TOURIST TRAFFIC IN THE ACONCAGUA MASSIF AREA

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ABSTRACT: The aim of the article is an analysis of tourist traffic in the Aconcagua massif, one of the most popular peaks of the Seven Summits. On the basis of statistical data, the tourist traffic was analysed in a temporal and spatial perspective. The applied data made it possible to capture the dynamics of visits in the period 2000/2001 – 2012/2013 and with a breakdown into months, which helped analyse the tourist traffic in this area. In each of the analysed periods, January dominates. Data concerning the origin of tourists according to countries and continents, their age, gender and type of mountaineering activity were also taken into account. Most tourists came from Argentina, the USA and Germany. These are people of age groups 21–30 (33%) and 31–40 (31%). Men account for over 75% of visitors. The favourite mountaineering activity is climbing (about 60%). Aconcagua has invariably been a very popular peak among tourists and climbers. It is a place for training and acclimatisation for alpinists, participating in Himalayan expeditions and climbers collecting peaks of the Seven Summits.

KEYWORDS: tourist traffic, climbing, Andes, Aconcagua

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Introduction

The tourist traffic in mountainous areas can be analysed in terms of different aspects: economic, legal, environmental and many other. The popularity of climbing has led various institutions (both state and private) or administration (e.g. of national parks) to draw considerable profit. This is often manifested in obligatory permits, insurance, hiring a guide or high-altitude porters. In mountainous area, various investments arise, on the one hand being useful to tourists, on the other compromising the natural landscape. Increasing tourist traffic in many mountainous areas has forced the introduction of adequate legislation. In order to protect mountainous areas against excessive degradation various forms of environment preservation have been enforced. Entrance is often covered by appropriate legal regulations, involving a number of fees. For example, the highest peaks of particular continents are covered by protection, including Aconcagua Provincial Park, Denali National Park and Preserve, Mount Kilimanjaro National Park.

The issues of tourist traffic in various protected areas in the world have frequently been described in literature. It was mainly the impact of tourism on particular components of the natural environment that was considered. Negative changes under the influence of tourism in the scope of vegetation, soil, climate and landscape were described by Byers, covering the Alpine zone in the Khumbu valley in the Himalayas (2005) and Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal and Huas-

carán National Park in Peru (2009). Cunha (2010) emphasised the destructive impact of broadly understood tourist industry on plant and animal species in Brazilian Atlantic forest National Park and the possibilities of limiting harmful factors. The impact of tourist traffic on the degradation of the mountainous landscape of Australia was described by Edwards (1977), of Torres del Paine National Park by Farrell and Jeffrey (2001), of the Mount Everest area by Karan and Cotton (1985), Stevens (2003) and others. A significant problem on the highest mountain peaks (Kilimanjaro, McKinley, Aconcagua) was addressed by Apollo (2010, 2011, 2014), who linked tourist traffic with pollution of the natural environment with waste and faeces. Mountain trails, especially of the Mount Everest area, are also covered by analysis. Frequently, changes resulting from tourist traffic can be observed on them. Research reveals a correlation between the number of tourists and trail degradation (Nepal and Nepal 2003, Nepal 2003).

Mountainous areas are also in the scope of interest of physical geography (geology, geomorphology). In the case of the Aconcagua area, there are publications concerning the activity of glaciers, including those of Brenning (2008), Milan (2007), Kuhle (2004) and others.

Scientific medical literature is also rich. Research concerning the impact of altitude in metres above the sea level on the human body has been studied frequently. This gave grounds for analyses related to the causes and effects of the acute mountain sickness (AMS). These issues were addressed by Carlos et al. (2005), Netzer et al. (1997), Snyder et al. (2007) and others. The causes of accidents and deaths in the Aconcagua region were analysed as well (Westensee et al. 2013).

The issues of high mountain expeditions in a sociological approach are the subject of numerous publications. Motivations of practising climbing and high mountain tourism were covered by Taher and Jamal (2012), or Domicelj (2003). A separate aspect is the activity of women in the mountains, which sometimes is the background of conflict during expeditions. This problem was undertaken by Logan (2006), Łojek and Szczepankiewicz-Battek (2006) and others.

The aspects directly connected with tourist infrastructure and demographic diversity of tourist traffic are definitely much less popular. This may result from a difficult access to complete data. In the case of the Aconcagua region, the tourist infrastructure in Horcones valley and in particular bases of the Aconcagua massif was described by Łojek (2008), Marek (2012). The presented results indicate that there are considerable shortages in infrastructure in the light of the systematically growing number of visitors to the massif. In high season it is inadequate.

The aim of the article is to describe tourist traffic in total in the years 2000–2013 and with a breakdown into months, as well as the demographic picture of tourists and climbers active in the Aconcagua massif. The collected data reveal which countries of origin prevail among visitors, what age and gender groups dominate and which form of high mountain activity is preferred.

Obtaining complete characteristics of tourist traffic will make it possible to indicate appropriate directions of tourist infrastructure development, to control the intensity of visits in order to preserve the natural environment and ensure tourist safety.

Study area

Aconcagua is located in the Southern Andes in the Cordillera Patagonica in the western part of Argentina, close to Chilean border, in the province of Mendoza. Aconcagua is the highest mountain of South America and the western hemisphere as well as the highest one outside Asia (Łojek 2008). Its altitude is 6960 meters above sea level which makes it 760 meters higher than McKinley (6194 meters) – the highest mountain of North America. Because Aconcagua summit is the highest point on the South American continent it is included in the Seven Summits[1] i.e. the highest peaks of continents. The summit is surrounded by three valleys: from the south – Valle de las Horcones Inferior, from southwest and west – Quebrada de los Horcones Superior, and from east and north-

[1] The remaining peaks of Seven Summits are as follows: in Asia – Mount Everest (8848 m), in North America – McKinley (6195 m), in Africa – Kilimanjaro (5895 m) in Europe – Mount Blanc (4810 m) in Australia – Mount Kosciuszko (2230 m) and in Antarctica – Mount Vinson (4892 m). These peaks are recognized by the International Geographical Union. Disputable remains Elbrus (5642 m), which according to many climbers (eg, R. Messner) should be included in the European continent and the Puncak Jaya (4884 m) in the Pacific.

east – Valle de las Vacas collecting waters from mountain streams including the Fiera, Cajon del Perdido, Chorro de la Vieja (Fig. 1).

In 1983 the Aconcagua summit and the surrounding area of 71 000 hectares was covered by the protection of Provincial Park which is one of 11 parks in the Mendoza province. It includes the glacial area of Aconcagua massif along with several other peaks as Cerro Ameghino (5900 m), Cerro Piramide (5700 m), Cerro Mirador (5510 m), Cerro Cuerno (5462 m), Cerro Tolosa (5432 m), Cerro Mexico (5083 m), Cerro Santa Maria (5026 m) (Mapas Caviar Bleu, Kiełkowscy 2009).

The Aconcagua massif has been the destination of climbing expeditions since the 19th century. On 14 January 1897 a Swiss mountain guide Mattias Zurbriggen, who participated in a British expedition led by Edward Fitzgerald, climbed the summit for the first time in history. This attempt was made from the west using what is known today as the classic route. The first Polish expedition in the Andes in 1934 is also noteworthy. During this expedition Konstanty Narkiewicz-Jodko, Stefan Daszyński, Wiktor Ostrowski and Stefan Osiecki climbed the summit on 8th March 1934. It was the eighth successful attempt in history and the first one from the eastern side across the glacier named the Polish Glacier after this event (Ostrowski 1984). The achievement of Wanda Rutkiewicz is also notable for she was the first female to climb the southern face of Aconcagua in Alpine style in 1985 (Marek and Wieczorek 2010).

The presence of the author (Marek) in the 2008 expedition offered an insight into statistics and observations of changes in the land development. The above shows that the significant tourist traffic forced the development of adequate tourist facilities for climbers and trekkers to be able to stay there. Most important tourist facilities include toilets, showers, medical units, sleeping unit, (Refugio Plaza de Mulas), food-serving units, dining units, water drawing units, telecommunication and satellite units, gallery and library (Fig. 2, 3). During the high season a lack of free space for tents and high prices for some necessities and services are notable. New accommodation facil-

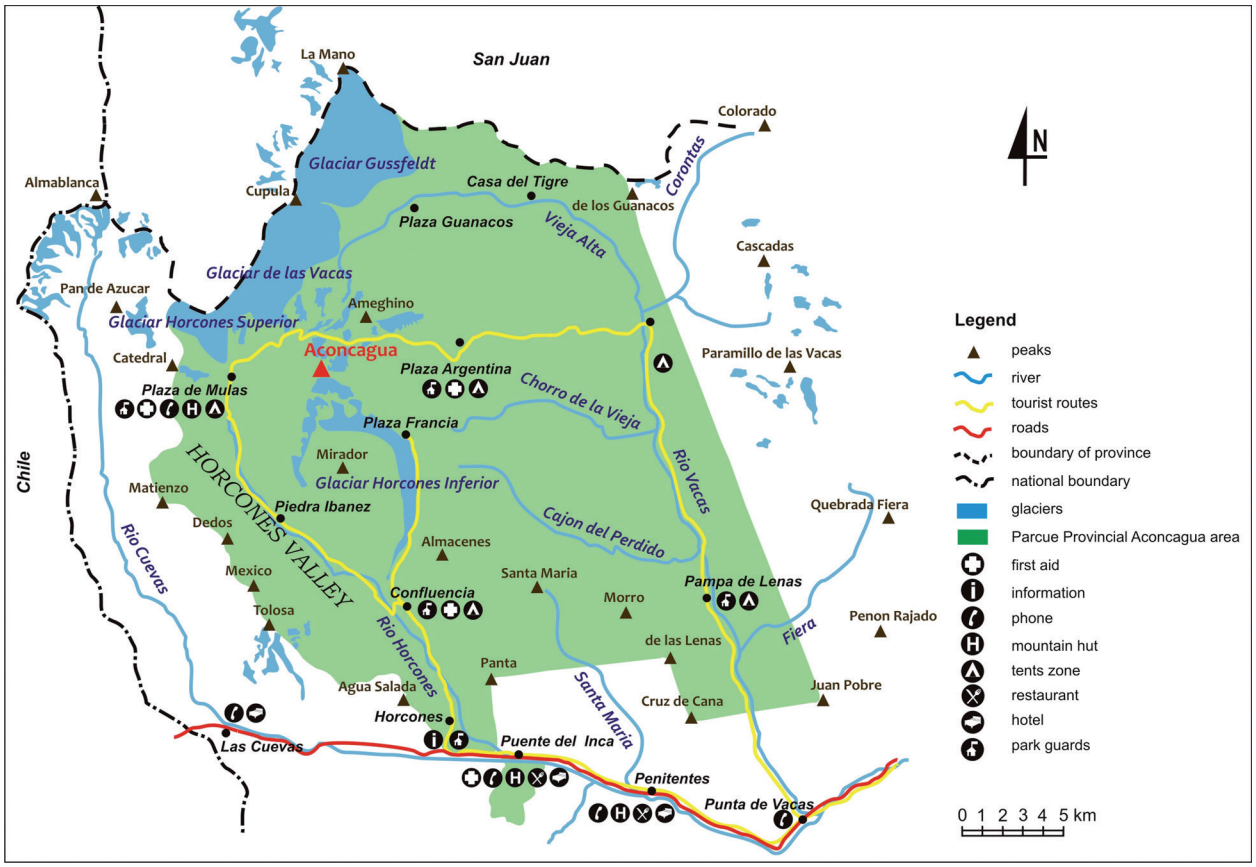

Fig. 1. Location of Aconcagua summit against the Aconcagua Provincial Park.
Source: Guide of Parque Provincial Aconcagua, Localización de campamentos, rutas y servicios.

Fig. 2. The development of main base Plaza de Mulas.

Fig. 3. View of main base Plaza de Mulas from the ascent to the Canada camp.

ities include the Elena shelter situated at an altitude of 6000 meters, which was constructed in 2011 as an emergency sleeping place.

From a logistics point of view, the organization of an Aconcagua summit expedition is relatively easy, because of the good access to information and to the agencies providing transport, accommodation and guides. Aconcagua is also technically easy and following the normal route does not require climbing skills. In case of emergency it is possible to receive aid, because there is a medical unit in the main base and a helicopter evacuation can be provided too. Apart from traditional expeditions, so called commercial expeditions organized by tourist and guide agencies are notably more frequent. The participants of such expeditions are often inexperienced and lack the appropriate knowledge. It is worth stressing that the massif is characterized by variable atmospheric conditions (low temperatures, snowfall, strong winds), which can endanger expedition participants. Therefore Aconcagua is considered as one of the summits with high fatality risk. Each year there are tragic accidents in the massif involving several fatalities.

Statistical data

Thanks to a close and systematic monitoring of the number of visitors coming to the Aconcagua region it is possible to track periods and forms of activity of mountain climbers and characterise them in demographic terms. The Park management collects information about the visitors of the basis of the permit form filled in by them, which makes a complete analysis possible. Of the resources accessible from the site of the Park the authors used the data for 2000–2013 concerning the number of visitors, cost of permits for mountain activity and nationality of the visitors. The number of visitors broken down into months revealed the months of the highest activity of tourists, and information on their gender and age showed the demographic diversity of the visitors in different seasons.

Similar procedures are carried out by many mountain national parks, including Denali National Park, where the third highest peak of the Seven Summits – McKinley (6196 m) is situated. The data, however, are accessible in a much narrower scope and not in the form of database but ready statistics. Hence, it was impossible to conduct a thorough comparison but only in certain thematic scopes. In the case of the remaining peaks included in the Seven Summits, even if visitors are registered, the data are not readily available.

Results

Significant interest in climbing and increasing tourist and climbing traffic in the Aconcagua massif region called for the creation of a protection area. Since the establishment of the Aconcagua Provincial Park all visitors are required to register. In the early years there were about 350 tourist registered whereas in the recent years their number has increased more than twenty times.

The first decade of the 21st century was characterized by a fast increase in total numbers of visitors to the highest peak of South America during the first 4 years, and then by a stagnation in the following years (Fig. 4). The smallest number of visitors was recorded in season 2000/2001. The figure peaks at over 7500 in season 2007/2008 prior to sharp decrease during the following year

In the years 2000–2010 the largest number of tourists (around 27%) came from Argentina and the remaining 73% was represented by climbers and tourists from abroad. Figure 5 shows bar charts illustrating the number of tourists from selected countries visiting the Aconcagua area in particular tourist seasons. During the first three seasons the number of tourists generally grew although the trend was different for each country. Season 2008/2009 was characterized by a decrease in the number of visitors from almost each country presented. Only a few countries such as Canada, France and Australia recorded a slight increase. In the next year the Aconcagua region enjoyed increasing popularity.

The analysis of data concerning the number of tourists from 17 countries displaying the highest interest in Aconcagua, as well as the summary leads to the conclusion that the decrease and increase in the number of visitors in these two categories were characterized by similar tendencies (Table 1). Based on the data for each season, the total number of tourists from the remaining countries not shown on the map was calculated

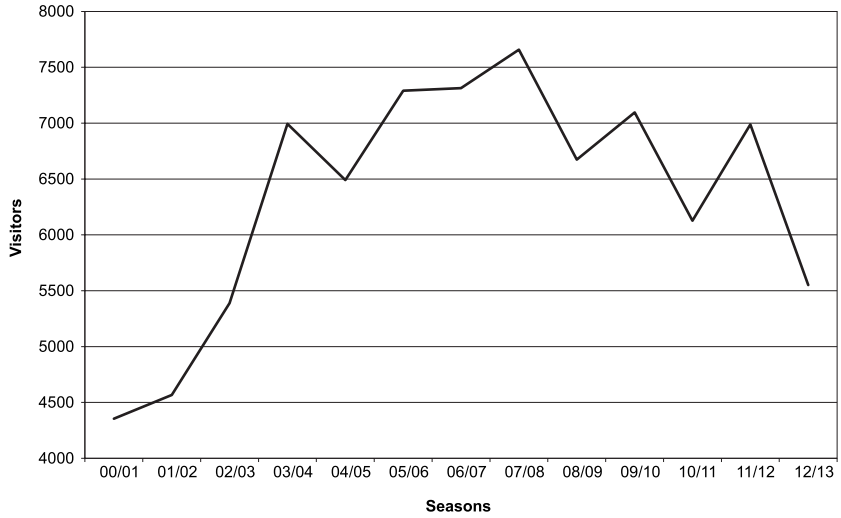

Fig. 4. The number of tourists visiting Aconcagua region during thirteen consecutive tourist seasons.

(Fig. 5). Apart from absolute data, the percentage of tourists for each season in relation to the previous season was shown in Table 1 in order to emphasize the dynamics of changes. The number of tourists coming from countries outside the top 17 was characterized by bigger dynamics of change and until the season 2008/2009 these changes were similar to those of the total number of tourists. The exception from that trend is the last season discussed in this article, in which the number of tourists from the top 17 countries increased, whereas from the remaining countries this number decreased. Among the countries represented by smaller numbers of tourists both the rise and fall in popularity of the Andean summit were marked by a bigger change in percentage share. It cannot however be determined whether this was a general tendency for each of these countries, due to a lack of detailed data. It is worth noting that the Aconcagua region enjoyed the greatest popularity in season 2007/2008 among both groups of tourists.

The number of tourists according to nationality and tourist seasons

At the turn of 2004 and 2005 the most numerous group was the Argentineans (26%) followed

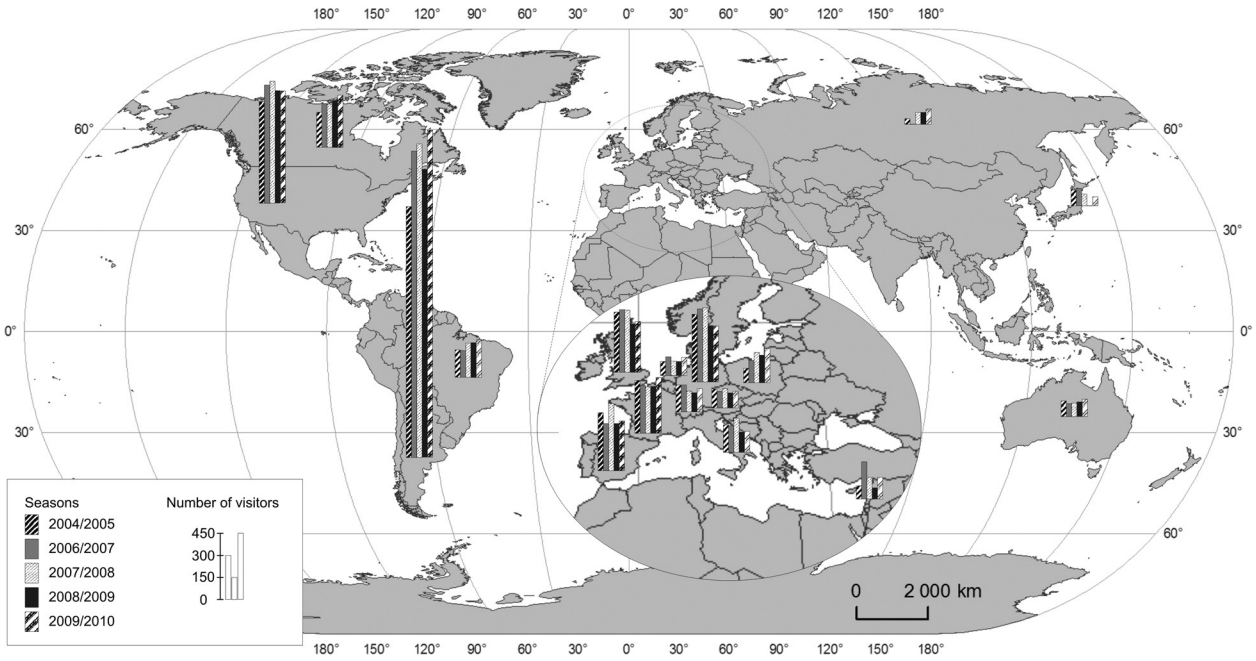

Fig. 5. Number of tourists visiting Aconcagua massif according to countries and tourist seasons.

Table 1. Total number of tourists visiting Aconcagua region in particular tourist seasons.

Seasons	2004/2005	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
Main 17 countries*	5437	6144 (113%)	6309 (103%)	5450 (86%)	6115 (112%)
Other countries	1053	1169 (111%)	1349 (115%)	1223 (91%)	981 (80%)
Total	6490	7313 (113%)	7658 (105%)	6673 (87%)	7096 (106%)

* The main countries refer to the countries depicted on the map (Fig. 5).

by Americans (11%), Germans (7%) and British (6%). Four years later, at the turn of 2008 and 2009 the Argentineans still dominated (29%) in the total number of visitors, followed by Americans (12%) and Germans (6%). In the analysed season, a change was noted in the representatives of other countries: the British (5%) were surpassed by Spanish alpinists (5%). In season 2012/2013 the number of visitors from Argentina (23%) was still the highest, followed by the USA (10%) and Germany (4%). It is worth noting that in the last analyzed year, climbers from Canada (4%) was also very active. Polish participation in the alpine – trekking activity in the Aconcagua massif is changing only a little bit. During the first analyzed year Poles constituted only 1.5% of all visitors to the Aconcagua massif staying behind climbers from France, Canada, Brazil, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Japan and Australia. In 2008/2009 the increase in numbers to 2.9% is visible as well surpassing Switzerland (2%), Austria (1.6%), Italy (1.6%) and Australia (1.5%) (Fig. 5). In season 2012/2013 the participation of Poles decreased to 2.0%.

It is also worth mentioning that the number of Poles choosing Aconcagua as their climbing destination increased by over 90% with respect to 2004. Analysing the data showing a decrease or increase in the number of tourists (Table 2) visiting Aconcagua in season 2008/2009 with respect to 2004/2005, a large increase in the interest in the summit is observed in Poland (almost 90%) and outside Europe in Canada (about 33%), Brazil (27%) and in Argentina (15%). Such a large interest in Aconcagua comes from a current fashion for collecting the Seven Summits. The second factor is the acquisition of experience and acclimatization before other expeditions in high mountains.

Among the first 10 countries, from which most tourists could be found in the region of Aconcagua in season 2004/2005, six recorded a decrease whereas four an increase in numbers of visitors to this corner of the earth five years later. Considering all the countries listed in the Table 2 it can be seen that the decrease in the percentage remained at a similar level of about a dozen – twenty per cent. After four years Italy dropped out of

Table 2. Visitors in the Aconcagua massif according to countries in years 2004/2005, 2008/2009 and 2012/2013.

Country	2004/2005	2008/2009		2012/2013	
	Number of visitors	Number of visitors	Decrease/increase in point of percent (comparing to 2004/2005)	Number of visitors	Decrease/increase in point of percent (comparing to 2004/2005)
Argentina	1 706	1 957	14.7	1 276	–25.2
USA	691	764	10.6	550	–20.4
Germany	460	382	–17.0	224	–51.3
UK	409	329	–19.6	–	–
Spain	395	320	–19.0	100	–74.7
France	359	319	–11.1	143	–60.2
Canada	238	317	33.2	215	–9.7
Brazil	186	236	26.9	192	3.2
Italy	186	137	–26.3	59	–68.3
Switzerland	182	130	–28.6	102	–44.0
Austria	129	102	–20.9	–	–
Japan	107	–	–	75	–29.9
Australia	106	99	–6.6	95	–10.4
Poland	98	187	90.8	113	15.3

Source: Subsecretaría de Turismo de Mendoza.

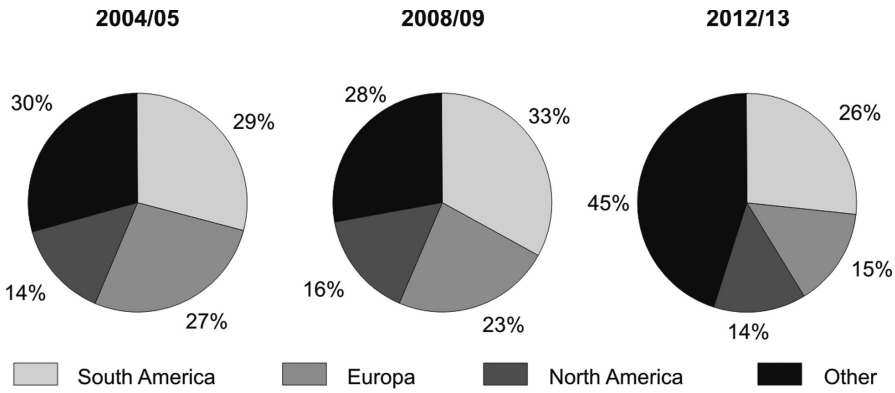

Fig. 6. The structure of origin of tourists visiting Aconcagua by continents (represented by their main countries) in seasons 2004/2005, 2008/2009 and 2012/2013.

the top 10 and its place was taken by Poland. It is worth noting that the decrease in the popularity of Aconcagua summit occurred almost entirely in European countries, of the richer part of Europe, joined also by Japan.

The breakdown by continents shows that the nationality structure of tourists visiting the Aconcagua region has changed during the last 4 analyzed years (Fig. 6). It was analyzed by choosing the most active countries for each continent in analysed period. In season 2004/2005 the largest group of tourists came from South America constituting 29% of the total number of visitors with a significant participation of Argentineans, which is quite natural because of the distance for potential tourists to the hiking destination. The second highest figure (27%) refers to the visitors from Europe in season 2008/2009 the main group of visitors came from South America and their percentage advantage over tourists from Europe is more significant – ten percentage point. The percentage share of tourists from North America increased by two percentage points from 14% to 16%, whereas the share of tourists from other countries decreased two percentage points. Among the people engaging in mountaineering in the Aconcagua region the representation from Africa is insignificant and tourist from Asia – the most populous continent – mostly come from Japan. This is a manifestation of the cultural, economic and political conditions shaping tourist attitude on those two continents.

In a discussion of the structure of visitors to the Aconcagua massif it is worth comparing these data with the tourist situation of peak McKinley in North America. While the inhabitants of Argentina constitute about 30% of all recorded visitors to the Aconcagua massif, the inhabitants of the USA constitute 60% of visitors to McKinley. The remaining 40% includes climbers from Canada and Great Britain. It is also noteworthy that in the years 2009–2011 the third largest group of visitors were representatives of Poland. McKinley was also visited by climbers from Japan, Germany, Spain, Korea and France.

Number of tourists by month

The tourist traffic in the Aconcagua massif area occurs in summer season (southern hemisphere) between 15th of November and 15th of March with a peak in January (Fig. 7).

Due to the dynamic tourist traffic in the Aconcagua massif area three different periods varying in price of admission were set up in the Aconcagua Provincial Park. The low season period lasts from 15th to 30th November and from 21st February to 15th March. Next there is the medium season lasting from the 1st to 14th December and from 1st to 20th February. The most expensive and busy is the high tourist season lasting from 15th December to 31st January.

The cheapest price offer applies to low season but those dates are not popular due to harsh climatic conditions and a significant snow cover. The admission fee for the Aconcagua Provincial Park is also diversified according to the type of mountaineering activities. The shortest form is the short trekking taking 3 days, the long trekking taking 7 days and climbing which must not exceed 20 days of activity in the Park. The time limits of visits in the park and related charges for permits for mountaineering established by the park authorities are presented in Table 3.

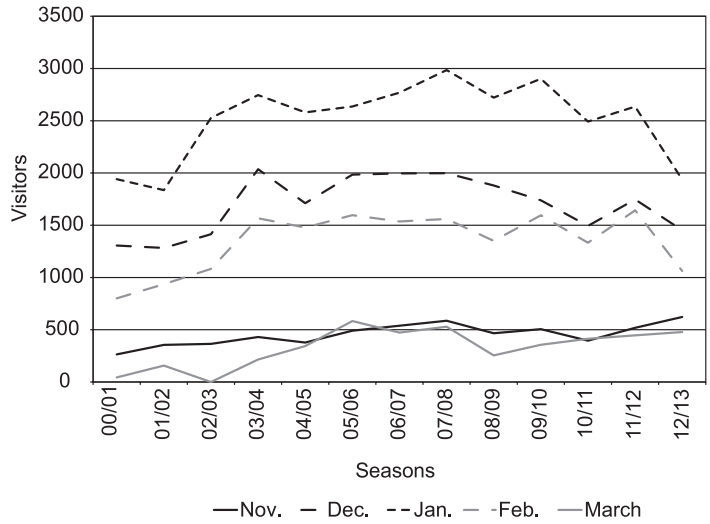

Fig. 7. Number of visitors in the Aconcagua massif in years 2000 to 2013 by months.

The prices of climbing permits are subject to the largest diversity depending on the season of activity. The price for climbing in medium season almost doubled and in high season almost tripled. In the case of other mountaineering activities the changes are slightly different. The price increases only when the trip is planned in high season. In season 2007/2008 the price increased by 33% for the long trekking and by 50% for the short trekking. In the next season there was an increase by 21% for the long trekking and only by 8% for the short one. In season 2009/2010 a much smaller increase in prices depending on seasons can be observed. This diversity however does not correspond do the intensity of tourist traffic.

By far the largest tourist traffic falls in January. It constitutes over 40% in each analyzed year. This is mainly due to more favourable climatic conditions than in November or December. It is worth noting that among all visitors to the Aconcagua region the majority are climbers. It is due to the desire to climb the highest summit of the Andes and South America as well as training and acclimatization before further high mountain expeditions especially into the Himalayas and Karakorum. The approach to the summit involves overcoming the height difference of more than 4000 meters – from the border of the Los Horcones Park (2850 m), through a forward base Confluencia (3300 m), main base Plaza de Mulas (4200–4400 m), camp Canada (4900), camp Cambio de Pendiente (5200 m), or Nido de Condores (5350 m) and the last larger camp Berlin (6000 m). Gradual climbing to the subsequent camps allows the organism to acclimatise and adjust to the altitude in order to avoid the altitude sickness. However apart from climbing activities, trekking is also very popular.

The number of tourists according to types of mountaineering activity

The Aconcagua Park authorities introduced two main forms of mountaineering activity – climbing and trekking. For comparison, mountaineering activity divided into climbing, short trekking, including one day trekking, and long trekking are presented in Fig. 8. The biggest difference in the choice among suitable mountain-

Table 3. The price of mountaineering permit in the Aconcagua massif area.

Type of mountaineering activity	Length of stay	Price in Argentinean Peso ARS (1 ARS = 0.248$)					
		Season 2007/2008			Season 2009/2010		
		Low	Mid	High	Low	Mid	High
Climbing	20 days	350	700	1 000	1 200	2 200	3 000
Long trekking	7 days	150	150	200	660	660	800
Short trekking	3 days	100	100	150	380	380	410

Source: http://www.aconcagua.mendoza.gov.ar/ from 20th of February 2011.

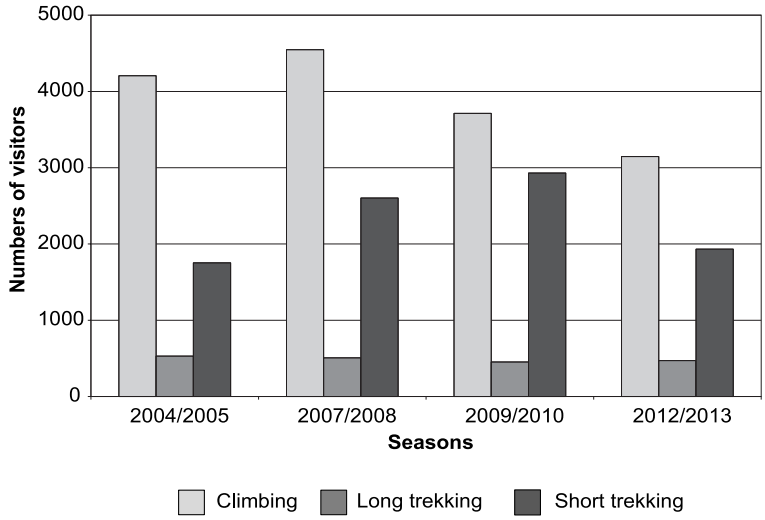

Fig. 8. Mountaineering activity in scope of climbing, short and long trekking.

eering activities was visible at the turn of 2002 and 2003, when climbing was unquestionably more popular. The largest total number of visitors was noted in 2007/2008 of which climbers constituted almost 60%. In the following period, a decrease in the total number of visitors by 7.3% with reference to the previous season 2007/2008 was noted as well as a decrease in percentage share of climbers by over 18%. In season 2009/2010 there is a visible increase of interest in trekking which reflects the international trends in mountaineering tourism and its popularity in all mountainous regions of the world. During all the analyzed seasons, an increase of interest in short trekking is visible: from 27% in 2004/2005 to 33% in 2007/2008 to 41% in 2009/2010 and to 53% in 2012/13.

The number of tourists according to gender and age

When taking into account the gender of visitors to the Aconcagua Provincial Park, it turns out that in two comparable seasons 2007/2008, 2009/2010 and 2012/2013 the majority of them (75%) were males. This situation is not unique as those proportions of gender can be seen among all people in mountaineering activities on every continent. This situation also reflects Polish mountaineering activity because according to polls conducted by Marek (2010) the proportions of gender in Polish climbing groups are largely comparable to the general proportions of all women and men visiting the Aconcagua area.

By comparison, a large majority of visitors climbing McKinley in Alaska were men. In each of the analysed years 2000–2013 they accounted for 86% to 91% of the total number of visitors. This is mainly due to technical difficulty and atmospheric conditions present there. It can be concluded that McKinley is chosen for exploration by only those women climbers who represent a professional and not tourist approach to alpinism.

Another indicator depicting the demographical image of visitors to the Aconcagua Provincial Park is their age diversity which was presented for season 2007/2008 and 2012/2013 (Fig. 9). In the first period the largest is the group of tourists from the age ranges of 21–30 and 31–40 years constituting 33% and 31% respectively of the total number of visitors respectively. Another group is represented by visitors of age ranges from 41–50 and 51–60 years constituting 19% and 10%. This is due to the high activity of those people and obtaining experience in high mountain exploration. Aconcagua is treated by climbers as a training peak before their expeditions to the highest mountains. Young people (16–20 years) and elderly (61–70 years) constitute 3% each of the total number of visitors to the Aconcagua massif. The smallest group of visitors is represented by tourists under the age of 15 and over 71, making up 0.5% each. These proportions between the age groups are not surprising. Because of the altitude and the difficulty of the route to the summit the largest group is represented by young and middle aged people with some experience. During the high mountain expeditions experience is one of the main reasons

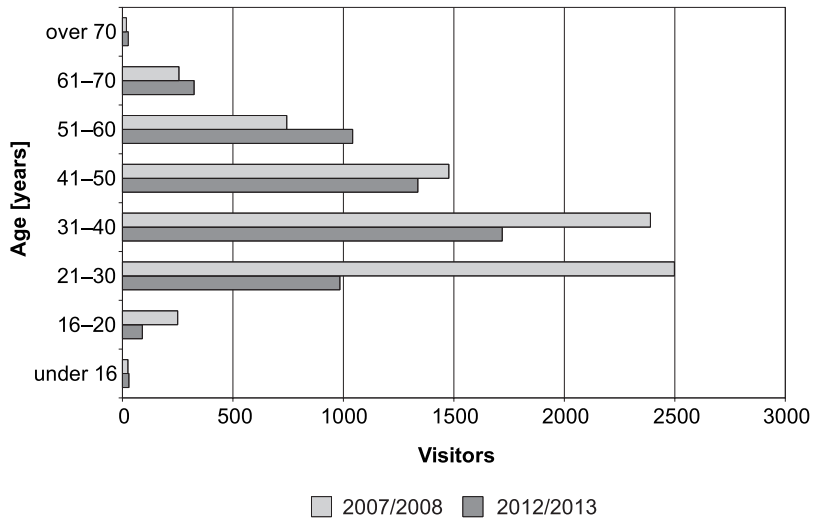

Fig. 9. Visitors to the Aconcagua massif according to their age in season 2007/2008 and 2012/2013.

why people of the ages of 41–50 and 51–60 years make up a much larger proportion than people of a very young age i.e. 16–20 years. Although the data concern only one season, a similar diversity of visitors to the Aconcagua massif in terms of their ages may be expected for other seasons.

The most significant difference between the two analyzed years can be seen in the age group 21–30. This group – the greatest in the season 2007/2008 slips to number four in the season 2012/2013. It is difficult to find a reason of such situation. Due to the lack of data it is impossible to classify the visitors by gender.

The data concerning the age of climbers are similar to the ones in the statistics for visitors exploring the highest peak of North America – McKinley. The mean age is 38 years. Despite considerable technical difficulty and much more extreme weather conditions, the peak is chosen by younger climbers, which does not necessarily correspond to their experience.

Conclusion

The tourist traffic in the area of South America's highest summit is very diverse within the demographic and seasonal range as well as in terms of the type of mountaineering activity. The general increasing trend of the tourist traffic in the area of the highest massif in the Andes was somewhat disrupted by season 2008/2009. The main reason for the decrease in the number of visitors in that period may have been the world crisis because it was observed among representatives of almost all nations. The simplest suggested explanation is an external factor – the crisis – or an internal factor for example resulting from the local policy of authorities responsible for the Aconcagua region, introducing quotas of visits. The second conclusion cannot be supported by any tourist reports. Only data from subsequent seasons (after 2013) can prove whether it was just a several-year fluctuation.

Aconcagua is a peak frequented by climbers from all over the world. Only about 30% of climbers are Argentinians. By comparison, among the climbers of McKinley the inhabitants of the USA account for 60% of visitors. Aconcagua is a peak visited mainly by men (75%), with a dominant age group 21–40. This proportion certainly indicates that it is treated as acclimatisation before further expeditions to the highest mountains Himalayas and Karakorum, and a fashion for collecting the highest peaks of the Earth. The apparent low level of difficulty in the Aconcagua massif and a lack of formal problems are favourable for a high number of visitors of around 7000 people a year. For McKinley the number is over six times lower (in 2012 – 1223 visitors), which results from administrative difficulties (visa requirement for some countries), higher costs, and above all extreme weather conditions and technical difficulty occurring during climbing. This indicates that visitors to McKinley are better prepared physically, mentally and technically, which corresponds to the number of those who reach the peak – on average 54% of all climbers.

For Aconcagua the proportion is about 30%. It may be concluded (on the basis of observation and interviews carried out during the expedition in 2008 by A. Marek) that Aconcagua is chosen to a high degree for commercial expeditions. Thus, it is necessary to constantly monitor the tourist traffic in order to keep pace with infrastructural needs for the safety of less experienced climbers and adequately protect the natural environment.

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