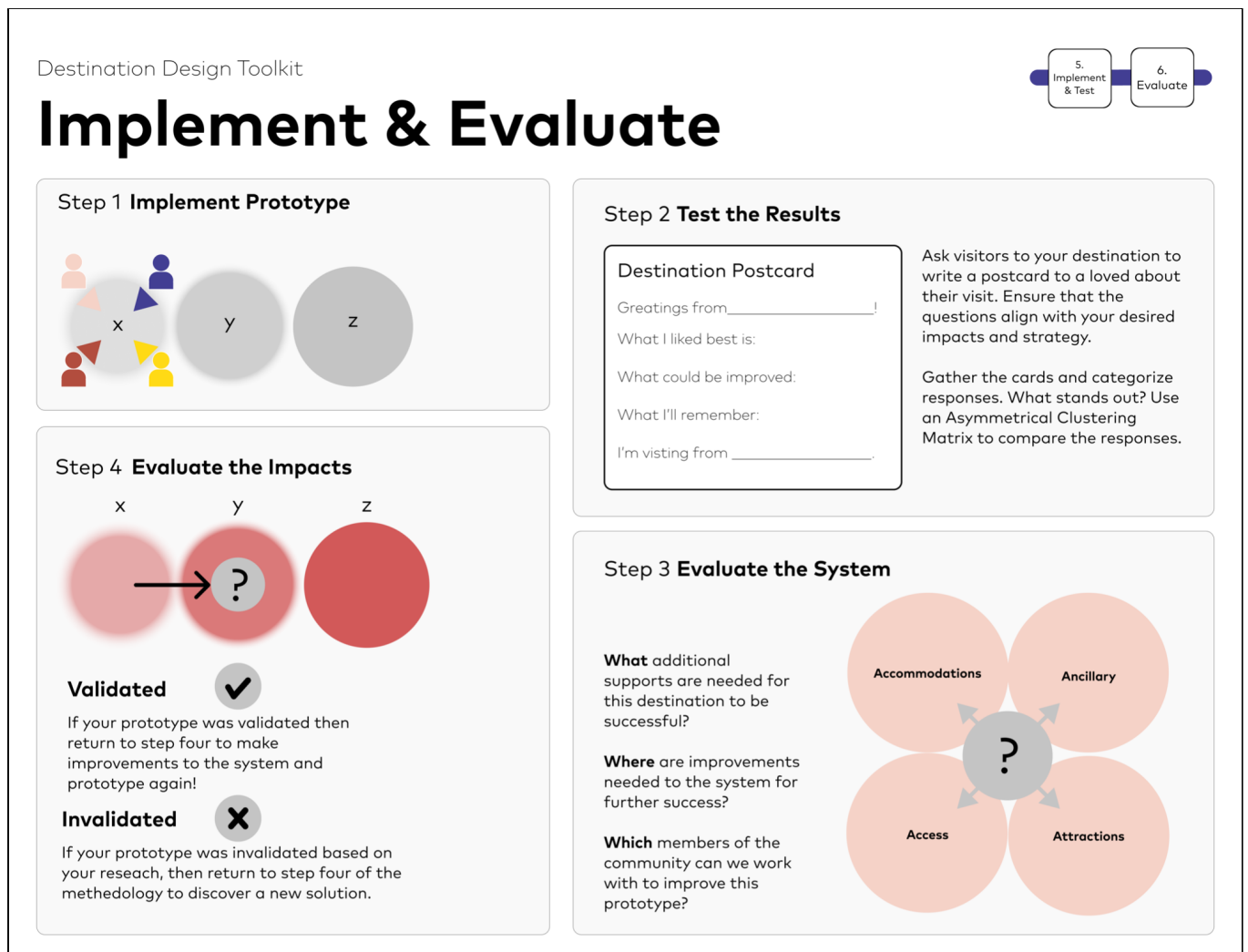
Making an idea visual helps others to see your vision. Encourage participants to draw what the destination could be. Just as architects add images of people to renderings of their buildings, draw how visitors will experience your destination and the emotions they will feel.

## **Step 3: Develop Impact**

To design a successful destination, your solution should address the needs of your community and stakeholders. Refer back to your work on the “Empathize & Define Needs” (Figure 15) worksheet. What does your community need from your destination?

As a group, fill out the Impact Checklist in Step 3 to ensure that we can measure the success of this solution. Think about the metrics that you can use to track and inform constant improvements.

## Toolkit Stages 5 & 6: Implement & Evaluate



### Step 4 Evaluate the Impacts

**Validated** ✓

If your prototype was validated then return to step four to make improvements to the system and prototype again!

**Invalidated** ✗

If your prototype was invalidated based on your reseach, then return to step four of the methodology to discover a new solution.

### Step 3 Evaluate the System

**What** additional supports are needed for this destination to be successful?

**Where** are improvements needed to the system for further success?

**Which** members of the community can we work with to improve this prototype?

Figure 18. Destination Design Toolkit: Implement & Evaluate (Source: Authors)

### Step1: Implement Prototype

The results of the feedback inform the next steps. Those initiatives that show promise can be iterated rapidly until they take sufficient shape to be developed; those that fail to show promise can quickly be abandoned. This is a cost-effective approach for destinations.

#### Idea generation:

Make the prototype that represents the vision of the final product. Consider a prototype with a low barrier to entry such as an event, pop-up activation, or adaptive reuse.

**Field Test:**

Destinations exist in the real world, not in sketches. In this step of the methodology, it's time to take your low-resolution prototype and develop a viable version to test.

**Step 2: Test the Results**

Ask visitors to your destination to write a postcard to a loved one about their visit. Ensure that the questions align with your desired impacts and strategy. Gather the cards and categorize responses. What stands out?

Evaluation

**Step 3: Evaluate the System**

The results of the feedback inform the next steps. Those initiatives that show promise can be iterated rapidly until they take sufficient shape to be developed; those that fail to show promise can quickly be abandoned. This is a cost-effective approach for destinations.

**Evaluate the 4As**

What is needed for system change? Where can we invest next to ensure further success? Was there a weak link that needs to be addressed in the next iteration?

**Step 4: Evaluate the Impacts**

**Validated:**

If your prototype showed promise, then it's time to do it again with improvements!

If your prototype moved you towards the desired destination then return to step four with improvements.

**Invalidated:**

If your prototype was invalidated, then return to step four to discover a new solution.

## Recommendations & Conclusion

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This research and proposal is only a first step towards a transdisciplinary approach to tourism. Through our research question, we set out to help communities create resilient destinations by utilizing design thinking and co-creation methodologies that consider the needs of all stakeholders.

The Destination Design Methodology and Toolkit was developed in response to the research question. These resources can be used to help communities co-create destinations and leverage community assets to spark innovation in destination development.

The following recommendations outline areas to further develop and strengthen this research and design proposal:

- Testing the methodology - Making this project and proposal publicly available may allow for more extensive and independent testing of the Destination Design Methodology and Toolkit. This research was conducted during COVID-19 restrictions, which was highly impactful to the tourism sector. Therefore, further work should be done once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted to test the methodology and toolkit in communities.
- An international perspective - This research focused on the North American tourism and destination development markets and structures. Utilizing the same design thinking methodology, further research should be done to address how it may apply in different locations and contexts around the world.
- Research into disruptive innovation - This research looked to help DMOs adapt their model to meet rapid changes due to innovation in the tourism space. Further research should explore how disruptive innovation may successfully challenge or potentially replace DMOs. Disruptive innovation could replace the existing system by providing value to stakeholders in new ways.

Whether communities are starting fresh, or improving an existing place, designing a destination is an exciting undertaking that is made easier with tools like the Destination Design Toolkit.

Destination Design has the potential to become an industry-changing tourism development opportunity that arrives just when communities are faced with big challenges, but also new possibilities. With tools like the Destination Design Toolkit, it is our hope that tourism and destination development are used to benefit everyone in their community.

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