

Advances in the Management of Recreational Use of Huascarán National Park, Peru

Resumen

La situación del turismo y la recreación en el Parque Nacional Huascarán se presenta dentro del proceso de planificación participativa del plan de uso del Parque. Con innovadoras opciones de comunicación horizontal y alejándose del esquema de "expertos", el proceso de planificación turística de Huascarán presenta los puntos positivos y negativos de una gestión de diseño planificador en la que varios organismos y personalidades han jugado un papel muy importante. La ejecución del plan, sin embargo, nos recuerda el hecho de que las recomendaciones técnicas de manejo se ven supeditadas a las decisiones de los políticos de turno que muy rara vez reflejan las necesidades locales sino las de sus electores en las ciudades de los distritos administrativos del servicio de Parques.

Introduction

This paper describes the process of elaborating the tourist and recreational use plan of the Huascarán National Park, in west-central Peru. The technical principles of the plan are discussed, as are inter-institutional relations and approaches—aspects so fundamental to this or any other proposal for mountain conservation. It reflects the point of view of one of the members of the planning team, and so includes personal insights on the process.

General Aspects of Tourism in the Park

The major tourism advancement of the last few years in protected natural areas of Peru has been the elaboration of the tourist and recreational use plan of the Huascarán National Park, between September 1995 and February 1996. This process was co-sponsored by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Peru and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). For the task, a mixed

team was assembled from the Huascarán National Park Service and the Mountain Institute, a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization, under an agreement with National Institute for Natural Resources (INRENA), the organization in charge of administering the Peruvian protected natural areas.

Huascarán National Park protects almost the entire Cordillera Blanca, one of the world's most popular mountain tourist destinations in the

1980s. After a recessive period in the early 1990s, from 1994 onward, the area has again seen increased tourist usage, even more so than that registered last decade. It is also one of the most innovative tourist destinations close to Lima, the capital and largest city. This makes Huascarán an important center of tourism on the national level, second only to the famous National Sanctuary of the Macchu Picchu.

The park encompasses lands used by ancient Indian communities and small farmers and ranchers, whose rights for grazing and for the use of the flora are acknowledged by the formal acceptance of the Park Service. A growing number of these "fuelwood, medicinal flora or grassland users" also participate in the tourist activities that are developed within the park. Since 1990, the Park Service has had a zoning and a general management plan to guide its actions. Before the elaboration of the tourist use plan, the park had basic guidelines for general aspects of tourism management, a proposal for a code of use by tourists, and specific guidelines for local associations for basic tourist services. The tourist use plan of the park is the most comprehensive attempt to manage tourism in the history of natural protected areas in Peru, and the first one specifically tied to a master management plan for any unit within the National System of Natural Protected Areas (SINANPE, *Sistema Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas*) in the country.

Tourist Activity at the Beginning of the Plan

The tourist use plan is based on priorities identified by the administration, as evidenced by the following problems:

- The overcrowding of visitors into a very few sites of tourist operations. This irregular distribution of visitors increased the potential impacts in some places and prompted the concentration of benefits in the hands of a few.
- The irregular or total lack of coordination among different groups dealing with tourism. There were governmental offices of tourism, private companies, guides, and local communities that themselves maintained a very irregular level of coordination with the authorities of the park, with a cyclical repetition of problems during the high season and special activities.
- The small economic benefit that the park obtained from tourism. This was due to a lack of park rangers at access points for hikers and climbers (Huascarán only had 3 check-in points for more than 45 entrances), an inadequate entrance fee schedule, a lack of control systems to requested alternatives to fees at the point of entry; and a total lack of concessions that allow income generation to the park and better services for park visitors.

Clearly, the solution to these problems was to implement adequate visitor services, with the goal of both diminishing negative impacts and en-

couraging enjoyable visitor experiences—and thus support for conservation efforts in the park.

Producing the Plan

From the beginning of the work, the team shared its vision on the fundamental character of the items discussed above, then designed first steps toward solving them. The participatory process ratified the validity of the base-line diagnostic of the problem.

The working team consisted of members from the park and the Mountain Institute, with supervision by INRENA officials. An important challenge faced by the team in the planning process was making sure the plan was integrated: the development of a common vision about tourism at Huascarán, the analyses of team members' roles, the definition of strategies that would allow them to maintain such roles and yet work as a unified team, and the renewal of alliances and commitments involved in each and every aspect of the process.

The team decided to shun the "experts" approach, adopting rather a horizontal framework of opinions, analyses, and learning opportunities, both within the park staff and at the interface with park users. In this approach, the first and foremost team decision was to amplify the draft plan to elaborate more on the its diagnostics, allow park personnel to increase their direct knowledge of the sites with data on visitor concentration, and to include information on proposed new sites for visitor redistribu-

tion.

This option was born from the perspective of strengthening the decision-making capacity of the park personnel during both the planning phase and, ultimately, during actual tourism management. Doing this would also fortify the staff's self-respect and their relationship with other enterprises associated with tourism activities. These points were kept as internal objectives of the process, and of the Mountain Institute as a cooperative entity with the park administration.

Figure 1 shows the initial concept to guide the plan. The graphic resulted from an internal workshop that started the teamwork and defined the different steps of the process.

A basic need clearly identified by the team members from the beginning was that the plan should be developed through a collaborative process. Several issues had to be resolved while designing the plan. The planners had to decide how to:

- Balance different interests and deal with "power games" among the incumbents;
- Create confidence that the suggestions from workshop participants would be truly analyzed and would constitute the basis for the plan proposals;
- Generate confidence among park personnel so they could "risk" their decision-taking power;
- Leave out of the process other aspects of park management that did not touch on the topic of tourism

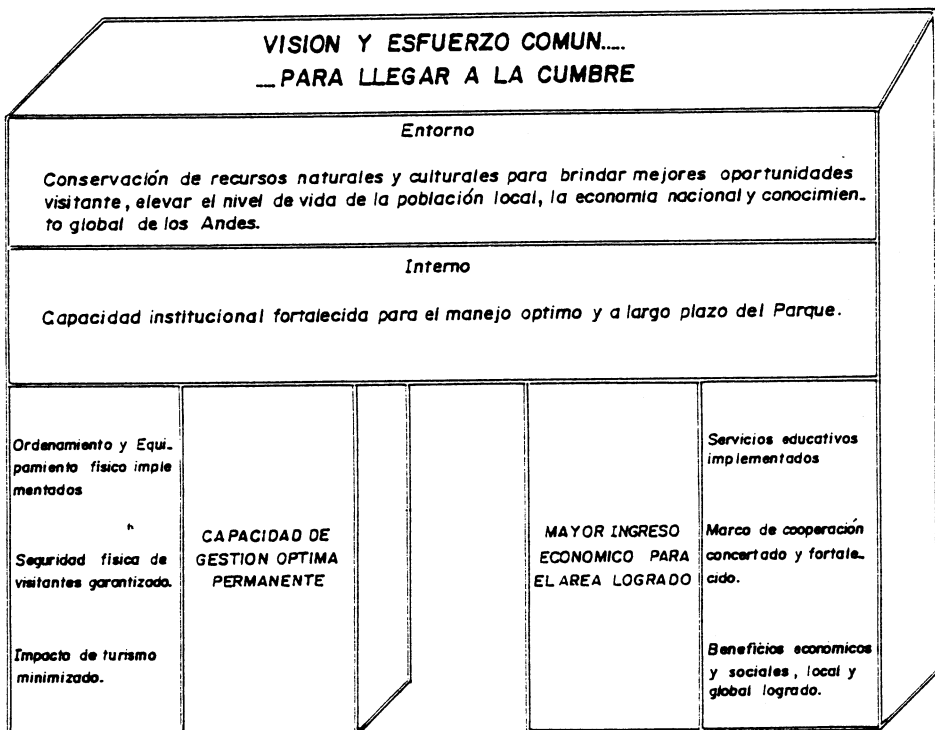


Figure 1. Plan de manejo de turismo del Parque Nacional Huascarán
[Tourism management plan for Huascarán National Park]

but could jeopardize its planning; and

- Balance the needs and expectations about this process and INRENA policies (since it was initially unclear up to what point a truly analytical space could be guaranteed for the local proposals, and that there were no high-level decisions without consultation).

In one way or another, these questions were answered during the process, which not only implied a level of formal working relationship between the Mountain Institute, INRENA and park rangers, but also a constant pro-

cess of compromise and maintaining interpersonal relations. As far as this process sought to strengthen the local agreement level for management, we learned that it is very important to develop alliances and relationships with external levels that have an important influence on the ratification of local decisions. Another important task was to keep open conversations and individual contacts with those people who have a great deal of influence in the tourist operation in the area, but who hardly presented their points of view during the working sessions.

Two fundamental aspects of the methodology were to cover the emo-

tional-affective aspects that a rearrangement such as this one entails, acknowledging and respecting everyone's hopes and the worries about the future of their individual activities. This helped to recover those more positive aspects from people and organizations, favoring the development of a common vision. The second important aspect was that each participant was given all the information resulting from a meeting just after it ended. All information was, hence, "exposed," with no chance for keeping confidential information or routing it only to a few or selected groups. So, everyone had the chance to correct the information gathered, and discuss it with others. This was a constant effort each day of the month-long series of discussions. Concomitant with the elaboration of the plan, the basic infrastructure that should be in place regardless of the plan's outcome was being implemented, including the placing of signs at guard posts and latrines in those places. These small actions helped to show the participants that the decision to improve services to users was in place and not only in paper.

The Plan's Contents and Technical Aspects

The plan identifies tourist use as one of the viable options in the protected area management, helping therefore to comply with the central objectives of the park's creation. It stresses tourism's benefits to the park in regard to finances, creating a con-

servation consciousness among numerous users, and providing an alternative source of income by non-extractive practices to local populations, especially the rural ones who, in one way or another, see their options of direct use of the park as being very limited.

Equally, the concept focuses on those strategic areas where the efforts of tourism management in protected areas should be directed; on the formulation of a vision of tourism in Huascarán, both from the point of view of the administration and of the affected sectors; on the development of facilities for tourism management, both in the protected natural area and in the sectors of influence; on helping the financial operation by exercising the primary objectives of conservation; and on management based on mutual trust. Without leaving aside the corollary actions, the framework attempts to stress the need for a more organic character to tourism management in Huascarán and other areas, stressing the importance of participatory action. Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework.

Inter-institutional tourism cooperation was identified as the highest priority by the members of the team. It represents a continuity of the effort from the planning stages through implementation.. The emphasis on coping with bureaucratic aspects before opening a space for true collaboration among institutions was clear. Here, it is important to note a need

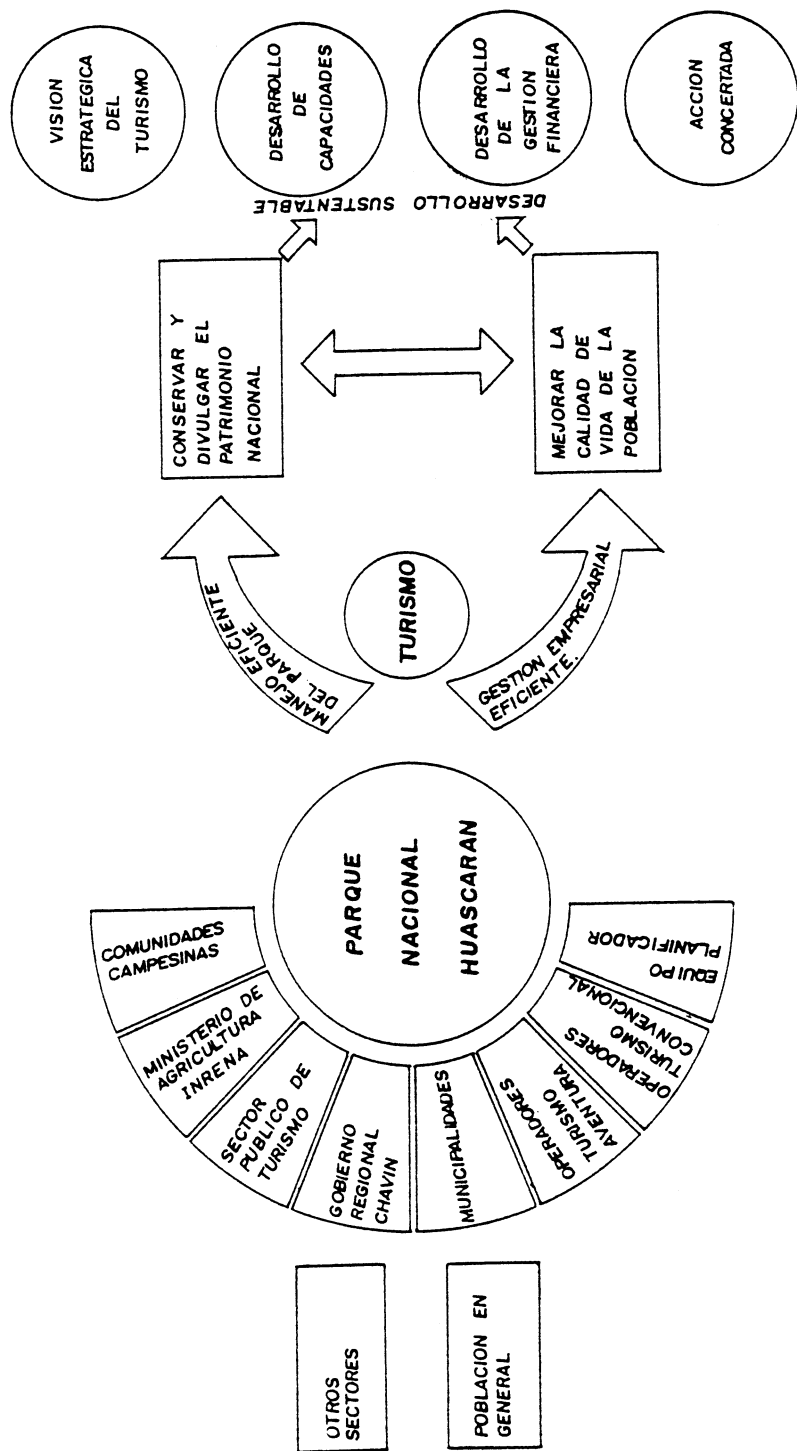


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of Huascarán tourism management.

for special support to the administration of the protected natural area so its personnel can achieve the technical confidence needed to continue with horizontal and participatory management models. This had to encompass a special effort in the central levels of administration of the protected natural areas system in Peru, where the potential resistance to change could be found.

Campesino tourism cooperation provides direct market-contact alternatives to the rural populations that are currently depending on the tourism agencies to offer their services. Looking to improve and adequately utilize these alternatives, the program offers training for interested campesinos, as well as new land use planning for cattle ranching in tourist sites and the re-introduction of llamas for hauling in lieu of donkeys and horses. Considerations of how to diminish the social impact of tourism on campesino populations were also included as part of other programs.

The objective of **strengthening institutional capacity** is to improve the operational capacity and management skills of park administrators to ensure adequate implementation of the plan. This requires the setting of priorities and strategies to improve the financial basis of the park (mainly oriented towards the establishment of concessions, fees, and increasing control points within the park). It also implies the development of training plans for park personnel and the exercise of regulations governing tourism use in the park.

Conventional and adventure tourism programs include not only detailed identification of 24 hiking routes and their variations, 102 destinations for rock climbing, four destinations for skiing, and six trails for mountain bikes (adventure tourism), and the design of nine destinations for different activities of conventional tourism, but also descriptions of locations and facilities for each route, and the maintenance areas needed. This infrastructure includes what the park needs for adequate management of tourism within the whole scope of activities, consistent with the philosophy that, without integrative management approaches, there could never be a healthy development of tourism in the protected natural areas.

Public education and interpretation stress the need to create a visitor center in the city that is the main operations center of the Cordillera, since it is the place where the first contact with the park is initiated, where tourists receive information about guides and companies and other accommodations offered by the population surrounding the park and, of course, where the political authorities of the region have their headquarters.

Assessing the impact of tourism activities may be the least-elaborated aspect of the plan, partly because of the need to advance the basis of information and management first, and then establish an appropriate program with the Park Service and with local authorities. Some of the main

needs in this area are environmental impact assessment studies of the concessions, estimations of optimal carrying capacity, and strategies for managing overshoots. In Peru, there is a dearth of experience in estimating tourist carrying capacity, but what is more important yet is the lack of identified appropriate carrying capacity methodologies for mountain protected areas, such as Huascarán.

Actions After the Plan's Elaboration

The plan was finished in February 1996. After the final workshop, a delicate period of adjustment to the final document followed. One side was trying to maintain the maximum closeness to the agreed-upon approach as approved by the working groups, while the other side was cautious not to lose political viability and official formulation. Only at this point did the central-level authorities realize some details they had not perceived before, and that were very hard for them to agree upon. However, the final approval resolution came in March, only one month after the final workshop.

Despite the plan's approval—almost without changes of the contents arrived at by the participants in the process—the regulations for tourist use in the park were not approved. These bylaws included the guidelines for concessions, the procedure for defining the fee schedule, and alternative mechanisms to park fees. Hence, the park administration was left with few formal tools to face day-to-day operations, and this delayed

the start of the charges to adventure tourist operators (those entering via certain areas almost never pay the access fee). Alternate mechanisms for conventional tourism were neither developed nor tested.

The plan's approval, within a participatory framework, ratified by the government of Peru, did not mean that the license for construction of the first park facilities was done following the recommendations for environmental impact assessment. This fact—which to a certain extent diminished the faith of the participants in the process—may be regarded, however, as having only a mild impact because it was clear that the political dimensions of this project were bigger than any single management option, even at the national protected areas level. Thus it was not identified so much as a failure to comply with the compromises reached by the consensus of the participants as it was a special instance involved in the management of tourism in the Huascarán National Park.

Nevertheless, conversations to formulate the regulations and the bylaws have continued, aiming towards a definition of the general basis for tourism throughout the whole protected natural areas system of Peru, to then be applied to individual units.

In the same vein, important advances resulted from the proposals of the plan and the linkages that the planning process generated. By having the description of services, spatial location of sites, etc., the park administration has obtained funding for

sanitary services in one of the critical areas of the park because of the number of visitors and the ecosystem type affected. Also, funding has been assigned to implement part of the conventional tourism infrastructure in this same area, and to build sanitary stations along the longer hiking route.

With the more active and less dependent participation of the park, other important actions are also taking place. The training workshops that are traditionally offered to the Mountain Guides Association of Peru are enriched with a better treatment of conservation topics and quality services, for which there are more collaborating institutions. A sanitary course was implemented for

those few members of campesino communities who offer tourist services.

However, the most important advance has come through the project "Llama 2000." This is an initiative of a group of pastoralists using one of the areas identified for the potential redistribution of the visitation load. In concert with the Mountain Institute, the park, and other institutions, Llama 2000 has created a new service of hiking with llamas instead of donkeys. This project is an example of how to link tourism and conservation with cultural recovery, and also an example of development options that conservation offers towards sustainability in the Andes.

References

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