

Staying Afloat

The experience with tourism-based boat trips in Caixa d’Aço Bay in Paraty, Brazil, highlights the problems of livelihoods in restricted-use protected areas

The concept of development has been discussed since the early stages of civilization and varies according to the epoch and philosophical currents. Although society has advanced in sustainability and human well-being issues, in practice development remains based on economic growth, capital accumulation and social inequalities. Dominant ideologies in development concepts are followed by an emblematic factor—the inability of an economy to generate decent employment and to provide access to resources at different levels.

Despite the process of decolonization, indigenous peoples and descendants of slaves in Latin America have been largely excluded from the process of development. With the economy unable to generate decent employment and provide access to resources at different levels, the search for informal jobs has become a common practice, especially among traditional communities in underdeveloped areas who, faced with the lack of formal employment opportunities, struggle to preserve their livelihoods. Part of these initiatives come from the social logic of promoting community ties and reinforcing solidarity and co-operation among community members.

Traditional communities living in protected areas are currently faced with the threat of restrictions in access to land and natural resources, forcing changes on patterns and sources of local livelihoods. Community empowerment and capacity building are essential to deal with this reality and to ensure fundamental rights, and social and cultural reproduction aligned to environmental conservation.

In this context, the efforts of the Association of Small-scale Fishermen and Boatmen of Trindade (ABAT) in Brazil to ensure local access to marine traditional territories and to maintain their livelihoods in a restricted-use protected area are worth examining.

The Caiçara community of Trindade is located in the municipality of Paraty, in the south of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Part of the traditional land is located inside the Serra da Bocaina National Park (PNSB), including Caixa d’Aço Bay, an important marine area for artisanal fishing and tourism. The PNSB is a no-take protected area established in 1971.

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Until the 1960s, families used to engage in artisanal fishing, small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry. Tourism has increased in Trindade as a result of federal development policies in the 1970s, and has become an important activity for the local economy since 1990.

Livelihood diversification

Due to the restrictions in the use of natural resources at the PNSB, a group of fishermen identified an opportunity to diversify their livelihood through the implementation of boat trips in three beaches: de Fora, Meio and Caixa d’Aço Natural Pool. The boats, which were until then used only for fishing activities, have since been also used to transport tourists. Boat trips were carried out individually

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The efforts of ABAT fishermen and boatmen to ensure local access to marine traditional territories and to maintain their livelihoods in a restricted-use protected area are interesting

until 1996, when the boatmen and fishermen created ABAT, aiming to establish collective rules for artisanal fishing and community-based tourism. Fishing is the basis of the Caiçara culture and a fundamental activity for fishermen and boatmen. Of late, boat trips have become a substantial part of the local community members' income, being as, or more, important than fisheries. This tourism activity currently takes place inside the PNSB and nearby localities.

The formalization of tourism activities in national parks is in conformity with the objectives of the protected area category and involves a series of steps. To this end, ABAT has been carrying out numerous actions to ensure right of access, permanence and autonomy of boat trips inside the PNSB, with the support of universities, technical experts and funding agencies.

In 2010, the PNSB released a Letter of Intent (LoI) establishing rules and standards for the formalization of boat trips, including safety measures and training requirements for the boatmen. The LoI also attested that both PNSB managers and ABAT members are co-responsible for the boat trips inside the PNSB, characterizing the beginning of a legislative process of this activity.

Due to the impossibility of meeting all requirements, the LoI was not signed by ABAT members. The formalization process stagnated until

November 2012, when a working group was formed by PNSB managers, representatives of ABAT and partners. Since then, after discussions, an authorization term between ABAT and PNSB to regulate the boat trips has been introduced.

Among the legal instruments that regulate visits to protected areas in Brazil—authorization, permits and concessions—authorization is the most fragile since it can be suspended at any time. On the other hand, it is the most feasible for community-based enterprises that do not have funds to compete with large corporations attracted by the tourism potential of the region. As a result, there are social and labour exclusions in the area.

The demand for the authorization of boat trips encouraged two consultants (co-authors of this article) to support ABAT in the collective planning and execution of an outreach project carried out between 2015 and 2016. This project received financial aid from Casa Social-Environmental Fund and worked along three lines of action: institutional strengthening; basic cost-benefit analysis of boat trips; and capacity building focused on traditional people and tourism activities in laws pertaining to conservation.

All the strategies developed (four workshops to formulate the basic cost-benefit analysis, and four other workshops to discuss specific regulations) were based on combining local and technical-scientific knowledge. Institutional development activities included organization of documents and participation in ABAT meetings. The active learning cycle (planning-monitoring-evaluating) and collective learning space promotion were also important components of the methodology adopted.

Cost-benefit analysis

The basic cost-benefit analysis was adapted to a community-based enterprise, and allowed the boatmen and fishermen to consider the real costs and revenues of the activity as well as to reflect upon possible

ways of reducing costs and fostering innovations and improvements in the service provided to tourists. The use of informative and simplified language in the workshops made it possible for all participants to understand the regulations related to visiting in protected areas, and traditional peoples' rights.

Relevant issues, such as proposals to improve the boat trips, and alternatives to stimulate tourism in the winter season, were also identified to balance the objectives of environmental conservation, local economic development and visitor experience. Thus, the representatives of ABAT were able to plan together how to present community demands at PNSB advisory council and thematic meetings, and improve ABAT participation and representation in the meetings.

Although many steps of the action plan developed by the working group have already been carried out in the last five years, the formalization of boat trips is still an ongoing process. The delay in effectively establishing the partnership between ABAT and the PNSB, including institutional and structural limitations from the environmental agency, was one of the greatest challenges of the negotiation process. The search for preventive (rather than responsive) alternatives to deal with uncertainties and difficulties is necessary, as is continuous advancement in empowering local representatives towards a balance in power relations between the government and the community.

The fragility of the authorization term to regulate boat trips in the PNSB causes insecurity and apprehension among the boatmen/fishermen. The National System of Conservation Units (SNUC), the National Strategic Plan for Protected Areas (PNAP), and the guidelines for visiting protected areas are regulations committed to social inclusion. However, no legal instrument is adapted to formalize community-based enterprises in protected areas. Furthermore, those instruments that provide greater

guarantee of permanence of the activity do not allow the participation of traditional communities on equal terms, when compared to large corporations.

The current environmental policy adopts the concession of tourism services in protected areas to large companies as a solution to manage and reduce the costs of conservation by the federal government. However, community-based tourism enterprises are clamouring to be included in these initiatives.

At a meeting of the PNSB advisory council in November 2016, the managers of the PNSB presented a project proposal to bid for services to support visits. The project included the construction of the PNSB headquarters in Trindade; it, however, did not include the boat trips. The representatives of ABAT sent an official letter to PNSB managers to ask for clarification about the proposal; there remains the possibility of participating in the bidding process, perhaps restricted to consultation with the affected communities. Thus, guaranteeing the autonomy of local initiatives in relation to public power and capital and market networks remains a challenge.

The combination of local and technical-scientific knowledge was essential to promote collective construction, social participation and positioning of the representatives of ABAT in different decision-making moments. Gradual changes and social transformation have been observed over time. Collective resistance actions, such as those designed by the project, must be strengthened to ensure the access to rights, human well-being and environmental conservation.

Improvements in public policies and legal instruments with respect to local communities and community-based enterprises are necessary to promote autonomy and security to them. Tourism-related activities should be considered, in addition to economic aspects, as opportunities to adopt co-management approaches that mediate social conflicts in traditional territories overlapping protected areas. 

For more



<http://cercle.lu/download/partenariats/BarefootGuidetoOrganisationsWholeBook.pdf>

Barefoot guide to working with organisations and social change. Community Development Resource Association (CDRA)

<https://www.icsf.net/en/monographs/article/EN/36-social-security>

Social Security for Fishworkers in Brazil: A Case Study of Pará