

Measuring Public Interest and the New Environmental Paradigm in the Transformation of a Public Park into a Protected Area "Los Colomos" Forest, Guadalajara, Mexico

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Introduction

Los Colomos forest is a public city park with 92 hectares (230 acres) administered by the county administration in Guadalajara City (UdeG, 2003). Los Colomos Park is unique as a park due to its extension inside a city with almost 4 million people, and is surrounded by a high to very-high income neighbourhood. This is a resource that attracts tourists to visit the city, and provides enjoyment for the locals.

The county administration is considering the need to transform this park into a natural protected area because of the water resources in the park which must be preserved and are important to satisfy the needs of Guadalajara. This issue of the legal protection has been under discussion since 2004. The studies to support the legal proposal were funded and conducted between September 2005 and February 2006. Part of the studies conducted include among others: flora and fauna, hydrology, soils, and social issues. In this paper issues related to social studies regarding perceptions of people of the park within the scope of this transition towards a natural protected area are reported. It is considered that public opinion provides a close idea of the participation processes that may arise in this transition. In depth interviews and two general surveys were conducted. The results of this research should give insight into the management program and zoning.

Methods

This report is based on two general surveys. These surveys were conducted during two week-long periods (December 2005 and February 2006). The difference between these two was stated by the changes regarding weather and school vacation periods. The total number of interviews conducted with statistical representation was 330 for both cases. The questionnaire includes closed and open questions. The closed questions were analyzed using SPSS, and the open questions under the technique of content analysis. The analyzed issues in this sequential survey regard: (1) the hours the park is open; (2) what aspects visitors liked most/didn't like about the park; (3) suggestions for management; (4) personal perspectives about changes; (5) problems in the park which the visitor perceives; (6) visitor's knowledge regarding management, and activities or services provided by the park administration; (7) entrance fee; (8) better services for people with different capabilities; (9) areas of interest for more information, and (10) information seeking behavior.

Results

Among the findings it is relevant that 52% of the visitors first visited the park 10 years ago or more, or as long as they can remember; 18% first visited the park less than 10 years ago, and 17% first visited the park 5 years ago or less.

In general, visitors are confident regarding the future of this park.

Considering the next 5 years, 81% of the respondents believe that the quality of the park will remain “the same” to will be “much higher”. This drops to 71% considering the next 10 years, and then drops to 63% considering the next 15 years. Some of the reasons for low confidence reported are encroachment, erosion, and deforestation. One of the reasons supporting the confidence in the higher quality is because they think the park will be protected. Almost all the visitors (91%) are in favor of the legal protection of the park. In general, people present low level of knowledge regarding the management, but on the other hand, a good proportion (63%) reports recognition of the official norms in the park. Regarding the New Environmental Paradigm, visitors show mostly adherence to the NEP vs. the Dominant Social Paradigm (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig & Jones, 2000). Most of the visitors (78%) indicate that it is important to allocate space for wild plants and animals, 53% consider that humanity should not govern nature, and 87% indicate that humanity is part of nature and wildlife and not apart. With the stated above and other indicators documented in this study it can be stated that the proposal to protect this park legally counts with a good base of public support. Efforts should be directed into zoning that warrants the permanence and improvement of the quality that ensures the preservation of the park as a water resource. The challenge is to meet the visitor’s needs, but the hydrological vocation of the area should be considered of paramount importance above all other human needs.

References

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