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## THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATORY TOURISM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT AS A MEANS TO AVOID NEGATIVE SOCIO- TERRITORIAL IMPACTS ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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**Abstract:** The native peoples have a history that predates the Spanish occupation, they preserve their own symbolisms and socio-cultural practices of great richness, generally little known. Complex thinking and transdisciplinary are used as a methodological theoretical basis to study their heritage values and evaluate the importance of their tourism promotion through participatory planning and management as a means to prevent and avoid negative socio-territorial impacts

**Keywords:** participatory tourism planning, tourism management, heritage values, indigenous peoples, socio-territorial impacts.

## INTRODUCTION

The original peoples are peoples who settled before the Spanish occupation, many of them were indigenous peoples who were transformed after the conquest, generating a syncretism from which they generated their own symbolism and socio-cultural practices through customs and traditions. Particularly in the Valley of Mexico, many of these peoples were absorbed by urban growth, making it difficult to recognize them as native peoples; however, for the most part they conserve a tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

This cultural wealth can be made known through tourism promotion, which would benefit the population in general; however, it is important to involve the local community to prevent and avoid negative impacts, such as overcrowding and socio-spatial segregation.

This work is part of the broader research project, funded by the National Polytechnic Institute, the main objective is to raise awareness of the importance of indigenous peoples as part of the national identity and their risk of disappearance, as well as the need for their participatory management and planning for the development of their tourism potential.

## FROM STRATEGIC PLANNING TO PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

Tourism as an economic activity presents different challenges, including improving the quality of life of people, both tourists and local residents, which is why it is important to plan for the benefits derived from this activity in a balanced and equitable manner.

One instrument that has been used in this regard is strategic tourism planning. This instrument aims to make the development and management of tourist destinations sustainable and competitive; it proposes future scenarios towards which actions should be oriented for the proper management of their resources and attractions. However, the criticism of this planning is that it focuses on the market value and the business vision that turns the citizen into a potential client and raises the need to consider all stakeholders through participatory planning. From this point of view, participatory planning in tourism emerges as an alternative approach to traditional strategic planning, seeking to involve social actors and strengthen spaces for citizen participation in decision-making on tourism development.

The origin of participatory tourism planning lies in the evolution of planning practices in the tourism sector, which have shifted from centralized and technical approaches to models that prioritize the inclusion of local stakeholders and the community in the decision-making process.

In this paradigm shift, tourism planning has evolved towards a more participatory approach that is more focused on the voices of local communities. Participatory planning arises in the context of sustainable development, which emphasizes the importance of considering the interests and needs of communities in the planning of tourism projects. This approach seeks not only to maximize economic benefits, but also to preserve the cultural and environmental heritage of the communities (Sosa, 2023).

Participatory tourism planning is based on the premise that local residents are the ones who best understand their environment and its needs. Therefore, their participation is crucial to the success of any tourism initiative (Cardozo, Fernandes, Soares, Holm, 2016).

Although strategic planning considers the dialogue between different stakeholders, including local authorities, entrepreneurs and the community, it is normally in the phase of diagnosis; in participatory tourism planning it is important that this dialogue also takes place in the strategy and operation phases in order to build consensus on tourism development, which improves the quality of planning as it allows the adaptation of strategies and projects to the specific realities of each community (Felix and Ganchozo, 2020).

Participatory tourism planning and management is of great importance for the sustainable and successful development of tourism destinations because it involves the local community; it allows the residents of the destination, who are directly affected by tourism activity, to have a voice and vote in decisions that impact their quality of life and their environment. This helps tourism development to respond to the needs and interests of the local population (Sosa, 2023).

When planning is based on community interests, the perception of collective benefits increases, which is key to sustainability and local support for tourism (Id.). On the other hand, participatory planning makes it possible to take advantage of local knowledge, since the residents are the ones who have a deep understanding of their reality, problems and opportunities, which is invaluable for the actions to be taken to be effective.

Another benefit of participatory planning is that it fosters hospitality. When the community is involved, a positive attitude towards visitors is more likely (Id.). It also allows the latter to set limits on the use of its heritage

and cultural resources, helping to preserve its identity in the face of tourism (Cardozo, Fernandes, Soares, Holm, 2016).

Considering environmental, social and economic dimensions from the local perspective facilitates more balanced and sustainable tourism development. There is also an improvement in decision making, as it incorporates the diverse perspectives and knowledge of the different stakeholders, leading to more informed and consensual decisions (Pax#, 2023).

Participatory tourism planning fosters cohesion, promotes joint work and collaboration among the various actors involved in tourism activity (Pax#); local actors, feeling part of the process, increase their support and commitment. In this way, participatory planning can comprehensively address the challenges that arise and allows for a holistic vision that considers all aspects of community life affected by tourism (Sosa, 2023).

In participatory tourism planning, the strengths of the local population should be considered to avoid alienation and gentrification processes. Planning should encourage the consumption of products, activities and services offered by the local population to strengthen their economy. Tourism promotion generates new employment opportunities; therefore, it should be verified that the local population is prepared so that local personnel are prioritized for hiring. The participation of the community in the planning process makes it possible to know these strengths beyond the information provided by statistics, as well as their willingness to undertake activities in areas such as lodging, gastronomy and recreational activities that directly benefit the residents.

Participatory tourism planning stems from the need for a more inclusive and sustainable approach to tourism development, recognizing the importance of local communities in creating tourism that benefits everyone involved and also strengthens community engagement.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

The epistemological approach is based on complex thinking, taking up Rolando García's Systems Theory and levels of processes. It is intended to be a transdisciplinary research that takes up qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods depending on the elements to be analyzed.

Considering each village as a system, four subsystems are analyzed: the spatial (natural and built); the sociocultural; the economic and the political-administrative. Each of these sub-systems is at the same time a system in its own right, which is why, for its study, multi-disciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches must be used for the interpretation of results. Regarding the levels of analysis proposed by Rolando García, the local, the immediate environment and its relationship with the rest of the city are analyzed.

In order to study each of the selected villages, a documentary research was carried out and multivariate analyses (historiographic, ethnographic and statistical) were performed. For the field study, maps of each town were made, as well as photographic surveys of the places identified as most significant by the inhabitants. In-depth interviews were also conducted with key informants, considering the different types of actors: members of the commissariat, original inhabitants and residents.

## **THE PEOPLES**

The native peoples share common characteristics such as being settlements prior to the Spanish occupation. Although they recognize a pre-Hispanic past, they are not necessarily indigenous, most of them are the result of miscegenation, but there is a core of families whose surnames identify them as originary. These towns conserve their original name that is generally related to the characteristics of their geographic location, which is accompanied by the name of a Christian saint.

In the spatial aspect, its layout is associated with what they called "Indian towns" and do not correspond to the norms established by Felipe II for the foundation of Spanish cities, for example, they lack a central square (which people have come to call *zócalo*) around which the church should be located and on one side the government palace; however, some were adopting certain characteristics.

On the other hand, their geographic location has been a key element in being absorbed by the urban sprawl and/or dispossessed of their territory. Towns such as Peñón de los Baños or Magdalena Mixiuhca, lost territory in the name of modernity, since the main facilities such as the Mexico City International Airport in the former and the Sports City in the latter were located there. Towns such as Santa Martha Acatitla were affected by the migration from the countryside to Mexico City during the industrial era, or more recently the town of Xoco, which although it had already been stripped of part of its territory, is now affected by the Mitikah complex.

Of the towns studied so far, San Miguel and Santo Tomás Ajusco stand out, whose remoteness from the center of the city and their environment, which was declared a reserve because of its high ecological value, allowed their territory to be less altered or coveted for urban expansion. Among their most relevant characteristics is that land tenure is still communal, which has allowed them to defend their territory and govern themselves.

## SAN MIGUEL AJUSCO AND SANTO TOMÁS AJUSCO: TWO TOWNS, ONE COMMUNITY

The local administration of San Miguel and Santo Tomás Ajusco is carried out through subdelegations, which are in charge of managing internal affairs and representing the inhabitants before the Mayor's Office of Tlalpan and the central government of Mexico City. Each town has its own subdelegation, which is led by a subdelegado. These subdelegations are responsible for organizing community events, managing public services and preserving local traditions and customs. However, for the villagers, the recognized authority is the Commissariat who together with the Assembly has the power and makes the important decisions; such as those related to the purchase and sale of land, security and surveillance; even in this place there is no payment of property tax to the Mayor's Office, but there are cooperations to different groups for the festivities -mainly religious-, otherwise they would lose their rights even though they are natives.

The Commissariat is made up of: President, Secretary, Treasurer and a supervisory board composed of the first two plus two members. The Assembly, the highest authority, is made up of 604 community members.

Unlike the other towns mentioned, urban expansion began to affect this place more strongly in this century. The arrival of new inhabitants, who are called *avecindados*, given the communal nature of the land, was only possible through the sale of land (which has to be authorized by the commissariat), although the new owners cannot have a property title, only possession rights, which have a cost that is charged by the commissariat. Those who refuse to pay this fee only have their purchase contract as proof of ownership.

## TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

In San Miguel Ajusco was the first chapel built in the XVI century that was replaced by the current one built in 1707. In the 20th century the chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was added. This temple together with its atrium constitutes a religious geosymbol<sup>1</sup> where two of the main festivities take place, both in honor of San Miguel Arcángel. The big festivity is celebrated on September 29th and the small festivity on May 8th. In these festivities the tradition and the rich culture of this town as well as its community spirit are shown. In these festivities there is a *verbena*, *chinelos* dance and *muleteers*.

The festivities (on each date) actually last more than a week; in May it is from the 8th to the 16th of that month and in September it is from the 29th to the 7th of October. The festivity begins when San Miguel Arcángel is taken out of the church and walks through some streets of the town, starting from the church near the Xitle volcano, until he returns to his original church. On this route, he makes some stops in houses where they prepare a niche for him with flowers and balloons and where the hosts offer refreshments to the people who follow this procession.

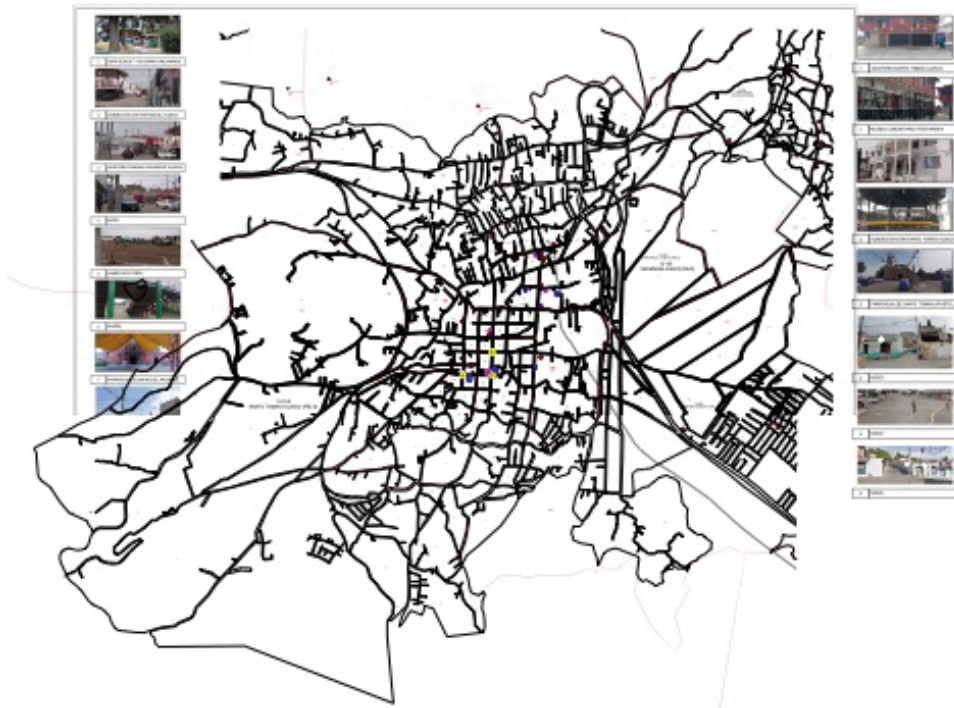
In this procession also go the *mayordomos*, a group of *chinelos* and the band that accompanies the festivity. They go throwing *cuetes* to announce the passage of San Miguel Arcángel but also to invite the inhabitants to join in.

During the days of the festivities, there are popular dances on the soccer field, where there is a stage for the groups that entertain. In the afternoon there is a *jaripeo* in the *Ruedo de San Miguel*. For the celebration of the festivities there are several groups that participate.

In the case of Santo Tomás Ajusco, its main temple dates from the XVI century and consists of a bell tower and a single nave. The

1. Geosymbol is a spatial marker, a sign in space that reflects and forges an identity, a term coined by the French geographer Bonnemaïson (2000).





**Figure 1.** San Miguel and Santo Tomás Ajusco  
Prepared by Fernando Espinoza Guillen (Servicio social IPN 2023)



**Figure 2 .** Temple of San Miguel Ajusco and its patronal feast.

Source: Photographs taken by Margarita Gallegos 2023

facade is of quarry stone on the sides of the door, four niches with the images of the four evangelists. The central niche has a sculpture of the patron saint, Saint Thomas the Apostle. In the atrium you can observe a carved cubic stone of pre-Hispanic origin, which resembles a chest and is known as “El cuartillo”, which was originally transferred from the pyramid of Tequipa.

Its patronal feast, dedicated to Saint Thomas the Apostle, is celebrated on December 21. In order to organize this festivity, fiscals and mayordomos are appointed who, together with groups of neighbors, are in charge of collecting money and organizing the eight-day festival. As part of the festivities, there are masses, horseback riding, fireworks and chinelo dances. In this festival, neighboring towns participate with dances such as the Moors, muleteers and concheros.

Of the festivals that take place in this area, some are common to both towns, such as Palm Sunday or the Güegüenchones festival. In this fiesta the “huehues” participate<sup>2</sup>. These characters parody the Spaniards and women, since previously the latter could not participate, so the men disguise themselves in an exaggerated and caricatured manner.

Another common feast celebrated by both towns is May 3, the feast of the Holy Cross, which is celebrated in the “ojo de agua” (water hole) that exists at the foot of the hill of the Eagle’s Peak. There they built several water boxes to store the vital liquid and a chapel where a priest officiates the mass. There is a legend that the spring had dried up and the water reappeared on May 3rd (feast of the Holy Cross), hence the tradition.

In this event, prior to the mass, the villagers arrive carrying decorated wooden crosses. After the mass, the groups in charge of this celebration offer food and drink to all those present. It is a moment of conviviality and community support.

2. *Huehes* is term derived from the Nahuatl *huehue* meaning old man

Another of the places of high patrimonial value is where the pyramid of Tequipa is located, an archaeological site dated between 1325 and 1521, where there is a base of Tepanecan origin dedicated to Xochiquetzal, goddess of love and harvest. It is thought that the corn ceremony was held there, which coincided with the date on which the Holy Cross is celebrated. Due to the temporality of this pyramid, it is considered that it was built by a Tepaneca group that fled from the Mexica advance.

At present, the site is abandoned, despite the care taken by the inhabitants who surrounded the property with a fence to prevent looting, invasions or vandalism; the fence was torn down. This foundation has not been cleared of the invading vegetation, so it only looks like a mound with trees; the only sign of its existence is a small wooden sign nailed to one of the trees.



**Figure 3.** Temple of Santo Tomás Ajusco

Source: Photographs taken by Margarita Gallegos (2023)



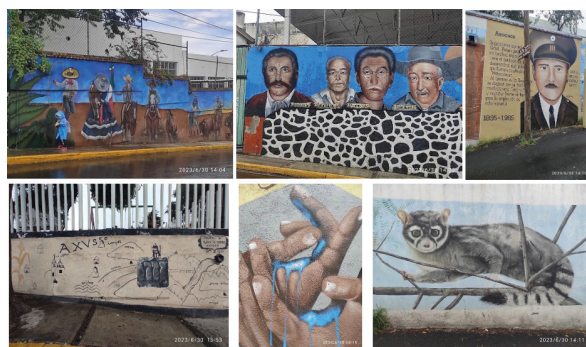


**Figure 4.** Tequipa pyramid and cuartillo

Source: Photographs taken by Margarita Gallegos (2023)

Of its non-religious festivities, one that stands out is September 15 and 16, since during the national holidays there are parades with participants dressed in traditional costumes. According to one of the villagers, they sing the Mexican National Anthem in Nahuatl.

Among the attractions of these towns are a series of murals that speak of their history and tradition. In Santo Tomás, there are those dedicated to the charrería, which is an important part of its culture. Another depicts the history of its founding. Others portray historically important characters, one of them is of General Reyes Nava, who participated in an important way in the Mexican Revolution. Although the architecture of the place is not relevant (except for the temples), the murals give it a particular character that is worth visiting.



**Figure 8.** Murals

Photographs taken by Margarita Gallegos (2023)

There is also a museum where, according to the inhabitants interviewed, there was an original codex among other vestiges found in the area. When the museum was damaged in the 2017 earthquake and had to be closed, the neighbors rescued what was there, however, they did not give further information about who has it in safekeeping.

Another place of great significance is the Cumbres del Ajusco National Park, which was decreed on September 23, 1936, when the constitutional president of the United Mexican States was General Lázaro Cárdenas, who in his justification expressed the following:

Considering, that the culminating mountain ranges of the National Territory, which form the division of its main valleys, occupied by populous cities and which at the same time constitute the division of the hydrographic basins, which by their own extension contribute in a considerable way to the feeding of the currents of the rivers, springs and lagoons of the same valleys, sustaining their hydraulic regime if they are covered with forests, The forest conservation which cannot be obtained by the conservation of forests, as they must be, in order to avoid the erosion of their sloping lands and to maintain the climatic balance of the neighboring regions, makes it absolutely necessary that these mountain ranges be effectively protected in their forests, pastures and verbales so that they form a sufficiently pro-



protective cover of the soil and guarantee the stability of the climatic and biological conditions; forest conservation cannot be achieved in an effective manner if private interests linked to communal, ejido and private property, which tend to overexploit the same forest elements, prevail; being for all this indispensable that these mountain ranges are constituted with the character of Forest Reserves of the Nation; and in those like that of the Ajusco that by its height and extension as well as by the multiple and varied aspects of its conformation forms in the national panorama majestic reliefs that indicate that mountain range like monument of exceptional beauty and grandiosity within the system tarasco - nahua, with its high summits covered with wooded characteristic of cold climates in prodigious contrast with the intertropical territory that extends in the low parts of its slopes, where there is also a fauna integrated by special wild animals that imprint on the mountain range itself the character of a true museum of the local fauna and flora, thus fulfilling the characteristics of the National Parks, which by agreement of the civilized nations has been agreed to indicate and reserve to this category of terrestrial reliefs and secular forests, protecting them against their denudation (Lázaro Cárdenas, 1936).

Subsequently there was a modification on May 19, 1937, which reduced its area. The decree aims to conserve the flora and fauna of the region, as well as to protect its mountain ecosystems. It is worth mentioning that it is part of the mountain system which is one of the main recharge zones of the aquifer of the Valley of Mexico.

This park is located within the Sierra de Ajusco-Chichinautzin, which delimits the southern part of the Valley of Mexico basin, bordering the Sierra de las Cruces to the west and the Sierra Nevada to the east. These mountain systems are part of the Neo Volcanic Axis. The park's highest point is La

Cruz del Marqués at 3937 m.a.s.l.; its flora is mainly composed of pine, fir, oak, juniper and strawberry tree families; the fauna is mainly composed of opossums, shrews, mice, coyotes, weasels, skunks, wildcats, volcano rabbits, squirrels and snakes such as coral, rattlesnakes and water snakes. There are bats in the holes in the summits, some of which are threatened and endangered (Lugo, 2023).

In the Cumbres del Ajusco National Park, various recreational activities such as hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, gotcha, ATV rides, zip lines, observation of flora and fauna and at certain points you can see the Valley. Among the services offered to visitors are parking areas, restrooms, and picnic areas. As attractions there is an alpine lodge and a small labyrinth in the style of the Renaissance gardens. There are also guides who can provide informative tours about the flora, fauna, and geology of the park. Unfortunately for some of the activities offered, some areas of the park have been deforested to make the land suitable.

This place is visited mainly on weekends, either by families to have breakfast at the Mexican food stands located at the foot of the Picacho-Ajusco highway or to contemplate and enjoy the scenery. It is also visited by hiking, trekking and mountaineering enthusiasts, who can stay at the alpine lodge located at kilometer 21.5 of the Picacho-Ajusco highway.

## **CHALLENGES FOR PARTICIPATORY TOURISM PLANNING**

Although participatory tourism planning offers numerous advantages, it also faces challenges, such as the need to establish effective communication and collaboration mechanisms among the various stakeholders involved. In addition, a genuine commitment on the part of authorities and developers is required to ensure that community voices are truly heard and considered in the planning process.

In this sense, one of the main problems is the social and ideological fragmentation between natives and settlers. The former are jealous of their autonomy and their culture, which means that visitors invited by some of the inhabitants are not accepted for festivals such as the Santa Cruz. On the other hand, the residents would like the Mayor's Office to participate more in the provision of services and for there to be greater growth and urban development. On the other hand, this sector of the population feels discriminated against by the original inhabitants, who do not recognize them as part of the town even though they were born there, so they cannot be part of the Assembly, which, as mentioned above, is the highest administrative body where relevant decisions are made.

However, one advantage is that both natives and settlers have a great attachment to their land, one could say that the emotional ties that people feel for this place and its environment lead us to the concept of topophilia. Both are proud of their heritage and care for it with zeal. Although it is the natives who consider themselves its guardians, as in the case of the Cumbres del Ajusco National Park, where the Commissariat is vigilant, keeps watch and moves immediately when there is a report of clandestine logging. Their zeal is such that for this research it was necessary to request permission from the Commissariat to avoid any inconveniences during the tours and taking of photographs.

## CONCLUSIONS

The native peoples have a great cultural richness, most of them have been affected by uncontrolled urbanization, often losing most of their lands, on the contrary, those who have not been totally absorbed by the urban sprawl, are jealous of their territory and hardly accept the participation of people from outside their communities.

Each of the towns analyzed has particular values that are often unknown but could be of tourist interest.

Tourism can bring improvements to indigenous peoples, such as job creation and the consumption of local products, but for this to happen, the original inhabitants must first agree to allow visitors to share their tangible and intangible cultural heritage with them. To avoid negative impacts, the participation and training of local tourism service providers should be encouraged, the tourism carrying capacity should be protected, and responsible tourism practices should be encouraged among visitors.

Participatory tourism planning can be an instrument that helps social cohesion by uniting the interests of the original inhabitants and settlers, since both have an interest in preserving the culture and heritage of their community.

Valuing and promoting the traditions, crafts and festivities of the towns as a way of enriching the tourist experience and keeping the local identity alive, and not considering them as merchandise, allows for a better approach to the host community.

With regard to San Miguel and Santo Tomás Ajusco, due to their location, being at the foot of the Cumbres del Ajusco National Park, participatory tourism planning can serve as a platform for environmental education, promoting awareness of resource conservation and respect for the natural environment that invites visitors to be more socially and environmentally responsible.

Diversification of the tourism offer, including cultural tourism and ecotourism, can attract a segment of tourists interested in responsible and sustainable tourism.

Participatory tourism and ecotourism share fundamental principles of sustainability, making them an ideal combination for promoting responsible tourism development that

respects the environment and local communities. Both approaches seek to minimize negative impacts and maximize benefits for host populations, but primarily promote the valuation and conservation of cultural and natural heritage, keeping local identity alive and protecting ecosystems.

In summary, participatory tourism planning and management is essential to achieve win-win tourism development, minimizing negative impacts and enhancing positive ones, while strengthening the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the destination.

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