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EL TURISMO EN LOS PARQUES NACIONALES DE BRASIL Y ARGENTINA Y LA MERCANTILIZACIÓN DE LA NATURALEZA. TOURISM IN NATIONAL PARKS IN BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA: THE COMMODIFICATION OF NATURE.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza la mercantilización de la naturaleza en parques nacionales de Brasil (75) y Argentina (39), centrándose en la turistificación y el desarrollo de infraestructura turística, sustentado en la retórica de la sostenibilidad. La metodología consistió en la recopilación de datos provenientes de instituciones federales, observatorios de turismo y entidades gestoras de áreas protegidas, complementada con revisiones documentales y bibliográficas para evaluar los flujos y hábitos de los visitantes. Los resultados evidencian que Argentina, con parques establecidos desde 1934, prioriza la ocupación estatal y una comercialización turística tradicional, mientras que Brasil, con parques desde 1937, ha mantenido un modelo conservacionista que desde 2019 incorpora concesiones privadas. Ambos países aparecen destacados en índices de competitividad turística, aunque Argentina otorga mayor énfasis al turismo como política nacional. Las concesiones privadas se concentran en parques con alta afluencia internacional, infraestructura desarrollada, accesibilidad y/o reconocimiento de la UNESCO.

Palabras claves: parques nacionales; turistificación; concesiones; Brasil; Argentina; mercantilización.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the commodification of nature in national parks in Brazil (75) and Argentina (39), focusing on tourism and the development of tourism infrastructure, supported by the rhetoric of sustainability. The methodology consisted of data collection from federal institutions, tourism observatories, and protected area

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management entities, complemented by documentary and bibliographic reviews to assess visitor flows and habits. The results show that Argentina, with parks established since 1934, prioritizes state ownership and traditional tourism commercialization, while Brazil, with parks since 1937, has maintained a conservationist model that has incorporated private concessions since 2019. Both countries rank highly in tourism competitiveness indices, although Argentina places greater emphasis on tourism as a national policy. Private concessions are concentrated in parks with high international influx, developed infrastructure, accessibility, and/or UNESCO recognition.
Keywords: national parks; tourism; concessions; Brazil; Argentina; commodification.

1. Introducción

The pressures of economic activities on natural environments have necessitated measures to preserve the environment, ecosystems, and biodiversity over the years. Baldi et al. (2019) warn about the expansion of agriculture, infrastructure, and population growth in South America, leading to an increased demand for the creation of protected areas[4], in 2019, these areas accounted for 7.1% of the territory, with a spatial distribution that was not uniform.

In the era of liberal and neoliberal policies, protected areas are embroiled in capital reproduction through their use for economically-driven activities, predominantly by private companies, with tourism playing a significant role. The extensive territories of Brazil (8.5 million km^2) and Argentina (2.7 million km^2), along with the natural landscape qualities that are highly valued in the contemporary world, underscore the importance of conservation and the utilization of protected natural areas; here, tourism emerges as an alternative form of conservation and use.

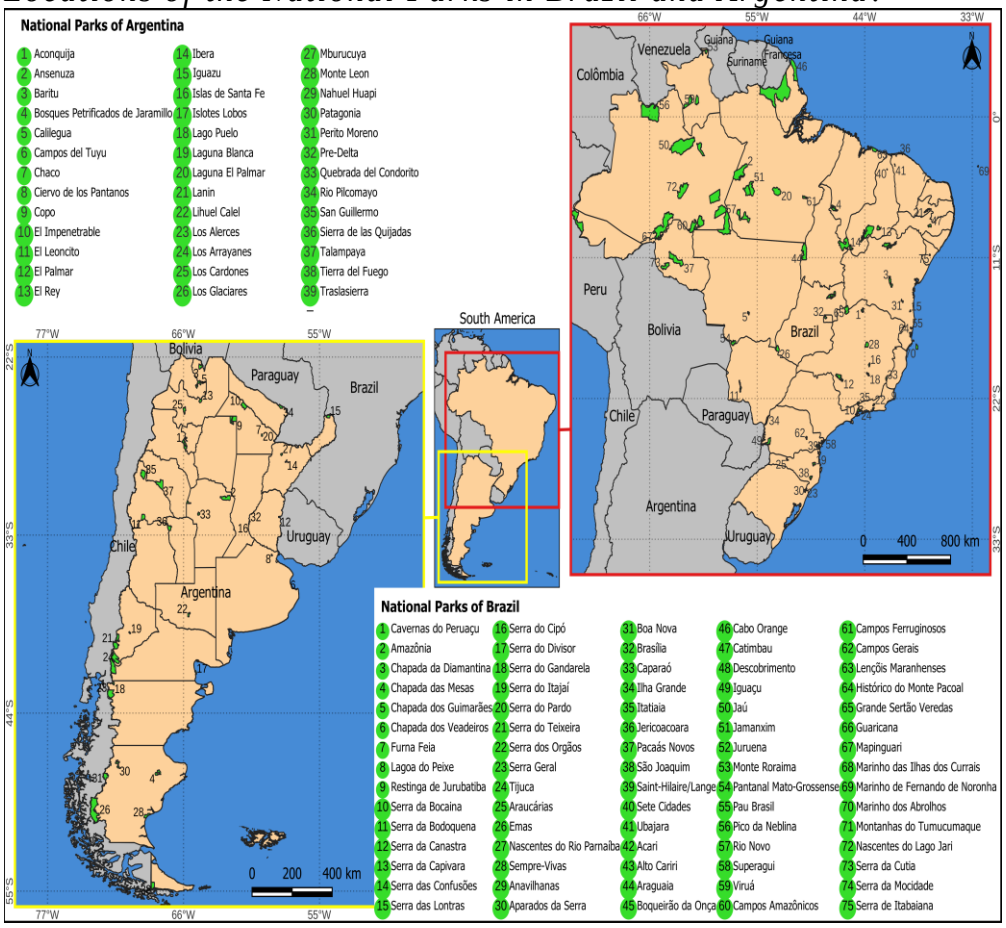
Among the international agreements to which Brazil and Argentina are signatories are the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, established after COP-10. Target 11 aims to preserve important areas for biodiversity and ecosystem services in at least 17% of terrestrial areas by 2020 (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011). Protected land areas constitute 16.6% of Argentina's national territory (Sistema Federal de Áreas Protegidas, 2024), and 18.5% of Brazil's continental territory is protected by PAs (Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade, 2024a). For context, globally, protected territorial areas make up 16.1% of the planet's land and inland water coverage, and 8.01% of marine area coverage (Protected Planet, 2024).

The configuration of the national parks (NPs) in these two countries reflects the historical process of their territorial

[4] The terms "protected areas" and "conservation units" will be used interchangeably. Even if in Brazil, following the decree of the National Strategic Plan for Protected Areas in 2006, protected areas encompass those with various protection mechanisms. These include conservation units, indigenous lands, *quilombola* territories, and private conservation areas regulated by the Forest Code, such as legal reserves and permanent preservation areas.

occupation and production by the central nations of the world system, marked by colonialism and, later, economic, social, cultural, and political dependence on various global forces, acting on their different levels of interests. However, the role of internal dynamics, which can often decelerate or accelerate these global processes, should not be underestimated.

Figure 1.
Locations of the National Parks in Brazil and Argentina.



Map created by authors (2024) using QGIS.

The spatial distribution of NPs in Brazil and Argentina mirrors the historical development of these protected areas, concentrating in regions proximate to urban centers and in nationally preserved areas primarily since the late 20th and early 21st centuries. To elucidate the map of NPs in both countries in terms of tourism, data on visitor numbers to the NPs by intra-country regions is revealing.

In 2023, NPs in Brazil received 11,878,584 visitors, distributed across the country as follows: the North, with 10 NPs, had 44,800 visitors (0.37%), with Anavilhanas seeing 35,684 visitors; the Northeast, with 18 NPs, had 3,072,282 visitors (25%), with Jericoacoara seeing 1,487,283; the Central-West, with 8 NPs, had 543,643 visitors (4.5%), with Brasília

seeing 300,603; the Southeast, with 12 NPs, had 6,048,508 visitors (51%), with Tijuca seeing 4,464,257; and the South, with 12 NPs, had 2,169,351 visitors (18%), with Iguaçu seeing 1,800,225 (Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade, 2024b).

In Argentina and the same year, there were 4,142,455 visits to NPs, distributed by region: the Northwest, with 6 NPs, had 112,930 visitors (2.7%), with Cardones seeing 77,552; the Northeast, with 6 NPs, had 1,616,637 visitors (39%), with Iguazú seeing 1,565,136; the Center, with 9 NPs, had 433,894 visitors (10%), with El Palmar seeing 156,790; and the Patagonia, with 11 NPs, had 1,978,994 visitors (48%), with Los Glaciares seeing 765,922 (Sistema de Información de Biodiversidad, 2024a). Of note, not all NPs in Brazil and Argentina receive and/or register the number of visitors; hence, not all parks were included. In addition, some NPs are located on borders, thereby forming part of more than one region.

This article analyzes the relationship between tourism and NPs, a category of protected areas that covers extensive territories and supports recreational and tourism activities (Dudley, 2008). To enable tourism to become a vehicle for commercializing protected areas while still adhering to environmental conservation goals, the strategy of granting concessions for the private use of public protected areas was implemented. This approach ensures the conservation of specific areas according to globally recognized preservation standards while facilitating the economic valuation and wealth generation centered around private companies, aligning with a neoliberal perspective that posits such companies as capable of protecting and profiting from these areas.

The commodification of nature is accepted in this text, as detailed by authors such as Martínez, 2022; Smessaert, Missemer and Levrel, 2020; Bernini, 2019, as a social and historical process resulting from the confluence of factors centered on the advancement of knowledge, fragmentation and manipulation of nature, with the private appropriation of results and participation in the accumulation of capital. Nature begins to have exchange value and participates in the system of expanded reproduction of capital.

The methodology consists of a sequence of interconnected analyses. The first approach to the issue is historical. It examines the context of creation, foundational models, and management objectives of the national parks in Argentina and Brazil, revealing different orientations such as conservation and preservation of nature, and how these are linked to the possibilities of promoting and carrying out tourism activities. The second part explores the development of tourism as a support for conservation management and the role of the private sector. These dimensions are then applied to the quantitative

statistical analysis in the final section. The unit of analysis selected was that of National Parks, as reliable and up-to-date information is available from governmental institutions in Brazil and Argentina. The analytical categories are related to the flow and origin of visitors, connecting them with the geographical location and infrastructure of the parks.

2. National parks creation and management.

In Argentina, specific areas of the territory have been earmarked to establish NPs since the beginning of the 20th century (Piantoni, 2016). In 1922, the first NP in Latin America, initially known as "Del Sur NPs," was inaugurated, which later evolved into the current Nahuel Huapi NP. The creation of these parks aimed to bolster national defense by asserting state presence in border areas, serving as a "physical framework of patriotism." This strategy was intended to unify the nation's social imaginary and foster regional development through tourism. Specifically, tourism was promoted in the first two founded parks—Nahuel Huapi and Iguazú—in 1934, coinciding with the establishment of the National Parks Board. These efforts were inspired by the experiences of the United States and Canada during a period when capitalist expansion targeted strategic territories.

Initially, Argentina's NP management favored the concept of conservationism over the preservation of nature. The aim was to integrate remote areas into the national framework through technological and communication infrastructures, alongside those built for defense and tourism. The interconnection between tourism and the creation of protected areas was significant.

Post-1945, the democratization of tourism reached the middle and lower classes, supported by public infrastructure development and the promotion of economic growth. Specifically, for protected areas, visitation and tourism were encouraged (Picone, 2020). In 1980, the enactment of Law 22.351, known as the "Legal Regime of National Parks, Monuments, and National Reserves," emphasized scenic beauty and the protection of native flora and fauna, representing diverse phytogeographic regions without focusing on biodiversity. This law employed an economic perspective with the concept of heritage and adopted a preservationist paradigm that separated society from nature protection, restricting human settlements to small areas within the reserves and excluding human activities (Duval & Benedetti, 2019); under this law, the National System of Protected Areas was created. Concurrently, efforts were made to increase Argentina's participation in global tourist flows by attracting international visitors (Picone, 2020), culminating in the 2005 Tourism Law, which sought to position Argentine tourism on the global stage (Schenkel & Bertoncello, 2022).

The 1990s saw the introduction of new protected area management categories, including Restricted Nature Reserves and Wild Nature Reserves, which limited human presence, and Educational Nature Reserves, which were less restrictive (Burkart et al., 2007). These measures aligned with international conventions like the Convention on Biological Diversity and the guidelines established by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. From 1997 to 2006, NGOs, including the Wildlife Foundation, played a significant role in establishing protected areas through direct land donations or by funding land acquisitions to offset environmental impacts from major infrastructure projects (Burkart et al., 2007). NGO efforts continue, as evidenced by the recent establishment of the Ansenuza NP in 2022, spearheaded by the NGOs Fundación Wyss and Aves Argentinas.

In Brazil, the legal framework for creating protected areas was established in 1937 with the creation of Itatiaia in the state of Rio de Janeiro, adhering to the conservation principles of the Brazilian Forest Code of 1934 (Aguiar, 2018). Influenced by NP models in the United States, the objectives expanded to include recreation and visitor attraction (Moreira et al., 2023).

The establishment of the Iguaçu (including Iguaçu Falls) and Serra dos Órgãos (a mountain range renowned for its scenic beauty) NPs in 1939 demonstrates the value placed on landscape and scenic beauty in implementing NPs. Aguiar (2018) and Moreira et al. (2023) outline four periods in the chronology of Brazilian policies for conservation and the management of protected areas. From the 1930s to the 1960s, Brazil adopted conservation models from industrialized nations, implementing regulations in the environmental domain as part of the country's modernization effort (Aguiar, 2018). This era focused on conservation, scientific research, and recreational activities near urban centers.

The 1960s to the 1980s were characterized by rapid urbanization and increased pressure on natural resources. This era coincided with the 1964 military coup in Brazil, linking environmental policy to national sovereignty and territorial integration, notably through major infrastructure projects that impacted natural areas and with the impossibility of any debate on the effectiveness and consequences of such actions (Aguiar, 2018). Following the initiative to integrate and safeguard the territory, the Amazon NP and Tapajós National Forest were established in the Brazilian Amazon region (Aguiar, 2018).

The most recent phase coincided with the country's re-democratization process, beginning in the 1980s (Aguiar, 2018). The promulgation of the 1988 Constitution and the establishment of the Brazilian National System of Conservation Units (SNUC) represent significant milestones in advancing and appreciating Brazil's environmental policy and forming a national

management system for protected areas. During this era, environmental conservation was contested by two opposing forces: one that views natural areas as a public and collective good and another that supports neoliberalism with a focus on privatization and reducing the state's role in managing natural areas. The 1988 Constitution, recognizing the environment as a collective good, asserts in Article 225 the right to an ecologically balanced environment for present and future generations (Brazil, 1988).

The institutionalization of environmental conservation in Brazil took place in 2000 through the SNUC, which defines the objectives and characteristics of the types of conservation units. The aim of the SNUC is the "protection of ecosystems of great ecological importance and scenic beauty" (Brazil, 2000). From 1930 to 2000, Brazil established 43 NPs and since the SNUC's implementation in 2000 until 2023, 31 additional NPs have been established, covering over 2.725 million hectares (Moreira et al., 2023). Significantly, 40.7% of all Brazilian federal protected areas (PAs) were created between 2000 and 2010. Argentina saw a similar increase in NP creation between 1990 and 2015, with 38% of its NPs established during this period (Sistema de Información de Biodiversidad, 2024a). This surge in protected area designation in both countries reflects international and local pressures to enhance environmental protection strategies.

3. Institutional arrangements for tourism development

Social pressure for preserving and conserving nature, coupled with consolidating a global environmental paradigm, have fostered a discourse centered on the protection that guides tourism policies (Cruz, 2020), aligning with sustainable development. This dialogue finds a particularly receptive domain in tourism as it represents "a proposal to balance the capitalist development of tourism with acceptable environmental and social protection" (Ulate, 2006, p. 20). Within this context of commodification, a proposition for the concession of public protected areas to private entities to take advantage of visits to these sites.

A chronological analysis of tourism-related public policies, environmental protection, and sustainable development reveals a trend toward involving the private sector in providing tourism support services in parks. The environmental institutes themselves from several nations have encouraged the private sector participation in offering tourism support services in parks as a strategic measure to improve the management of these areas (Rodrigues & Abrucio, 2019).

National parks are the protected areas that host a significant portion of the world's natural tourist attractions.

Motivations for recreation and tourism draw individuals to these natural settings, leading to various forms of occupation and appropriation of these areas (Rodrigues, 2009). With growing concerns over environmental 'changes resulting from human interaction with nature, environmental agencies are increasingly promoting tourism support services in protected areas. This strategy aims to enhance the visitor experience and bolster NP management (Rodrigues & Abrucio, 2019; Fonseca & Cara, 2021), with potential benefits, including income generation for community and eased management of protected areas.

The conceptual and normative frameworks governing protected areas are defined by the SNUC, which aims to foster environmental education and interpretation, promote recreation in contact with nature, and advance ecotourism in all federal, state, and municipal PAs (Brazil, 2000).

In Argentina, the connection between NPs and their utilization has historical roots and even intertwines with public policies pertaining to protected areas and tourism (Bertoncello & Troncoso, 2018; Burkart, 2005; Burkart et al., 2007; Secretaria de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable de la Nación y Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina, 2007). The Federal System of Protected Areas was established in 2003, adopting a new management model for "planning public use in protected areas" under the jurisdiction of the National Parks Administration (APN). This model emphasizes the importance of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and stakeholder involvement in sustainable tourism (Fonseca & Cara, 2021).

The enactment of Argentina's new National Tourism Law in 2005 signaled the prioritization of tourism to foster socio-territorial development (Schenkel & Bertoncello, 2022). Efforts are made to coordinate public and private interests to boost the inflow of international visitors to protected natural areas, which impacts the very definition of an NP. For the Federal Government's tourism sector, protected areas are envisioned as key attractions for the national and international tourism industries. This approach informs the APN's budget policy, emphasizing high-quality services for visitors and developing collaborative programs with agents in the tourism intermediation sphere, among other initiatives (Argentina, 2019).

Progressing with this vision, in 2019 and 2020, initiatives were launched to attract private investment through the "natural opportunities" policy, establishing the National Nature Tourism Board and the nature routes program. These efforts aim to position the country as a leading nature destination on the global stage (Schenkel & Bertoncello, 2022). By 2023, the APN had been integrated into the Ministry of the Interior, within the Secretariat of Tourism, Environment, and Sports, solidifying the link between NP management and tourism.

In Brazil, NPs have been managed since 2007 by the federal agency ICMBio and, following the enactment of Law no. 13.668 in 2018, tourism operations in NPs have been entrusted to the private sector through a public policy strategy that utilizes concessions for visitation support services (Brazil, 2018). These concessions represent a variety of institutional arrangements within the realm of tourism management in Brazilian NPs. For this article, we focused on agreements with private for-profit institutions (Ordinance No. 289, 2021; Rodrigues & Abrucio, 2019). The expansion of concessions since 2018 indicates the Brazilian federal government's preference for this partnership model as the primary method of facilitating tourism in NPs (Rodrigues & Abrucio, 2019; Brumatti & Rozendo, 2021; Rodrigues & Botelho, 2023).

As of February 2024, the Brazilian government has continued to endorse concessions for service provision in 10 areas of NPs, including Chapada dos Guimarães, Jericoacoara, Brasília, Serra dos Órgãos, Anavilhanas, Jaú, Caparaó, Serra da Bodoquena, and Iguaçu. Overall, concessions in 27 NPs are either in progress or planned, allowing for private exploitation over 20–30 years (Observatório de Parcerias em Áreas Protegidas, 2024). Similarly, in Argentina, private companies hold service concessions in 9 NPs, such as Los Glaciares and Nahuel Huapi, for periods ranging from 15 to 20 years (Argentina, 2024).

This evolving legal framework underlines a move towards integrating protected areas into the green market, positioning tourism as a mutually beneficial activity that can reconcile conservation efforts with capital generation, effectively leading to what is described as the commodification of nature.

4. Attractiveness and visitation rates

The development of tourism activity involves the consumption and production of places, with parks increasingly being transformed into opportunities for the market. This is driven by the growing appreciation for environmental protection and the associated demand for leisure and recreation in natural settings, leading to the creation of infrastructures that are frequently funded publicly but appropriated privately (Buckley, 2009). To fully understand the shifts in cultural demand for conserved natural areas, it is essential to explore the investments and the dynamics between producers and consumers in the tourism market.

The competitiveness of tourist destinations is deeply intertwined with economic considerations and is often assessed from the supply side. González-Rodríguez et al. (2023) highlight the effective management of the environment and tourism infrastructure are key strategies for securing a competitive

advantage. According to data from the World Travel & Tourism Council's most recent annual report on the travel and tourism sector, in 2023, this sector contributed 9.1% of the global GDP (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024).

An examination of the Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI) published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) reveals differences in the competitiveness of Brazil and Argentina compared to other countries and to each other. In the WEF's ranking of 119 economies (2024), Brazil (26th) and Argentina (49th) are well-placed, having improved their standings compared to previous years.

A 2019 report showed that Argentina (76th) outperformed Brazil (106th) across almost all indicators regarding the prioritization of the tourism sector as a national development strategy (Fonseca & Cara, 2021). This trend continues into 2023, with these countries ranked 42nd and 79th, respectively, in terms of tourism sector prioritization (World Economic Forum, 2024).

In terms of natural resources, both countries score above average. Argentina (18th) and Brazil (5th) boast significant standings, with Brazil maintaining the 1st place in fauna richness since 2009, according to the TTDI-WEF publication history. Argentina, ranking 31st in this indicator, performs better in the country's protected land area percentage, ranking 14th. Brazil ranks 2nd, surpassed only by Australia, in the percentage of protected land area.

Adopting a sustainability approach is crucial for achieving competitiveness in the tourism sector and has become a dominant paradigm in tourism research (Rodríguez-López et al., 2019). Factors such as population growth, increased demand for natural resources, and improvements in communications and travel affordability have escalated tourism to protected areas (Leung et al., 2019; Rodríguez-López et al., 2019). In 2021, the TTDI-WEF introduced a new dimension, sustainability in travel and tourism where Argentina ranked 24th and Brazil 5th (World Economic Forum, 2024).

For Buckley (2009), the number of visitors to NPs is politically significant since these parks are ecological and political constructs, and their visitation levels can affect their maintenance. Brazil and Argentina are leaders in terms of the number of visits and the extent of areas designated as NPs. To analyze the flow of visitors to these destinations, we refer to data from the Dynamic Panels of Argentina, which reports visitation data for 32 NPs (Sistema de Información de Biodiversidad, 2024b), and Brazil, where, according to ICMBio records, 56 NPs had visitation records in 2023 (Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade, 2024b).

In Argentina, a visit is counted when a person crosses into a protected area for leisure, business, or personal reasons (Ministerio del Interior, 2024a). Conversely, in Brazil, since

2018, the method has shifted from counting visitors to counting visits (Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade, 2020).

Visitation to protected areas in both countries has seen an increase, excluding the pandemic period. In 2023, ICMBio recorded 11,835,760 visits in Brazilian NPs, an all-time high. The ten most visited NPs account for 87.7% of the year's total visits. Notably, the Tijuca and Iguaçu NPs are responsible for 65% of these visits, a slight decrease from 74% in 2013, although the overall number of visits has risen since then. Viveiros de Castro et al. (2015) observed that natural attractions, especially those with a higher reputation facilitated by user-generated content, social networks, and media exposure, tend to draw more visitors. Other notable NPs include Jericoacoara, with 1,487,283 visits (12%), compared to 100,000 visits/year (12.6%) in 2013, and Serra da Bocaina with 715,537 visits (6.0%) in 2023. With more restricted access, the Fernando de Noronha Marine NPs saw 618,238 visits (5.2%), while the visitation levels in other NPs were below 5%.

National parks can gain recognition as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, further boosting their allure due to their rich natural heritage or cultural significance, increasing your reputation even further. In Brazil, recognized sites within or adjacent to NPs include the Iguaçu, Costa do Descobrimento Reserves of the Atlantic Forest, Southeast Reserves of the Atlantic Forest, Pantanal Conservation Area, Central Amazon Conservation Complex, the islands of the northeast coast such as Fernando de Noronha and Atol das Rocas, Chapada dos Veadeiros and Emas in the Cerrado, as well as the cultural heritages of Serra da Capivara and the cultural landscape of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Viveiros et al. (2015) explored the correlation between external and internal factors related to tourist attractiveness, concluding that population density and regional attractions significantly influence visitation rates. They conclud that geographical remoteness negatively correlates with the number of visits. Other factors include landscapes and the historical occupation of the area. Specifically, the Atlantic Forest and Caatinga biomes, found in southeastern and northeastern Brazil, respectively, have been the most visited historically (Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade, 2020). The Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade (2023) notes a stagnation in prioritizing NPs and National Forests with controlled access, and it highlights that the vast and diverse access to the Brazilian coast in southeastern and northeastern regions and the predominance of sun and beach tourism should encourage the designation of new protected areas.

In Argentina, the ten most visited NPs account for 94% of annual visits, with Iguazú, Los Glaciares, and Nahuel Huapi comprising approximately 68% of these visits, it was 61.8% in 2013. As in Brazil, the number of visits increased for all NPs. Tierra del Fuego also ranks as one of Argentina's most popular destinations, rising from 8.6% of visits in 2013 to 10% annually. Other NPs receive less than 4% of the visits each. Fonseca and Cara (2021) attribute this concentration to the location, ease of access and circulation, and the international recognition of these destinations.

The remote regions of Patagonia, known for their national and international connections and infrastructure, attract a significant number of international visitors. The Serra Paranaense ecoregion, home to the Iguazú, enjoys widespread popularity. These areas are celebrated for their natural beauty and hold the distinguished status of world heritage sites. Notably, the NPs of Iguazú, Talampaya, Los Glaciares, and Los Alerces, with the latter two situated in the Patagonian region, are recognized under this category. Moreover, attractions such as the Iguazú Falls, the Misionera Jungle, the Perito Moreno Glacier, and the Talampaya and Nahuel Huapi NPs are acknowledged as world wonders. Aconquija, similarly, is significant for housing "La ciudacita," an ancient Inca site in Argentina, which forms a part of the Qhapaq Ñan — the main Inca trail recognized by UNESCO. Among the lesser-visited yet integral part of Argentina's natural heritage is San Guillermo.

To analyze visitor trends in NPs in Brazil and Argentina, we adopted intensity class intervals following the method outlined by Souza et al. (2017). Parks receiving fewer than 1,000 visits per year were designated the "very low" classification. Those with 1,000 to 10,000 visits were classified as "low," parks with 10,001 to 100,000 visits were categorized as "average," those receiving 100,001 to 1,000,000 visits were considered "high," and parks with over 1,000,000 visits were classified as "very high.".

Table 1.
Distribution of visitation in Brazilian NPs by intensity classes.

Classification	Total visits	Number of parks
Very high	7,751,765	3
High	3,397,987	13
Average	634,967	14
Low	48,094	13
Very low	2,947	13
Total	11,835,760	56

Sources: Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade (2024b).

Tijuca, situated within the urban confines of Rio de Janeiro, experiences a particularly prominent level of visitor engagement comparable to Iguaçu and Jericoacoara. The prominence of the Tijuca NP is further enhanced by the landscapes being recognized by UNESCO as part of the City of Rio de Janeiro Cultural Landscape. This distinction acknowledges its significance as a cultural heritage site. Notably, this park features two highly frequented viewpoints, Corcovado and Cristo Redentor, attracting numerous visitors annually.

While Tijuca, along with Iguaçu and Jericoacoara, falls under the category of high visitation, it is important to note that most NPs experience low to very low levels of visitor intensity. This variation in visitor intensity can largely be attributed to factors such as the intensity of usage, concessions, and the unique history of occupation and urbanization within Brazil. Such dynamics have historically rendered the Atlantic Forest biome the most visited (Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade, 2020).

Table 2.
Distribution of visitation in Argentine NPs by intensity classes.

Classification	Total visits	Number of parks
Very high	1,565,136	1
High	2,209,942	7
Average	309,037	9
Low	55,734	12
Very low	589	3
Total	4,140,438	32

Sources: Sistema de Información de Biodiversidad (2024b).

Tables 1 and 2 show the concentration of visitors in a few NPs, with most parks receiving low to very low visitation. Internationally recognized parks experience higher demand. Urry (2001) suggests that the global tourism trade allows for the ranking and comparing places according to the tourist's gaze, leading to a specialization of countries or places in offering specific elements for contemplation.

In Argentina, approximately 31.9% of tourists visited natural areas in 2022, engaging primarily in accessible activities such as hiking, birdwatching, fishing, and visiting estancias (ranches) and traditional communities (Ministerio de Turismo y Deportes de Argentina, 2023). According to this same report, the visiting parks and reserves, second most popular activity, was participated in by 9.1% of tourists, a decrease from 12.7% in 2019, marking it as the only activity that saw a decline compared to 2019 data.

The interest in natural areas contributed to 31% of all trips within Argentina in 2022, with conservation areas attracting 20% of domestic tourists (Ministerio de Turismo y Deportes de Argentina, 2023). The report also highlights a downward trend in domestic nature tourism since 2012, which bottomed out at 17% in 2019. However, following the pandemic, these numbers have gradually increased to the most current percentage.

In 2023, 7,285,688 foreign tourist trips were recorded in Argentina, with the main visitors from Uruguay (21%), Brazil (19%), Chile (18%), and Europe (11%) (Ministerio del Interior, 2024b). Considering that the NPs received 767,338 non-residents, these protected areas are the destination of 10.5% of foreigners visiting the country and 18% of visitation to the NPs in relation to residents (Sistema de Información de Biodiversidad, 2024b).

In 2023, although the number of foreign visits did not reach the pre-pandemic figures of over 1 million foreigners, among the 767,338 non-residents, the majority visited Los Glaciares (393,834), representing 51% of the visits to this park, followed by Tierra del Fuego (170,663) with 41% of the visits made by foreigners (Sistema de Información de Biodiversidad, 2024b). In December 2023, according to official data (Argentina, 2024), non-residents comprised 77% of visitors to the Iguazú NP. The same trend occurred in the Patagonian region during the same period, where Los Glaciares (65%), Tierra del Fuego (68%), and Nahuel Huapi (29%) were visited by a significant number of non-residents (Ministerio del Interior, 2024a).

5. Conclusions

This article has analyzed the process by which protected areas are integrated into the market valuation of nature, drawing on the theoretical framework of commodification. It has examined the relationship between tourism and national parks in Brazil and Argentina to understand how these protected areas navigate the increasing demand for income generation while also preserving their environments and biodiversity.

Historically, the establishment of NPs in Argentina has been closely linked to tourism to promote regional development. In contrast, Brazil initially intended to preserve these areas with minimal human interference. Over time, the rationale shifted towards making these areas accessible for public use, necessitating the formation of partnerships to deliver visitor support services.

The introduction of market values to public spaces has led to the emergence of a new market for nature. Public-private partnerships have become the preferred model for environmental institutions managing NPs, facilitating visitor access. Although

there are various institutional arrangements for managing tourism in NPs, concessions are often favored for the most visited parks due to their effectiveness in managing and utilizing protected areas.

The surge in competitiveness, activities, and visitor numbers highlights the increasing flow of tourists to protected areas in both countries. This requires careful consideration of concessionaires' environmental and social responsibilities, particularly in parks where the focus on profitability over conservation can lead to overbooking. Environmental institutions need to monitor and oversee NPs and contractual agreements with companies and implement compensation plans for areas adversely affected.

The challenges associated with implementing and managing these spaces are not adequately addressed by the current tourism structure, necessitating more significant efforts from the environmental agencies tasked with protecting these areas. The prevailing concession model in Brazil and Argentina, which prioritizes the commodification of nature, perpetuates inequalities and restricts access to and use of protected areas. Moreover, this model sidelines local communities from participating in managing these areas by adhering to the business-focused regulations and standards that align with the global tourism industry.

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