

Social Impacts of Tourism in the Pantanos de Villa Wildlife Refuge (Peru)

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Abstract: Protected areas (PAs) have a unique value that relies on their high biological and cultural diversity, as well as their scenic beauty. Thus, they attract a large flow of tourists with recreational and/or educational purposes. The profits obtained from tourism support the PAs' objective which is to preserve its natural and cultural resources and ensure its sustainable development, including the maximisation of benefits for the local communities. Nevertheless, inefficiencies in the tourism management of PAs can produce negative social outcomes, such as pollution or disparity in the distribution of economic benefits, negatively affecting residents' quality of life. The Pantanos de Villa Wildlife Refuge (PVWR) is one of the most visited PAs in Peru and the only one located in an urban environment, which represents a challenge in its sustainable tourism management, especially in the social aspect. This research analysed the social impact of tourism in the PVWR, as perceived by residents located in its buffer zone. The study applied a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured in-depth interviews to 14 residents that allowed them to share their personal experiences with the social impacts identified in the literature and one non-academic source of evidence of the population's comfort/discomfort with tourism. The study revealed 11 social impacts of tourism about which participants have a predominantly positive perception. For instance, participants agree that tourism promotes environmental education and improves public infrastructure, while a strong sense of belonging and pride was perceived among them. Nonetheless, participants have diverse perceptions of three social impacts, namely: employment and economic growth, citizen security, and opportunities for cultural exchange, possible indications of an unequal distribution of benefits or differing level of involvement of residents in the tourism activity. This is one of a few studies that addresses the impacts of tourism in PAs in Peru focusing on the social dimension, as most research focuses on the environmental one. In terms of practical contributions, the study suggests specific actions that the local authorities may apply to maximise the positive social impacts of tourism for all residents of the PVWR.

Keywords: Residents' perception, Social impact, Tourism, Pantanos de Villa Wildlife Refuge, Protected areas, Peru

1. Introduction

Protected areas (PAs) have a unique value that differentiates them from other tourism sites due to their high biological and cultural diversity (Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado [SERNANP], 2016). These areas have a tourism application, as they offer opportunities for recreation and education, which allows for a greater recognition of the destination and a steady source of income for the area (Spenceley, Snyman and Rylance, 2019). PAs are usually open to the public and have optimal accessibility, thus attracting a large number of tourists, which impacts residents' livelihoods (Malchrowicz-Moško, Botiková and Poczta, 2019). In this context, social impact refers to the positive and negative changes in the quality of life of people in a community due to their interaction with tourists at their place of residence (Inter-American Development Bank [IDB], 2018; Leung et al., 2019).

Tourism in PAs should meet the main objectives of these places, such as increasing employment opportunities and improving the quality of life of nearby residents (Martín Martín et al., 2019). Some positive social impacts of tourism are the dynamization of the economy in the area and the improvement of basic services like education, electricity, water, etc. (Custodio and Maldonado-Oré, 2020). Tourism also stimulates local cultural identity and promotes environmental education among residents (Khan and Bhagwat, 2010). However, uncontrolled tourism can also negatively affect communities adjacent to PAs by causing the loss of their cultural values (Gonzales, Vargas and Zizumbo, 2021) and generating a sense of invasion among residents (Malchrowicz-Moško, Botiková and Poczta, 2019), which incites them to reject visitors and tourism in general (Stylidis et al., 2024).

Studies on the impact of tourism in Peru's PAs are scarce and tend to focus on economic and environmental aspects, leaving aside the social aspect. Such is the case of the Pantanos de Villa Wildlife Refuge (PVWR), where environmental studies have been prioritised due to its great biological diversity (Cogorno, 2021; Serrano Pazos, 2020). However, international literature calls for studies that explore the complex relationships between PAs and the surrounding communities (Malchrowicz-Moško, Botiková and Poczta, 2019). This research seeks to fill this theoretical gap and sets as its main objective to analyse the social impacts of tourism

as perceived by residents of the PVWR, using a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured in-depth interviews.

This PA was chosen as a case study because it is the only PA in Peru that is located in an urban environment, in Lima, the nation's capital, which posits challenges in its sustainable tourism management (Serrano Pazos, 2020). This affirmation is based on research findings claiming that tourist destinations located in urban environments suffer greater negative social impacts than other destinations, such as increased crime, due to overcrowding (Almeida-García *et al.*, 2021; Leung *et al.*, 2019). Regarding the practical contribution, this research will provide the PVWR authorities with valuable information for an inclusive tourism management that generates sustainable benefits for people in surrounding communities. In addition, residents will have a better understanding of how tourism impacts their lives to advocate for the design of policies and regulations that contribute to the sustainable tourism development of their community.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Protected Areas and their Relationship to Tourism

PAs are geographic areas managed through legal measures or other effective methods for the maintenance and protection of the natural and cultural resources associated with them (Unión Internacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza [IUCN], 2003). These areas are distinguished by their high biodiversity (Leung *et al.*, 2019; SERNANP, 2016), therefore, they should be chosen carefully and strategically, since, when declared as such, they become representatives of a country's natural heritage (SERNANP, 2016; Solano, 2020). PAs also stand out for providing ecosystem services to the population from the ecological processes that take place in them, such as soil formation, oxygen production and water purification (Wei *et al.*, 2020). Such ecosystem services make these areas conducive to research, environmental education and recreation (Martín Martín *et al.*, 2019).

Most PAs have a tourist application, as they usually have a recreational and educational focus, which generates greater recognition of the destination and a constant source of income to preserve the place (Spenceley, Snyman and Rylance, 2019). Therefore, PAs delineate specific areas for tourism activities such as boating, outdoor games, camping, bird watching, cycling, horseback riding and artisanal fishing, which, if not properly managed, can negatively affect biodiversity, vegetation cover, water and soil in that area (Canteiro, Córdova-Tapia and Brazeiro, 2018). Tourism in PAs is committed to conserving their natural resources, sensitizing tourists about their importance, and generating economic benefits that improve residents' quality of life (Custodio and Maldonado-Oré, 2020). The participation of residents in PAs is important for tourism development, since they are the main labour force in restaurants, travel agencies and lodging companies; therefore, their commitment and participation are fundamental for carrying out a good relationship between tourism and conservation in PAs (Chávez-Dagostino *et al.*, 2015).

2.2 Social Impacts of Tourism in Protected Areas

The social impacts of tourism refer to the positive or negative changes in the quality of life of people in a community due to their interaction with tourists at their place of residence (IDB, 2018; Leung *et al.*, 2019). Social impact is usually related to the economic and cultural impacts (Alamineh *et al.*, 2023). Some examples of this relationship are that tourism generates jobs that impact the household economy of residents, and, in addition, tourism offers residents the opportunity to share their traditions with the tourists, and thus collaborates with preserving their cultural values (McGinlay *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct social-impact studies in tourism from the residents' perspective, to identify in time the government initiatives that are effective, and to stop those that are failing to be inclusive of the local community (Abukari and Mwalyosi, 2020). The value of such studies is that they often reveal the residents' willingness to engage in tourism and to participate in conservation activities in PAs (Khan and Bhagwat, 2010). The positive and negative social impacts identified in the literature are presented below, along with Indications of social impacts in the study area.

2.2.1 Positive social impacts

PAs seek to improve the livelihoods of local communities by promoting tourism development and protecting local nature and culture (Gonzales, Vargas and Zizumbo, 2021). In this context, tourism functions as a strategy to foster job opportunities and economic growth, which promotes a positive attitude on the part of locals towards tourist activities (McGinlay *et al.*, 2023). Citizen security is a basic requirement for tourism

development in PAs, which not only benefits visitors, but also has a positive effect on the quality of life of residents in surrounding areas, and even promotes the return of former residents (Hsu, Lin and Jhang, 2020).

Leung *et al.* (2019) identified that tourism in PAs fosters environmental education, as it involves visitors and residents in tourism activities that promote awareness and concern for the preservation of the area's natural and cultural resources. However, planning is fundamental in tourism to attain sustainable development and serve as a stimulus for the preservation and protection of PAs (Martín Martín *et al.*, 2019). Residents recognise that tourism generates diverse social and cultural benefits, such as fostering cultural pride and identity, revitalizing indigenous traditions, promoting the exchange of knowledge, culture, ways of life and languages, and enhancing the community's image (McGinlay *et al.*, 2023; Schmudde, 2015).

Tourism also promotes the development of public infrastructure, since it is necessary to invest in equipment, facilities and infrastructure, which will also be used by the local population, to develop tourism activities (Bennet *et al.*, 2012). In addition, tourism increases the demand for more qualified employment, which promotes an improvement in the education and training of the workforce (Abukari and Mwalyosi, 2020). A study conducted in the PVWR revealed that one of the positive social impacts generated by tourism is that it is a source income for residents (Flores Parihuamán, 2021). In addition, residents perceive that tourism promotes environmental education and manifest their pride in witnessing a part of the life cycle of birds in the PVWR (PROHVILLA, 2022).

2.2.2 Negative social impacts

One of the main negative social impacts of tourism is that residents develop a sense of invasion, especially in the peak tourism season (Malchrowicz-Moško, Botiková and Poczta, 2019), causing the visitors' recreational experience to be negative in terms of the attitudes of residents, regardless of the scenic or natural attractions of the destination visited. Another negative social impact is the pollution produced by tourists, causing inconvenience to residents (Leung *et al.*, 2019).

There is also the "demonstration effect", which happens when residents experience a loss of cultural identity due to tourism, which often affects many developing countries, where the culture of tourists is often perceived as superior to the local one, causing changes in the attitudes, behaviours and values of residents (Leung *et al.*, 2019). In addition, the inauguration of tourist infrastructures (e.g., lodges) around PAs affects the scenic beauty of the site (Martín Martín *et al.*, 2019). Specifically, a study by PROHVILLA (2022), the authority in charge of the conservation of the site, found that residents feel rejection towards unfinished tourism infrastructure in their locality. It also revealed a concern about the overnight camps promoted by PROHVILLA, as they expose tourists to insecurity and negatively impact the image of the place.

3. Methodology

The research applied a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews, which allows for an understanding of the phenomena from the perspective of the participants in their natural environment (Hernández *et al.*, 2014). The study population was comprised of residents of the buffer zone of the PVWR. The sample was of volunteer participants, who told their experiences and expressed their perceptions of the social impacts consulted about. The participant recruitment strategy involved three actions. First, the identification of gatekeepers (i.e., influential individuals within the community) through the social network Facebook. Second, the posting of invitation announcements on Facebook groups of the PVWR residents. The third action was to request the support of PROHVILLA for support in the dissemination of the study. Snowball sampling was applied, and the sample size was defined following the category saturation criterion (Hernández *et al.*, 2014).

Regarding the design of the data collection instrument (i.e., interview protocol), the Gioia three-step methodology was applied to identify the social impacts of tourism in PAs, in which (1) evidence of social impacts of tourism in PAs was extracted from the literature; (2) statements summarizing these impacts were constructed; and (3) a label or name was assigned to them (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013). The literature considered for analysis were mainly the studies of Abukari and Mwalyosi (2020), Leung *et al.* (2019), Martín Martín *et al.* (2019), Hsu, Lin and Jhang (2020), Khan and Bhagwat (2010), McGinlay *et al.* (2023) and Schmudde (2015), which provide evidence of social impacts caused by tourism in PAs in different geographical contexts. Additionally, information from local sources was included, such as the thesis of Flores Parihuamán (2021) and the conversation on tourism carried out by the local authorities (PROHVILLA, 2022), in which residents' opinions about the social impacts of tourism in their locality emerged. The latter sources could not

be overlooked, since they are the only indications of positive and negative impacts of tourism perceived by the residents of this PA. The above resulted in a list of 11 social impacts generated by tourism in PAs, which can be either positive or negative depending on the context in which they take place (e.g., strengthening or loss of cultural identity). These are: environmental education, employment and economic growth, education and labour training, cultural identity, cultural exchange, public infrastructure, social discontent due to contamination, sense of invasion, site image, scenic beauty, and citizen security.

The semi-structured interview consisted of 16 open-ended questions and spontaneous questions were added when it was necessary to delve into a certain topic. Pilot tests were conducted with 4 residents near a natural tourist site, after which adjustments were made to the instrument prior to its application. At the beginning of each interview, participants received general information about the study and their informed consent was requested. The interviews were conducted through the Google Meet platform during April of 2024 and were audio and video recorded. Each participant was assigned a code and number to ensure the confidentiality of their responses (i.e., P#). The interviews were transcribed, analysed and organised in an Excel table, which revealed the positive and negative perceptions of participants' about each impact. The researchers met twice a week for a period of two months for data analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed a predominantly positive perception of the impacts of tourism on the PVWR by residents, which are detailed below (Synthesis in table 1).

Environmental education: Participants agreed that the activities carried out at the PVWR seek to preserve the biodiversity and habitat of the site while encouraging sustainable tourism. Among the main activities that promote environmental education in the area, it is the guided tours and the scientific excursions. Most interviewees declared having participated in the guided tours and commented: "I was able to learn something about how to take care of the flora and fauna of the place" (P7). This finding is consistent with Leung *et al.* (2019), who uphold that tourism promotes knowledge of natural resources and environmental awareness. However, some participants indicated that, although a progressive increase in environmental culture is perceived among residents of the buffer zone, this change does not encompass everyone.

Employment and economic growth: Most participants mentioned that there are two jobs directly related to tourism within the PAs: tourist guides, which is mainly occupied by locals with university or technical studies, and park rangers. In addition, a strong presence of artisans stands out in the surroundings of the PVWR. However, a minority of participants stated that "there are very few locals who have a job related to tourism" (P6). This difference in opinions may be due to there not being enough jobs directly related to tourism available for residents (Abukari and Mwalyosi, 2020).

Education and labour training: Some participants indicated that there are new educational institutions near the PVWR that use the PA as an area for academic and scientific education and research. Most participants indicated that tourism promotes workforce training, as there are jobs within the PA for people with higher and/or technical education. However, it is not known whether PA managers invest in the professional development of their workers, this being a highly valued benefit by PA residents (Spenceley, Snyman and Rylance, 2019). Regarding the production of handicrafts, it is stated that it is not essential to have training, as knowledge is passed from generation to generation.

Cultural identity: Participants feel identified with the PA and take pride in residing near an area that attracts visitors, both national and international. However, taking pride in being a resident of the buffer zone of the PVWR not only lies in having a constant flow of tourists, but also in the recognition, importance and natural value of the PA. This same sense of pride and sense of belonging was identified among residents of the Eifel National Park in Germany (Mcginlay *et al.*, 2023).

Cultural exchange: Most participants had not interacted with tourists visiting the area, since "the communities are not part of the tourist circuit" (P10) and "tourists are not interested in the surrounding areas, but in the attraction itself and the activities that take place within the area" (P2). However, research shows that tourists do have an interest in learning about the lifestyle of the communities surrounding the PAs (Tapa, 2013). Therefore, travel agencies and managers of the PVWR could design activities that include locals in tourist circuits.

Public infrastructure: Most participants recognise improvements in public infrastructure and ascribe this to tourism. Specifically, they perceive an improvement in green areas, signage, and lanes for the arrival of tourist

buses. The public transportation option and the existence of a bicycle lane that facilitates access to the area are highlighted. The improvement of street lighting was also highlighted. However, participants reiterated their concern about the state of paralysis of some public works, as expressed in the conversation with PROHVILLA (2022).

Dissatisfaction with contamination: Participants indicated that there is good waste management and control in and around the PVWR, they perceive that “there is pollution, but not because of tourism” (P06). In fact, they highlight the environmental awareness of tourists and attribute the responsibility for this problem to the locals. This finding differs from Gosh, Sharma and Gupta (2022) study in a PA in Bali where locals perceived that tourism caused an increase in water pollution and litter.

Sense of invasion: “It is flattering that tourists come” (P10). This statement suggests a positive and open attitude towards visitors, therefore, there is no feeling of invasion, unlike what was found by Malchrowicz-Moško, Botiková and Poczta (2019). This difference could be because the PVWR is not a mass-tourism destination, whereas the PAs in the cited study host mass sports events. Only one participant mentioned that the agglomeration of tourists discourages him to visit the PA. Others fear that the tourist attraction of the PA could provoke invasions or disorderly urbanization.

Site image: Most participants emphasised that tourism activities in the area are carried out in a sustainable manner under the supervision of public entities. Apaza-Panca, Flores Quevedo and Carranza Reyes (2024) affirm that all actions that contribute to the sustainable use of the area are part of a “green marketing” strategy that enhances the value and image of the PA. However, a minority of participants considered that deficiencies in public safety could negatively affect the site's image.

Scenic beauty: Most participants identified a few tourism businesses (i.e., lodging, restaurants and travel agencies) in the area, which they consider positive, but this might only be because these businesses do not abound and therefore, they do not affect the scenic beauty of the site (Martín Martín *et al.*, 2019). However, some participants pointed out to the need to open more tourism businesses if they do not affect the conservation of the PA.

Citizen security: It is stated that “since there is tourism, there are funds to hire security” (P14), indicating that tourism contributes economically to increase security in the area. However, some participants do not perceive this improvement. This difference could be explained by the area in which participants live, since some have more surveillance and lighting, which translates as perceived security. In this study, the concern raised by residents two years ago about overnight camps that could put the safety of tourists at risk was raised again, which is something to look after (PROHVILLA, 2022).

Table 1: Participants’ perception of social impacts of tourism in the PVWR*

Social impact	Perception			Result
	Positive	Negative	Unbiased	
Environmental education	13	0	1	Increased environmental education.
Employment and economic growth	8	6	0	Tourism-related jobs available but scarce.
Education and labour training	11	0	3	Improved access to education and training.
Cultural identity	12	0	2	Strong cultural identity.
Cultural exchange	7	7	0	Few opportunities for cultural exchange.
Public infrastructure	10	2	2	Improved public infrastructure but discontent with unfinished projects.
Dissatisfaction with contamination	14	0	0	Pollution is not caused by tourism.
Sense of invasion	12	0	2	There is no sense of invasion.
Site image	10	0	4	Positive image but at risk.
Scenic beauty	14	0	0	Not affected by tourism.
Citizen security	5	0	9	Opposed perceptions of safety.

*Number of participants: 14

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The general objective of this study was to analyse the social impacts of tourism based on the perception of the residents of the PVWR. The study applied a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 14 residents of the buffer zone of the PVWR. The literature review revealed 11 social impacts generated by tourism in PAs, about which participants were consulted.

Findings show that participants generally have a positive opinion about most of the social impacts generated by tourism in the area (8 out of 11). It is perceived that the managing entities of the PVWR are working to improve the environmental education of the local population and of visitors. There is an increase in the education and training of the labour force. Participants showed a strong cultural identity. Improvements in public infrastructure due to increased tourism are recognised. Tourism is not considered a cause of pollution in the area and there is no sense of invasion. Tourism improves the image of this PA, and its related businesses do not affect the scenic beauty of the area.

Nevertheless, participants had contrary or unbiased opinions about 3 social impacts. They stated not having many opportunities for cultural exchange, but willingness to do so. Regarding citizen security, some consider that this has improved thanks to tourism, while others do not perceive it. There is an increase in jobs due to the leisure and recreation offer near the tourist destination; however, tourism-related jobs are still scarce.

Participants showed willingness to engage in cultural exchange, therefore, it is recommended that cultural events be held in public places to facilitate locals-tourists interaction. The identification of artisans in the area represents an opportunity to promote local art and revitalise their culture while generating income. Therefore, it is suggested the convenience of providing artisans with adequate space to sell their products at the entrance or exit of the PVWR. In addition, it is also recommended to identify new jobs that are directly or indirectly related to tourism, in which the villagers could participate, since few can access the positions of guides or park rangers.

Based on these findings, it is suggested that the local tourism authorities of the PVWR hold periodic meetings with residents to discuss the negative social impacts such as those identified. Academia could collaborate with the design of an instrument for the longitudinal study of impacts. This research offers authorities crucial information to improve the tourism management of this PA and provides residents with evidence of how tourism affects their lives, to advocate for their well-being and the sustainable development of their locality.

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