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Recreational Geography in Latin America

Recreation is a basic need of man. It appears in increasing demand as urban sprawl and industrial development mar the natural landscape. A combination of the natural qualities of an area and the ability and desire by man to use them for recreation provides the basis for recreational geography. This newly emerging field of study has major economic significance in many regions and is closely tied with current problems of environmental quality.

In many respects Latin America presents an ideal research ground for studies in recreational geography. The region contains superlative natural beauty in landscape and biota. It also has scars from the exploitation of resources and from overpopulation. Thus the recreational geographer has the opportunity of investigating possible areas to be used for recreation before they are despoiled, and he also can find challenge in trying to rehabilitate areas which have been either misused or overused.

Review of studies on recreational geography of Latin America

This past decade saw a phenomenal growth of interest in outdoor recreation in the United States, largely due to the creation of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and the strong leadership of the Department of Interior. A survey of dissertations and theses on recreational geography produced in the past decade gives the following results.

TABLE 1. UNITED STATES GRADUATE STUDIES
IN RECREATIONAL GEOGRAPHY

Year	Ph.D.	Masters	Year	Ph.D.	Masters
1960	0	0	1965	6	6
1961	1	1	1966	3	14
1962	5	4	1967	4	15
1963	1	4	1968	5	13
1964	2	4	1969	4	18

Of these studies, only three dissertations and one thesis were specifically on

recreational geography in Latin America; one thesis was on the general topic of international tourism (Fiabane, 1969). In analyzing the specific subject matter of graduate studies, it should be noted that only one dissertation dealt with the broad study of recreational geography (Stillwell, 1961). The other studies were oriented toward tourism (Carpenter, 1964; Mings, 1966; Ryan, 1969), a part of the total field of recreational geography. Stillwell (1961) in the Brazilian park study presented an analysis of the geographic setting of Itatiaia National Park and of the role that the area plays as a national park. The functions, problems, and future of Itatiaia were discussed in detail.

Two recreational studies of Latin America appeared in professional geographic periodicals, one by Stillwell (1963) and one by Pearson (1957), although the latter was published prior to the decade 1960-70. Stillwell dealt with the study of national parks of Brazil while Pearson presented the recreational geography of Jamaica. Other periodical articles concentrated attention on general descriptions of national parks in such areas as the Virgin Islands (Moore, 1967), Mexico (Taplin, 1962), the Argentine Andes (Erikson, 1967; Wilhelm, 1966), and southeast Brazil (Lee, 1968). A particularly broad description and evaluation of South American parks and conservation activities was presented by Mary and Lawrence Rockefeller (1967) following a 22,000 mile tour. The national history of selected national parks was described in two different publications (Carrington, 1967; Cordini, 1964). A four-volume work by Para and others (1967) presented an economic study of tourism in Venezuela. The 18th International Congress of Geography held in Rio de Janeiro, 1956, published a volume on the geography of recreation (Chabot and Pingard, 1965).

Eight studies in the conservation of natural resources, a discipline closely related to recreational geography, appeared during the past decade. Topical research included forests (Wadsworth, 1968), soil (Blanco-Macias and Ramirez-Cervantes, 1966), air pollution (International Clean Air Congress, 1966), and water (Wollman, 1968). Regional studies were carried out in the Caribbean (Caribbean Research Institute, 1967; Carlozzi, 1968) and Ecuador (Buchinger and Milton, 1967; Acosta-Solis, 1965). Emphasis was placed on the inventory of present natural resources and an analysis of future needs.

Summary of major research questions raised in the past decade

The prevailing approaches to the study of recreational geography of Latin America in the last ten years have asked two questions. First, what are the areas

and facilities which supply recreation? This has been answered to a limited degree in scattered parts of Latin America, and generally reported in the more popular periodicals. Second, what function does recreational geography serve in selected areas of Latin America? This question has been posed in only two areas, Brazil and Jamaica, and appeared in professional geographic periodicals. Rather definite conclusions were drawn as to how the areas serve the public, what major problems exist, and how they may be solved.

Current research objectives

Since so few geographers have done substantive research in the recreational geography of Latin America, it would be presumptuous to evaluate current research objectives. However, some direction to research has been given by the Latin American Committee on National Parks, established in 1964. The concept of conservation has been modified in the light of changing technology and standards of living.

Increased budgets for conservation research, especially for the study of soil and water, are encouraging scholars. Nature conservancies are being organized to study ecological problems. Laws relating to wildlife, forestry and other natural resources are being modified and strengthened. Sites are being studied for possible development as recreational resources.

A review of current research objectives in the United States might be relevant to some parts of Latin America. The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission was established by Congress in 1958 and subsequently published an extensive report (1968). It stressed five needs: (1) recreation should be in the service of people, (2) it should be more closely allied to the highly populated urban areas, (3) there is need for much greater action and responsibility by state and local governments and private business, (4) there is need for better coordination among the numerous federal agencies, and (5) the most urgent need is to preserve and place under effective public control land and water resources that will be required for future recreational purposes.

In a recent publication by the National Academy of Sciences, *A Program for Outdoor Recreation Research* (1969) research objectives were divided into three major parts: (1) research into the social and behavioral dimensions of outdoor recreation, (2) research into the economics of outdoor recreation, and (3) research into the operation of recreation service systems. Formulation of these objectives

developed from a desire to systematically broaden the understanding of outdoor recreation as a social institution and of the other social institutions on which it depends, and a desire to assist policy and program decisions concerning the operation and modification of recreation systems.

Research needs in the geography of outdoor recreation were outlined in detail by Wolfe (1964). He organized a synoptic view according to macro- and micro-geographic recreational patterns. Specific needs included field work, inventory and classification, establishing use indices, gathering and analysis of statistical data, and cartographic techniques.

Marion Clawson (1963), research economist for Resources for the Future, posed four problems in dealing with recreational resources. First, how might the country better coordinate planning for outdoor recreation? Second, how might we estimate the future demand for outdoor recreation and the areas of land and water required to meet those demands? Third, how can we encourage greater public use of private land for outdoor recreation? And last, how can the money necessary for the provision of public areas be raised?

Specific research objectives by two leading Latin American conservationists were presented at the First World Conference on National Parks held in Seattle, Washington (Adams, 1962). Enrique Beltran, director of the Mexican Institute of Renewable Natural Resources, gave a paper on "Use and Conservation: Two Conflicting Principles". He proposed five areas of study: (1) analyze existing parks to determine their effectiveness as recreation resources, (2) study the possibility of giving small parks near important population centers to local authorities, (3) establish use zones within parks, (4) increase recreation facilities in parks too small for use as nature preserves, and (5) work for increased funds for recreational land use. A Venezuelan, Arturo Eichler, professor of natural resources conservation, Institute of Geography and Conservation, University of the Andes, gave a paper "Planning for Use." He called for coordination of recreation development with other soil and water conservation programs, especially in areas reasonably accessible to crowded urban communities and to growing industrial areas.

It is obvious that all research objectives in recreational geography of the United States are not applicable to Latin America. However, geographers can find many problems in recreational research which are relevant to both areas.

Conclusions

Since problems in recreational geography of Latin America have received such sparse attention in the past, there is much to be accomplished in the years ahead. It will require the collective efforts of both physical and cultural geographers. The resource base for recreational use must be analyzed with respect to the total ecosystem. The sociological needs for outdoor recreation must be studied with respect to the total recreation service system. Specific avenues of investigation will vary with different regions, but a major need in most of Latin America is the accurate mapping of existing and potential recreation sites. The first areas to be considered should be those threatened by exploitation or overuse, especially areas near population concentrations where recreation needs are acute.

Latin America presents a fascinating research area for the recreational geographer. At a time when man is beset with problems of environmental deterioration, both physical and cultural, it is vital that emphasis be placed on the maintenance and improvement of recreational resources -- a key to the quality of life for which man is striving.

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