

FUTURE OF THE KOREA NATIONAL PARKS: A PRELIMINARY DELPHI STUDY OF KEY EXPERTS

Byung-kyu Lee

Ph.D. Candidate in Parks, Recreation & Tourism,
University of Maine, 5769 So. Annex B, Orono, ME
04469-5769

Wilbur F. LaPage

Assistant Professor of Parks, Recreation & Tourism,
University of Maine, 215 Nutting, Orono, ME 04469-5755

Abstract: A preliminary Delphi survey of a panel of key experts who are very knowledgeable of Korean national parks was conducted between February and March in 2001. Park professionals, environmental NGO directors, interested citizens, and retirees identified issues facing the Korean park system (Wave 1). Findings from wave 1 of the survey provided the baseline for a series of Delphi waves in order to assess the future roles of the Korean national park system in protecting biodiversity and promoting tourism.

Introduction

Stated as preservation and use, the relationship between the threats to national parks and the potential resolutions of these threats are intertwined. Thus, identifying what are the threats to national parks and what can be done about them are critical questions (Machlis and Tichnell, 1985). Every national park system faces the dilemma of managing for long-term preservation of its assets and the short-term economic benefits of park use and tourism. Both the long- and short-term needs are vital for the nation; yet park systems are expected to resolve these national priorities with severely limited staffs and budgets.

This paper reports on the first part of a Delphi survey, which will suggest a model to help park professionals carry out the objectives of the Korean National Parks Authority (KNPA). More than three decades ago, Ruhle (1968) suggested a future Korean national park system should have clear master plans stating the significance of each area and listing its outstanding features. Such plans should specify the policy to be followed, the objectives to be pursued, and an outline for orderly development. Each potential national park area should be considered and plotted as an individual unit, thus avoiding a monotonous repetition, which might threaten Koreans' feelings of uniqueness. However, his most critical recommendation was that the national parks should be administered on a national level. For instance, if a forestry bureau were to be charged with the administration of such areas, it might include the desire to harvest timber, regardless of the degree of care and skill. Therefore, the care of the national parks should be vested in a ministerial or other high government rank that would have the greatest understanding and sympathy for park standards and goals. The agency should have the authority and means for sound administration (Ruhle, 1968).

Currently, there are 20 national parks in Korean national park system. As in all park systems, insufficient money and time for park management reflect the major current threats, along with over-development to the system. The status of KNPA is a trustee organization under the auspices of Ministry of Environment, thus employees of the KNPA are non-governmental. The system suffers from an inconsistency of relevant laws. Another unique attribute of Korean parks is their landownership (43% of total park lands are owned by private owners or Buddhist temples that are located in major park areas).

Methodology

In order to develop a likely array of future directions for Korean national parks over the next decade, a panel of knowledgeable experts on the system was asked for their forecasts based on current and past trends in park management, philosophy, legislation, public attitudes, and funding. The Delphi technique offers a way to systematically combine expert knowledge and opinion to reach an informed group consensus about the likely occurrence of future events (Moeller & Shafer, 1989). The assumption of this method is that although the future is uncertain, individuals able to make informed judgments about future contingencies can approximate probabilities of the future. The method is intended to provide a general perspective on the future rather than a sharp picture. It replaces direct open debate with an iterative series of questionnaires, with each subsequent series of questionnaires containing information gathered from those preceding it. Borrowing from Moeller' and Shafer's explanation, the steps of the method consist of (1) identifying the relevant event -- in this study, problems of park management in Korea, (2) preparing clear and precise statements, (3) selecting panelists from the area of expertise suggested by the problem, and (4) mailing questionnaires in at least two waves. Other rounds may be necessary until a consensus begins to emerge.

In this preliminary phase, a panel of 36 Korean park professionals, retirees, interested citizens, and environmental NGO directors was requested to identify current major problems the Korean parks face. The panel members were selected by two different procedures: first 27 members were chosen through a literature review, a list consisting of 90 park professionals provided by Korea National Parks Authority (KNPA), an expert's recommendation on the KNPA list and supplementary list, a Ministry of Environment's recommended list, and two NGO groups' supplementary lists. In addition, 9 more members were added to the panel after the first 27 members recommended them as panelists.

Preliminary Findings

In the wave one, 18 out of 36 members responded. The mean familiarity score of this group is 3.94, on the 5 point Likert scale, where 5 is "extremely familiar" with the Korean park system (Figure 1).

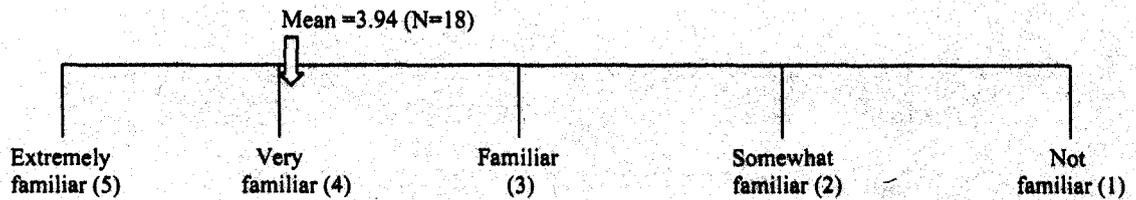


Figure 1. Respondents' Familiarity with the Korean Park System/Management/Policy

Table 1 shows the issues identified by the respondents. These 47 major issues are organized into 3 clusters: park philosophy/policy, park organization/management, and park visitation/visitor needs.

Further Study

In further waves, follow-ups on their converging and diverging opinions will be used in an attempt to develop consensus on what is likely to happen, what should happen, and what facilitating measures need to be taken to ensure a viable park system during the first decade of the new millennium. Finally, the panel's recommendations will be compared with the evolution of other national parks systems from selected nations in Asia and North and Central America.

Literature Cited

- Machlis, G., & Tichnell, D. (1985). The state of the world's parks. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Moeller, G., & Schafer, E. (1987). The Delphi technique: A tool for long-range tourism and travel planning. In J. Ritchie & Goeldner (Eds.), Travel, tourism, and hospitality research (pp. 417 - 422). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ruhle, G. (1968). Advisory report on National Parks and Reserves for the Republic of Korea in 1966 (Special Pub. No. 20). New York: American Committee for International Wildlife Protection.

Table 1. Identified Issues by the Panel

PROBLEMS DESCRIBED
Park Philosophy/Policy
The Korea National Parks Authority and the central government's lack of national park idea
Conflict between preservation and use
Paradigm shift (need to consider national parks as preservation/educational places)
Land ownership (unlike the U.S. & Canadian park systems, 20% of Korean parks are private land)
Management control over parks (possibility of conflict between central and local governments)
In order to emphasize conservation, need of amending "natural parks law"
Inconsistent management system in KNPA (due to rapid turn-over of officials in Min. Of Environment)
Inconsistency/overlap of relevant laws
Need to establish state-run "national park bureau"
Organizational inflexibility of KNPA
Need to reclassify national parks on the basis of preservation/ecosystem values involved
Lack of policy regarding cultural resources such as eco-villages and Buddhist temples
Development pressure/ attempts in park area
Attempt of building cable car system in park area
Lack of inventory (ecosystem, infrastructure, etc)
Increased degradation of resources in park area/visitor impacts on natural environment
Insufficient protection for ecosystem
Lack of central government active role on natural resources
Infringement on private property right in park area (which causes civil appeal)
Entrance fee including separate admission fee for cultural assets (buddhist temples)
Conflict with buddhist temples, which are located in major park areas
On-going construction/renovation in buddhist temples in park areas
Park Organization/Management
Under-budgeting
Lack of knpa control over its budget
Understaffing
Lack of expertise in knpa
Problem of political appointment of knpa chairman
Lack of standards in conservation
Inconsistent management of ecosystem
Knpa and central government's lack of understanding national park management
Lack of management direction/goals/objectives; lack of long-term view in management
Unlawful facilities in park area
Unplanned development and facility deterioration in "mass facility zone" in park area
Financial difficulty of business in "mass facility zone"
Problem of zoning
Poaching and illegal picking (due to lack of law enforcement)
Park Visitation/Visitor Needs
Lack of public relations/education on ecosystem
The general public's awareness/views of park purpose
Inappropriate/insufficient interpretation programs
General public's low awareness of national parks
Need to provide more environmental education programs
Lack of visitor management
Need to provide good quality of recreation experience
Need to guide visitors to non-disturbing behavior
Insufficient service/educational facilities for visitors
Lack of character distinction between parks
Lack of providing tourism opportunity (on-hand educational experiences in nature and culture)