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**Protected Areas: From Vertical Institutions to Collaborative
Dynamics**

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Abstract

By shedding light on nature/society relations, the articulation of complex networks (Murdoch, 1998) is revealed. It is essential, however to consider the heterogeneity of such arrangements - composed of human actions and non-human counterparts. Within this framework forest fringe communities are seen as a network of micro-power relations (Kumar, 2002; MacDonald, 2005). From two cases studied, I bring into the debate arena the institutionalisation process of protected areas. Through Serra da Capivara National Park case, in northeast Brazil, I seek to illustrate the National Parks concept and the patrimonialisation of the territory. The research questions in one hand socioeconomic processes undergone by fringe communities on the face of institutionalisation, and on the other the challenges of park's conflict management. Seen as a step ahead on the management perspective, not only optimising resources but also recognising the importance of local networks on the issue of biodiversity protection, the case of Ankasa Conservation Area in Ghana furthers the discussion. It questions the institutional initiative of community empowerment in resource management and its expectations. Overall, I seek to locate the agenda in which biodiversity protection is inserted, both internationally and locally. Therefore empirical analyses are sensible to the cultural milieu, sometimes requiring the change of lenses so as to perceive the richness of local livelihoods contingencies to the institutional arrangements and the impact from the introduction of alternatives.

The participatory approach of contemporary policy-making brings into discussion strategies not only for conflict resolution but to promote socio-economic inclusion into the decision-making process and, therefore a development that is more sustainable. However, the attempt to secure social, ecologic and economic sustainability is met by the challenge of coalescing interests of conservation and uses of natural resources. It means that protected areas should not be considered as ecological islands but recognise the importance of off-reserves' participatory rural development. Management alternatives aiming integration of rural communities and devolved authority - such as benefit sharing, community-based management and multilateral panels - are then included into the modern preservationist agenda.

Keywords: Collaborative strategies, fringe communities, forest management, protected areas

Introduction

Territories of reserve have been of increasing demand through institutionalization means, the so called natural protected areas (PA). With it raises also the debate surrounding the uses of the territory and its resources. National Parks express the dichotomy men/nature established by the natural scientists that defined the parameters for the first protected areas, criticized by Diegues (1994) as the Modern Myth of the Untouchable Nature since it idealizes tropical 'nature' as 'Eden' and the need to protect it from humanity. Although new modalities of management that consider the use of resources have been established, the international definition and strict establishment of National Parks persists. It requires the adoption of strict zoning; traces boundaries overwriting local territorialities and relies most on coercive strategies so as to consolidate its institutionalisation. Case studies bring into evidence antagonisms between natural preservation and social development since it alienates local communities from their traditional territorialities, resulting in conflict between institutions and "affected" populations. This is because the practical institutionalization of a preservation area demands measures that hinder the dynamics of its immediate rural population. Impacts array economic as well as social aspects of forest-dependents' livelihood, as it is the case of eviction of residents or the introduction of norms and regulations into habitual activities. Coercive conservation strategies, such as law enforcement, has proven to be costly and, in many cases, ineffective in the safeguard of biodiversity. Local people – hunters and cultivators – become then 'poachers' and 'squatters' (Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997) since encroachment is needed to answer basic demands as the resources from off reserves areas become scarce. More recently PA management is recognizing the failure to attain conservationist objectives if continuing to ignore its social aspects, what lead to the field of investigation into alternative management strategies.

Material and Methods

This study was conducted in two phases: in 2006 at Serra da Capivara National Park in Northeast Region of Brazil and in 2008 at Ankasa Conservation Area in the Western Region of Ghana. Relationships and multiple realities constructed by management strategies were observed through qualitative social method of research. In Brazil the research encloses households of seven villages in four Municipalities covered by the Park boundaries, as well as the resettlement grounds "New Zabelê". In Ghana the selected area encompasses twelve villages, from which the pilot (Amokwaw) and four under implementation phase of a programme on conflict management intervention and alternative livelihood schemes: the Community Resource Management Area - CREMA and Protected Area Management Advisory Unit - PAMAU. The 'Household and Community' stratum of the research was carried through in-depth interviews with local leaderships; traditional authority (Odikros and Headmen in the case of Ghana), elders that have lived in the Park area before its creation and individuals directed involved in management activities. In both cases fringe communities are mostly constituted of peasants, small farmers and tenants. The 'institutional' stratum was covered by interviews with management representatives, patrollers, mediation entities and Non-Governmental Organisations. The total of 34 hours of recorded interviews had informants' conformity, and was transcribed.

Results and Discussion

The assumption of the study defends that institutionalization of environmental protection interferes in the socio-spatial network – by then, the only preservation feature enabling the standing of these resources up to the formal regulatory act – creating conflicts among the local population and instituted powers. The interval between the Governmental decree of Park creation and its actual demarcation as a crucial phase within this process since food security and land tenure become threatened, the resources area – then called Park - not any longer respected as a common property regime but rather seen as "no-man's land": overexploited until the institutionalization process is taken place altogether with coercive methods of biodiversity

protection. Once local livelihood is disturbed, project of alternatives may be stimulated, relying mostly on alien cultivations and tourism activities. They require significant investment, are generally seasonal, and nevertheless carry out a strong impact in terms of social values involved in the transformation of the local way of life. The latter suggests that economic alternative recommendations must incorporate a social variable in the form of collaborative planning model in order to promote a harmonic movement towards social-economic local autonomy and avoid the situation in which residents and fringe communities are excluded from the planning of the area, do not understand its purpose, receive little or no benefit sharing and hence do not support its existence. Observed in Ghana and Brazil, also confirmed in India by Kumar (2002:776), collection of non-timber forest products by fringe communities has also a symbolic connotation in terms of the social realities of village life. As seen in Serra da Capivara National Park, by Marseille (2004) in Mole National Park in Northern Ghana and northern Pakistan by MacDonald (2005), in addition to its nutritional significance hunting plays also an important symbolic role. By integrating local tradition and knowledge into biodiversity safeguard efforts, collaborative strategies hold the potential to bring success to protected areas management.

Testimonies collected in Brazil and in Ghana pointed that poachers are mainly ‘outsiders’, rather than originated in the fringe-communities. The latter are minimal poachers, for herbs and small animals. The testimonies from Amokwaw CREMA villages in Ghana relate the community-based natural resource management initiative to the substantial diminution of illegal activities and increasing presence of animals in off-reserve. These observations can be further confirmed by faunal studies. The data analysis on apprehension of hunters within the Brazilian Serra da Capivara National Park, for the years of 2005-6 show that those apprehended were mainly males between 25-35 years old and residents of nearby municipalities. When locals were asked on why these people from the city are recently coming to hunt in the park’s area, informants would explain that that land is now perceived as “no-man’s land” once it belongs to the government. Similar was noted by McIvor: “many of the poachers come from outside the country” (McIvor, 1997: 267). The interpretation of the data-base on ACA apprehensions from the local headquarters of the Wildlife Division, show that the majority of poachers are outsiders, in the area only as “passage”, to collect the material for purely commercial purposes. More recent residents (between 10 and 20 years) also constitute a significant part of offenders, which can be explained by the exhaustion of off-reserve resources (including land) and the struggle for economic survival by the younger generation of fringe-residents. Residents prior to the park establishment are in less number, as one ACA personnel explained: *Most of the indegenes here don’t do this* and if so, mainly *for building materials*.

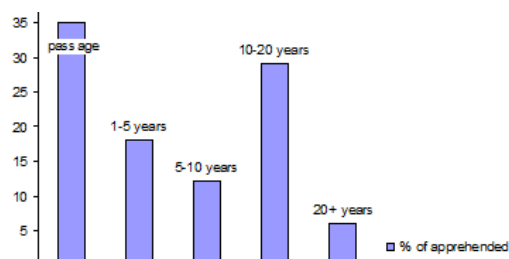


Figure 1. Offender’s permanence in Ankasa Conservation Area, Ghana.

The CREMA concept was observed as a strong advantage of the ‘untouchable nature’ ideal, keeping the fringe communities from claiming reserve’s resources and at the same time as patrollers against outsiders. Informants reported increasing presence of animals and of forest products in their properties as a result of CREMA’s stimuli for individual forests. By informing the Wildlife Division on poaching activities and helping on apprehensions, PAMAU/B and CREMA convert into mechanisms that not only work towards meeting an operational gap in terms of law enforcement, but that also bring the community together in a sense of ownership of

the resources. This unity among and within the villages also strengthens the demand for a development agenda within the institutional structure as well as endogenously. It also increases the potential for sustainable initiatives regarding alternative livelihoods and capture of donor's interest, as said by Amokwaw's CREMA Chairman: "Before they had their programmes but it didn't come, but since we became a group it is easier for the NGOs to work with an organized group". However in general, local population's benefit seems still to rely on external interests. The devolvement of authority to community-based organisations holds the potential to change the "nature of social arrangements, which can be crucial for individual freedoms" (Sen, 1999: 288).

Actor-networks theorists' broaden the definition of space, permitting to overcome boundaries of scale, since according to Murdoch (1998: 360) "places with similar set of elements and similar relations between them are close to one another". Taking the set of elements as the ecologic significance, the conservationist discourse connects protected areas and consequently brings its fringe communities into the grid of global villages. It is seen then a new phase of institutional environmentalism in which global processes have assumed priority over local ones and helped to produce and popularize the idea of a global commons (Mac Donald, 2005:270). In this perspective management models are to benefit from past experiences and the failure of coercive management methods. At the same time, we have to consider the lack of legitimacy of developmental projects' experimentalism. Such approaches, carried out by mediation entities and non-governmental organisations end up frustrating participatory efforts and thus create an atmosphere of distrust. Vertically initiated processes observed on the ground confirm Mac Donald's claim (2005:261) that "local ecologies are becoming subject to institutional agents of globalization through strategies similar to those exercised by colonial administrations". Such colonial powers are also exercised through the multi-faceted tourism exploitation, species protection, bio prospection and development, as well as through aide-projects. Most times disguised as developmental or as community projects these activities have little interest in community-based initiatives or in endogenous development. Many are the development agencies and programmes investing, for example in alternative livelihoods projects as poverty alleviation initiatives. However, the concept adopted, the technologies, sustainability perspective and, more importantly, the origin of the demand for these schemes, is questionable. Ghimire and Pimbert say that "indeed, there has rarely been genuine concern for offering sustainable livelihood alternatives on the part of most conservation planners and administrators" (1997: 35).

Field observations in Ghana allow one to acquiesce with Kasanga and Kotey (2001) on the argument that in Ghana's conservation areas' conflicts and misunderstandings are strongly related to the occupation of land. This is due to the absence of written agreements and demarcation of boundaries. Hence, 'advocacy' through land demarcation and documentation, as initiated by Amokwaw CREMA, brings security over land tenure and ultimately, long term peace. Indeed it must constitute a back bone for long-term amity in these areas. In the cases studied both in Brazil and in Ghana it was observed the influx of migrants to the fringe area of the PA after its establishment. The presence of migrant tenants increases the demand for farm lands and the pressure on natural resources, whether for subsistence or on a more market-oriented demand. The threat to biodiversity safeguard within the institutionalization process of protected area lies within the delicate dynamic of the common property regime which, intrinsic on a traditional socio-cultural fabric, manages the use of such resources. The arrival of a vertical dynamic of management tears this protection belt which then becomes susceptible to outsiders, rendered to become unregulated, or open-access, and exploited for personal gain (Ostrom, 2002; Mc Ivor, 1997: 266).

Conclusions and Outlook

Empirical evidences from the studies here presented illustrate the importance of leadership aspects as well as of democratic and regulatory mechanisms to bring in substantial collective

solidarities. It is observed how conflicts related to PA establishment bring social change. It can, in one hand disrupt traditional social bounds and in the other, as the scenario traced by collaborative strategies, bring unity. Content analysis from oral testimonies allow the conclusion that the failure of development and alternative livelihood initiatives is greatly due to the fact that the projects were vertically suggested rather than raised in an endogenous process, therefore assembling little commitment and participation from community individuals. In Ankasa Conservation Area, in the Western Region of Ghana the major threat to the reserve are outsiders, for the commercial collection of cane and rattan, as well as the chainsaw operators. Illegal hunting was found to be a minor problem nowadays and only practiced occasionally by the villagers. Similar dynamics were observed in the Brazilian Serra da Capivara National Park, where mercantilization of natural resources exploitation are mostly brought by outside hunters, with the exception of a number of cases where poaching can be seen as the only form of resistance to the institutional entities left to local actors.

Furthermore there is also the perspective of consumer's choice, since articulated through particular identity formations, the space become a consumable product. The freedom of choice granted to such consumers of this subjective product - as well as their responsibility and awareness while acquiring, experiencing and feeding back -, define the marketable terms of such spaces and there, the issues of sustainability in the complexity of the term. Observed in the studied cases, and also in Zimbabwe by McIvor (1997) the consolidation of tourist potential demands investments which are often possible only by external entrepreneurs; in this case profits concentrate on few hands, mostly of private entrepreneurs. This scenario potentially brings exclusion of local population from tourism-related activities and increase of hostility. Also in this sphere the urban and rural networks merge, additionally in the choice of objectified products such as bush meat, rattan, wood and so many others that are products and causes of encroachment, where the debate on product's certification can be included.

Such related experiences shall integrate a tool box for spatial negotiation arrangements and co-evolvement (Murdoch 1998: 369) for policy makers, mediation entities and non-governmental organisations as well as to communities themselves, to take matters into hand and build the environment for practical sustainable management of protected areas with respect to local territorialities.

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