

## SUMMARY

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AMONG SOME Brazilian conservationists and Governmental Agencies, such as IBAMA (Brazilian Institute for Environment), there is still the concept that protected areas (National Parks, Ecological Stations) should be empty spaces, with no human dwellers. According to the existing law, the presence of any human group, traditional or not, is a threat to conservation and therefore, traditional communities living in areas before the establishment of the restrictive protected areas should be expelled. It is known however that the traditional communities (mainly artisanal fishermen, riverine and extractive groups) have lived for long time and due to their type of livelihood are, to a large extent, responsible for the conservation of the area. In many cases, the expulsion of these groups has induced the arrival of powerful economic groups such as sawmill processors, land speculators that are responsible for the degradation of protected areas.

In some cases, after the transfer of the traditional population to the surrounding regions, the protected area is considered to belong the government environmental authorities and not to the original dwellers. In this case, very often, the expelled traditional groups also start predatory practices. In the cases these communities have

not been officially expelled, the constraints on the use of natural resources are so restrictive that part of the population migrates in order to make their living elsewhere.

In order to understand the cause of this unjust treatment against traditional populations it is important to understand the origins of the North-American conservationism concerning the creation of national parks in the late 19th century, when the Yellowstone Park was created. These ideas have deeply influenced the establishment of national parks in Brazil.

In the second half of the 19th century, industrialization and urbanization in U.S.A. were an advanced process, and colonization was going on in the western regions. However, in that period there were vast empty or wild areas. Conservationists, like Muir, Thoreau, Marsh were influential in putting aside these areas for recreation and admiration of natural beauty by urban population. This ideology of “wilderness” considered that there is an inverse relationship between human action and the well-being of the natural environment. The natural environment and the urban world were viewed as enemies. In this context, mountains and forested regions and related wildlife were considered as wilderness, an area enhanced and maintained in the absence of people. There areas were seen as pristine environments, similar to those that existed before human interventions. Very few north-American conservationists considered that indians were part of the “wilderness”. George Catlin was an exception and suggested that not only the grazing lands but also the buffaloes and the indians should be protected.

These ideas have deeply influenced the first Brazilian conservationists. Vast areas were considered “empty” and “wild”, although most of them were sparsely populated by traditional communities of small scale fishermen, shifting cultivators, extractive groups. These human groups were not so common in the areas proposed as national parks in the US. Very often parts of the tropical forests in Brazil were and in some case still are maintained in a “wild” state because of the type of livelihood of the traditional population that need to use the natural resources in a wise way in order to survive. However, because of imported conservationist ideas

these traditional human groups should be transferred, by law, from the land their ancestors have inhabited for a long time. Recent studies undertaken by IUCN (Amend, 1992) have shown that only 14% of the national parks in Latin America are inhabited and around 50% of them have traditional dwellers (small farmers, artisanal fishermen). According to the same study inside or around 80% of the Brazilian national parks there are human communities that use natural resources. The NUPAUB/USP – Research Center on Human Populations and Wetlands in Brazil is undergoing an overall survey on traditional communities and protected areas in the Atlantic Forest. In the first phase, four states (São Paulo, Paraná, Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo) are studied. Only in São Paulo in 40% of the parks there is population (traditional or not) living inside the protected areas.

Conservationist ideas concerning the role of traditional populations have evolved, as it can be seen from the various international meetings of IUCN – World Conservation Union in the last 20 years. Many Brazilian conservationists however opposed any change concerning the need for maintaining traditional population in their habitat. Since the IUCN Meeting in Delhi and particularly in the *IV International Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas*, in Caracas (1992), called Peoples and Parks, the positive role of traditional population in national parks conservation has been recognized. Deep knowledge of the ecosystem, long-standing sustainable management practices, dependence on the use of natural resources, ancestral territorial rights were recognized as important arguments to maintain and associate traditional communities with protected areas management.

Recent studies (Balée, 1988; Gomez-Pompa, 1971, 1972; Posey, 1987; Brown, 1992) have shown the role of the traditional communities (indians, small-scale fishermen, traditional peasants) in conserving flora biodiversity in the tropical forests. These researchers claim that it is important to take into consideration the knowledge and expertise of these populations in conserving biodiversity. These studies are relevant as today conservation of biodiversity has become one of the most important functions of the protected areas.

The acceptance of the presence and awareness of the contribution of traditional population to national parks conservation is growing among conservationists and researchers in Brazil, in spite of the fierce opposition of some governmental and non-governmental sectors. The creation of the extractive reserves, result of the struggle of the rubber-tappers (*seringueiros*) is an important step to the recognition of the role of the traditional communities. Other categories involving the contribution of traditional population should also be added to the existing protected area system managed by IBAMA. NUPAUB/USP is proposing a new category entitled: *Ecological and Cultural Reserve as a Strategy to Protect both Biological and Cultural Diversity*.

A new system of protected areas (*Sistema Nacional de Unidades de Conservação*) is being proposed but unfortunately this discussion is restricted to narrow conservationist circles. In the first proposal made by the IBAMA there is barely a place for the traditional population in the system, and this should be changed. The new system is an important issue and should not be handled only by a few conservationist agencies. It should be an issue of interest to be thoroughly discussed within the Brazilian civil society.