
AYASACHA
USER RESEARCH

Client and Area of Focus

Fausto O. Sarmiento, Ph.D.

- **Professor of Mountain Science**, University of Georgia
- **Globally recognized expert** in mountain geography & sustainable development
- Advisor to **UNESCO & IUCN** | Fulbright Global Scholar | Author of 16+ books



Area of Focus

- **Zuñac Parish and the Chimborazo Region:** A biocultural landscape that supports sustainable livelihoods in the highlands. Conservation of this area is vital to the well-being of its people.
- **Eastern Andean Flanks:** A highly biodiverse region within an iconic mountain range, home to flourishing endemic species.





Research Objectives

1) Assess Global Perception

To understand how the scientific community, students, and the public perceive Zuñac Parish and the Chimborazo Region. This also includes assessing popularity of montology.

2) Evaluate Interest in Ethnotourism

To determine how these audiences value cultural and ecological travel experiences, as well as whether or not they agree with the concept of ethnotourism as a whole.

3) Identify Best Communication Strategies & Branding

To explore how concepts of these regions, including sustainability and biocultural heritage, can be told in a way that resonates with all targeted audiences.

Research Methods

01 Individual Interviews

We conducted a series of interviews on 10 candadites. Each interview consisted of the same 9 questions based around their expirences with travel and familiarity with our region of interest.

02 ESPOCH Survey

We created 10 survey questions for ESPOCH representatives to deepen our understanding of montology in Ecuador and Zuñac and to refine our project’s mission.

03 Secondary Sources

We utlized the vast amounts of online travel guides and ratings for locations in our area of interest.

Target Audiences

In collaboration with Dr. Sarmiento, we identified three primary audience groups that reflect the academic, public, and research dimensions of the project. While distinct, each engages with conservation, culture, and place from a different perspective.

01 Scientific Community

- Researchers in mountain studies and conservation
- Engaged in fieldwork and interdisciplinary collaboration
- Invested in biocultural landscapes and regional research

02 Students

- Encountering montology for the first time
- Interested in study abroad and global exploration
- Curious about sustainable and responsible travel

03 Interested Public

- Globally minded and travel-oriented
- Value environmental awareness and cultural storytelling
- Engage with ecological topics through personal interest



Interviewees

Each interviewee was chosen to reflect one of our three target audience segments, allowing us to gather insights across academic, student, and public perspectives.

1) Scientific Community

- Chadley Hollas – Dr. Sarmiento's Research Assistant
- Sidney Eigeman – Dr. Sarmiento's Research Assistant
- Dr. Gayle Allard – Professor at IE University Spain and Semester at Sea

2) College Students

- Nicole Chaveous - UGA Undergraduate student
- Riley Panessa - UGA Undergraduate student
- Cade Peterson - UGA Graduate Student

3) Interested Public

- Alecia Mclochlin
- Summer Gomez
- Lauren Baggett
- Paty Rios

Interview Questions

1. “Can you describe how you typically like to travel?”

2. “What usually influences where you choose to travel?”

3. “When choosing a destination, what tends to matter more to you: cultural experiences, natural environments, or something else?”

4. “Before today, had you heard the term ethnotourism?”
   - Ethnotourism (or ethnic tourism) involves traveling to experience the lifestyle, culture, and traditions of Indigenous or local communities, often in remote areas. It promotes cultural preservation and economic opportunities, allowing tourists to engage in activities like traditional workshops, ceremonies, and staying in, or visiting, local villages.

   → “After hearing that definition, do you feel it describes the way you travel at all?” Why or why not?

5. “What aspects of traveling with or learning from local communities appeal to you, if any?”

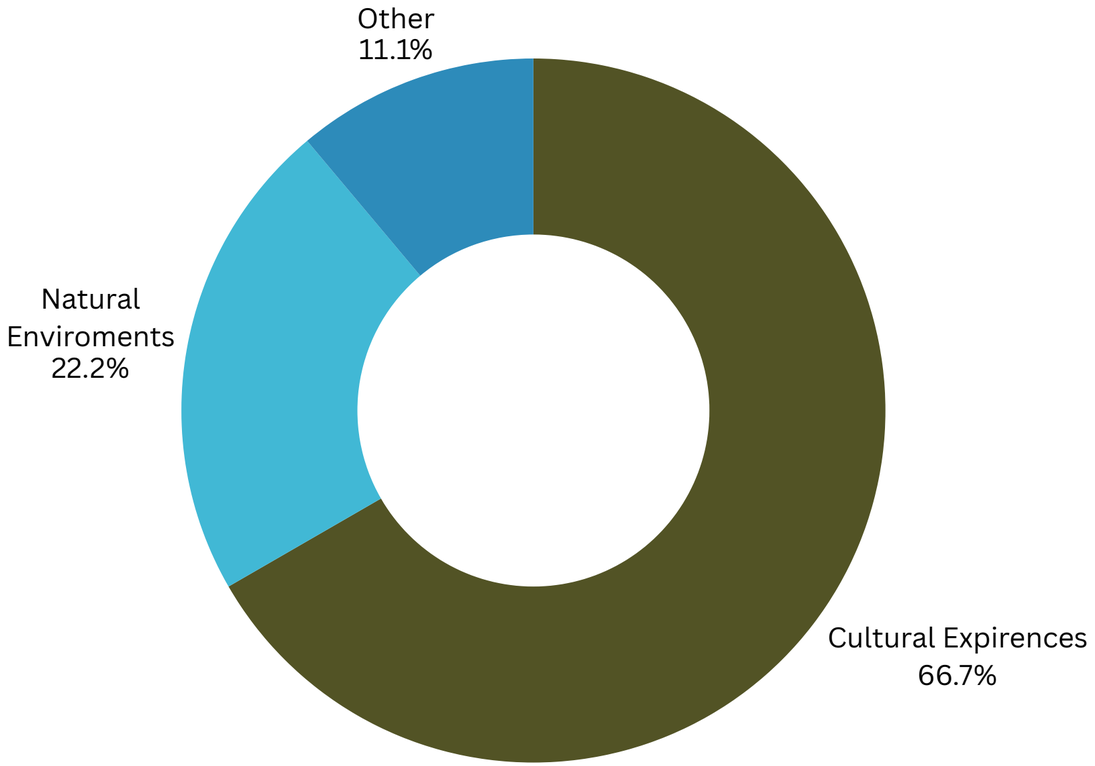
6. “What do you know or associate with Ecuador as a travel destination?”

7. “What comes to mind when you think about the Andes or the Andean region?”

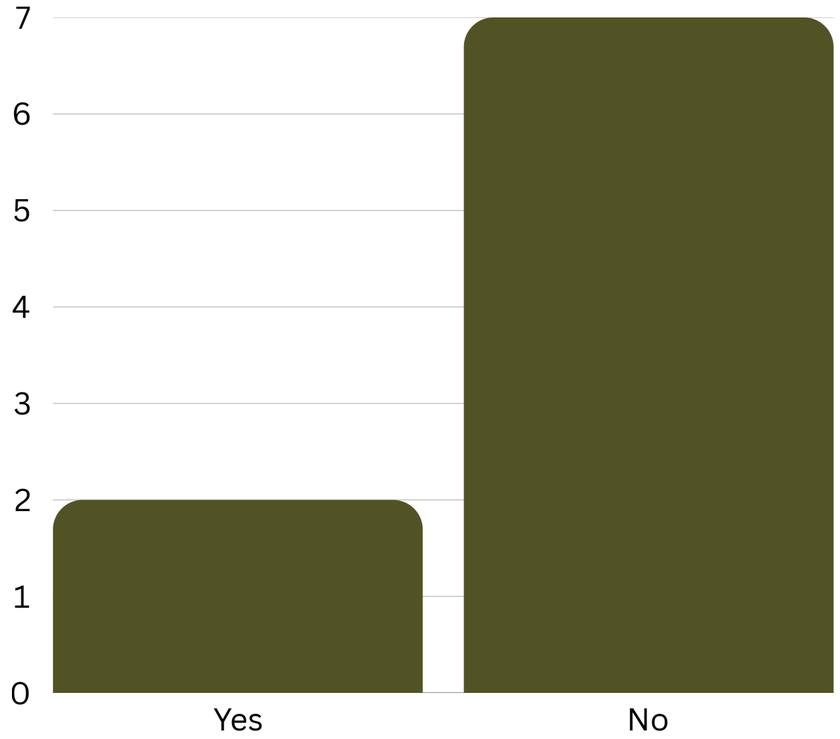
8. “Have you ever heard the term Andean flanks before?”

9. Do you consider yourself a “world traveler?”

Quantitative Data



What matters most when choosing a travel destination:



Have you heard the term “Andean Flanks”:



Interview Highlights

“I don’t know much about them [Andes]. My initial thought would be hiking and outdoor experiences.” - **Nicole Chaveous**

“Traveling with and learning from local communities is extremely appealing to me...Local communities know the area better than anyone else and can help give/recommend the most comprehensive experience possible.” - **Sidney Eigeman**

“I like knowing that my tourism supports a local economy, but I would need to be convinced that the experience isn’t exploitative of that community.” - **Lauren Baggett**

“When I hear the Andes, I immediately think of the tall mountains, snow-capped peaks, volcanoes, hiking trails, and traditional Andean culture with colorful textiles and local villages.” - **Paty Rios**

“Amazing and well-preserved sites, urban or otherwise, exist in the Peruvian highland and Andes, which do not exist in many places around the world.” - **Cade Peterson**

High Level Findings

1. Limited Awareness of the Andean Flanks: Awareness of the Andean flanks is low outside of montology and mountain studies. This highlights the need for clearer definitions and stronger place-based context.

2. Cultural Experiences Drive Travel Decisions: Most respondents prioritize cultural experiences when choosing a destination. This underscores the importance of emphasizing the region's biocultural richness and lived cultural experiences.

3. "World Traveler" Means Different Things to Different People: Participants expressed varying interpretations of what it means to be a "world traveler," with some hesitant to self-identify as one. This suggests an opportunity to position the region as accessible and meaningful for both first-time global explorers and experienced travelers.



ESPOCH Survey Questions

1. Why is the Zuñac region important from a montology perspective, and why should a global audience care?
2. What makes Zuñac unique compared to other mountain systems in Ecuador or the Amazon region?
3. How does ESPOCH collaborate with Dr. Fausto O. Sarmiento and the University of Georgia on this research?
4. How does this project integrate scientific research with local or Indigenous knowledge systems?
5. What environmental or climate challenges in Zuñac does this research help us better understand?
6. How does this work contribute to sustainability, conservation, or resilience in mountainous regions?
7. What real-world impacts has this project already had, or aims to have, on local communities?
8. How does Zuñac serve as a model for mountain research in other parts of the world?
9. What visuals, stories, or data best represent the importance of this research for a digital audience?
10. If you had one message about Zuñac and montology to share with UNESCO decision-makers, what would it be?

What We Aim to Learn from ESPOCH

- Keeping in mind the **language barrier** with our client's colleagues, we created an **English & a Spanish version** of this survey to fit their needs.

- We want to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from ESPOCH representatives firsthand as we find the **best ways to communicate and display their research findings**.

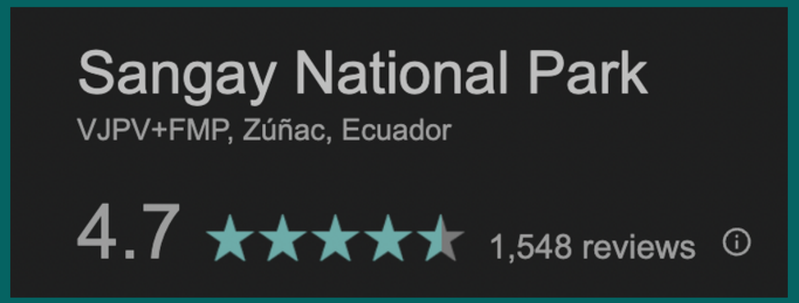
- We want to honor Dr. Sarmiento's wishes of keeping all information **authentic, relevant, and directly tied** to his research mission.





Secondary Research Findings

Google Reviews:



Tripadvisor:



- “Last summer I visited Sangay National Park in Ecuador, a WHS that is rarely visited by tourists. It is one of the most beautiful places I’ve ever been to.” -Nuriaofzoiets (reddit)

- On TripAdvisor, there are eight non-five-star reviews, all rated four stars. Only one review mentions a drawback, describing the area as beautiful but muddy and difficult to access.

Continued Research

From **March 3–5**, Fausto will attend the **International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative Conference at ESPOCH** in Riobamba, Ecuador.

This **conference centers on key concepts that directly align with our project** and is taking place within our geographic area of focus. It presents a valuable opportunity to gather insights from a highly relevant scientific audience.

We have **developed a short survey to attach to our infographic** in order to collect feedback from conference attendees.

Through this survey, we aim to better understand:

- How a scientific audience interprets our current identity and messaging
- The scientific community's existing understanding of our area of focus
- Opportunities to refine clarity, positioning, and academic relevance

