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Canopia Project — Humboldt Meets Disney in the Brazilian Amazon

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Abstract

The tropical rainforests of the Brazilian Amazon are more than ever threatened by unsustainable land-use practices and overexploitation. The ongoing deforestation and degradation are a serious threat to both the natural and cultural environment in the Amazon itself and the global ecological balance. Initiatives to protect the Amazon rainforest from further devastation have been undertaken for several decades, but many of them failed mainly due to the lack of benefits for local communities. Therefore, strategies integrating environmental requirements into economic and social needs have been formulated. Most of them are based on the economic and social values of biodiversity. Ecotourism is a promising alternative to benefit directly from biodiversity, because of its high economic potential and good prospects in the long term. On the other hand, there are ecological and cultural risks, particularly when tourism development expands into remote areas. To minimise those dangers, the needs of local communities and the interests of investors and other stakeholders have to be considered and weighed against each other. Against that background, the presented pre-feasibility study for the “CANOPIA-Project” analyses the possibilities of combining scientific research in tropical rainforests with ecotourism. The innovations of the project are the scientific orientation in the field of canopy science, using extraordinary observation systems such as cranes and balloons to study the hidden world of forest canopies, as well as the unique project concept. The latter is based on the hypothesis that it is possible and profitable to establish a large scale ecotourism project with a minimum capacity of 200 beds, which

- allows tourists to explore the forest canopies with cranes, trams, etc.,
- gives them the opportunity to observe scientists during their work,
- supports scientific research activities through profits from tourism,
- encourages the development of a region with structural difficulties,
- creates a local market for high value agricultural products and
- helps to protect a rainforest area.

To find out if and how such a project could be realised in the Brazilian states of Amazonas or Pará was the aim of the study.

Keywords: Amazon Rainforest, Canopy Science, Ecotourism, Regional Development