

## DISCOURSES OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN THE PROTECTED AREAS AND THE INSERTION OF THE INDIGENOUS AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES IN THIS DEBATE

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**ABSTRACT:**

Appreciation of natural spaces in our society began in the Modern Age, but was inserted in the symbolic idea of nature, something external to the human, therefore, dichotomous. Say that we conserve to contribute for the ecological balance or for the own intrinsic value of biodiversity is partial and perhaps naive. Appreciation of the biodiversity and consequently of the protected areas in the world has much reason in the world economy. In the midst of this discussion are the indigenous and traditional communities, which have different perceptions and values of Nature. Thus, we sought to discuss about the term environmental conservation and its relationship with the indigenous and traditional communities. And on the other hand, seek to understand what conservation is for these communities. For this, the methodology was based on literature review. It is expected to bring geographic reflections to the world thematic, which has Brazil as the main subject in this process.

### DISCURSOS DA CONSERVAÇÃO AMBIENTAL EM ÁREAS PROTEGIDAS E A INSERÇÃO DAS COMUNIDADES INDÍGENAS E TRADICIONAIS NESSE DEBATE

**RESUMO:**

A apreciação dos espaços naturais na nossa sociedade iniciou-se na Idade Moderna, mas, inseriu-se na ideia simbólica da natureza, algo externo ao ser humano, portanto, dicotômica. Dizer que conservamos para contribuir para o equilíbrio ecológico ou para o próprio valor intrínseco da biodiversidade é parcial e talvez ingênuo. A valorização da biodiversidade e conseqüentemente das áreas protegidas no mundo tem muita razão na economia mundial. Em meio a esta discussão estão as comunidades indígenas e tradicionais, ao qual possuem percepções e valores diferenciados da Natureza. Assim, buscou-se discutir acerca do termo conservação ambiental related to the inclusion of indigenous and traditional communities in this debate. E por outro lado, buscar o entendimento do que é conservação para essas comunidades. Para isto, a metodologia baseou-se em revisões bibliográficas. Espera-se trazer reflexões geográficas para a temática, que tem o Brasil como principal nesse processo.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

Conservação  
Cultura  
Áreas protegidas

**DISCURSOS DE LA CONSERVACIÓN AMBIENTAL EN LAS ÁREAS PROTEGIDAS Y LA  
INSERCIÓN DE LAS COMUNIDADES INDÍGENAS Y TRADICIONALES EN ESTE DEBATE**

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**RESUMEN:**

La apreciación de los espacios naturales en nuestra sociedad comenzó en la edad moderna, pero se insertó en la idea simbólica de la naturaleza, algo externo al ser humano, por lo tanto, dicotómica. Decir que conservamos de contribuir al equilibrio ecológico o el valor intrínseco de la biodiversidad es talvez ingenua. La valoración de la biodiversidad y las áreas protegidas tiene toda la razón en la economía mundial. En medio de este debate están las comunidades indígenas y tradicionales, que tienen diferentes percepciones y valores de la naturaleza. Así, tratamos de discutir sobre el término conservación del medio ambiente y su relación con las comunidades indígenas y tradicionales. Y por otro lado, buscar la comprensión del significado de conservación de estas comunidades. Para tanto, la metodología se basa en la revisión de la literatura. Se espera que traiga reflexiones geográficas sobre este tema, que tiene a Brasil como el principal en este proceso.

**INTRODUCTION**

The world conservationist discourse is modern. It derived from the contraposition to industrial capitalism, to which the uses of the natural resources and transformations of Nature accelerate, causing negative environmental impacts, without respecting the natural dynamics.

Still in the nineteenth century, the Romantic writers and the contributions of natural history, influenced the creation of the first national park (1872 – Yellowstone- USA). Its objective was bent on the preservation of the scenic and natural beauty, besides meeting the educational and recreational demand of the urban populations. It was, therefore, a preservationist view, since the idea was that the park was unoccupied and that the people only visit the area. This was the model that has spread worldwide.

Many are the criticism to this preservationist view, mainly Amend; Amend (1992); Gómez - Pompa e Kaus (1992), Diegues (1994), Clay (1985).

Gómez - Pompa and Kaus (1992, p. 273), to whom, the notion of an “untouched” and wild natural world reflects a perception of urban populations that live far from nature. For indigenous groups in the tropics, for example, tropical forest is not wild – it is their home.

This reflection is important since it denotes that the territory is not only a space of state governance, there were other territories and indigenous and traditional territorialities involved, which were totally disregarded at the moment of the creation of the protected areas (called Conservation Unities in Brazil).

Therefore, this paper aims to discuss about the term environmental conservation through the creation of protected areas related to the inclusion of indigenous and traditional communities in this debate. The specific objective is to understand the different conceptions that our urban-industrial society and indigenous and traditional peoples shed light on the meaning of the term conservation. For this, the methodology was based on specific literature review, focusing on human populations and protected areas, as well as authors of the Cultural

Geography and anthropology to the understanding of the conservation concept for indigenous and traditional communities.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN THE PROTECTED AREAS AND INDIGENOUS /TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES**

In the global context, the first protected area – Yellowstone National Park – was created in the year 1872, and encompasses the states of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. The purpose of this type of park is to ensure the protection to the environment from human intervention. It was, therefore, a preservationist view, since the idea was that the park was unoccupied and that the people only visit the area. This was the model that has spread worldwide.

The consequences of this preservationist model, associated with the fact that the creation of parks and reserves has been performed without social participation, from “top to bottom”, there were expropriations, disappropriations and countless socio-environmental conflicts in territories where indigenous and traditional communities lived (Risso, 2005) generating incompatibilities with the present parks and reserves legislation (Clay 1985, Amend e Amend 1992, Gomez-Pompa e kaus 1992, Diegues 1994, Brito (2000), Adams (2000), Ferreira (2004).

Based on this historical, the concept of the traditional communities emerged as a way to fight for the land rights of indigenous and traditional communities, preventing the creation of protected areas under the call of the methodology "full protection", resulting in the expulsion of these communities in the territories they occupy secularly.

In world literature the preoccupation with communities (indigenous people) in protected areas appears in events and publications of the IUCN<sup>1</sup>.

In 1985, the debate on population and parks is highlighted with the magazine Cultural Survival, especially the article by Clay (1985).

Influenced by discussions involving issues of indigenous peoples and the formation of full protection areas, began the "discussions on whether to stay in the territory of protected natural areas, populations which is usually called traditional" (Vianna, p .92). Thus, arises primarily the concept of traditional peoples (Redford and Mansour, 1996).

Traditional peoples and indigenous have become important in the management of conserved landscapes (Redford and Mansour, 1996), tanto que Nietschmann (1992, p.18) emphasizes “the correspondence between indigenous land and forest cover is strong enough that one geographer has dubbed it the “rule of indigenous environments”.

According Beltrán (2000, p.ix), IUCN book editor, should not be conflicting interests between the conservation of the protected area and traditional/indigenous peoples, as [...] “where indigenous and traditional peoples are interested in the conservation and traditional use of their lands, territories, waters, coastal seas and other resources, and their fundamental human rights are accorded, conflicts need not arise” [...].

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<sup>1</sup> World Congress of Bali in 1982. Publications 1980 IUCN - "World Conservation Strategy" Conference on Conservation and Development in 1986 (IUCN), 27. Session work of the National Parks Commission and protected areas of IUCN " frown Strategy to Action "(1988-IUCN), Handbook for management of protected areas in the tropics (IUCN, 1986), Fourth World Parks Congress in Caracas (1992 IUCN), which recognized the permanence of people with traditional cultures of a irreplaceable knowledge of nature (Diegues, 1994, p.99).

The publication of the IUCN brings in its principle 1, the following statement (Beltrán, 2000, p.9): “Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas: Principles, Guidelines and Case Studies”. Indigenous and other traditional peoples are those having:

[...] long associations with nature and a deep understanding of it. Often they have made significant contributions to the maintenance of many of the earth's most fragile ecosystems, through their traditional sustainable resource use practices and culture-based respect for nature. Therefore, there should be no inherent conflict between the objectives of protected areas and the existence, within and around their borders, of indigenous and other traditional peoples. Moreover, they should be recognised as rightful, equal partners in the development and implementation of conservation strategies that affect their lands, territories, waters, coastal seas, and other resources, and in particular in the establishment and management of protected areas (BELTRAN, 2000, p.9).

Other terms that have emerged in the debate were “traditional ecological knowledge”, “Indigenous Knowledge” and “local Knowledge”.

Traditional ecological knowledge seeks “to define and describe knowledge that is derived from human observations and experiences on local landscapes” (Ream, 2013, p.2).

For Berkes, Kislalioglu and Folke (1998, p.409) many traditional ecological knowledge systems are “compatible with the emerging view of ecosystems as unpredictable and uncontrollable, and of ecosystem processes as nonlinear, multiequilibrium, and full of surprises” (BERKES, KISLALIOGLU, FOLKE, 1998, p.409).

Ream (2013, p.2) criticizes the usage of terms “traditional” and “ecological”, to the extent that “compartmentalize the knowledge as something that is both stagnant in time and narrow in focus, ignoring the fluid, dynamic, and complex nature of its existence”.

Indigenous Knowledge “is more specific than traditional ecological knowledge in that it recognizes the distinct origins of knowledge obtained through indigenous cultural heritage” [...]. The author holds that the mere fact of not including the word “traditional,” “recognizes that this knowledge is constantly changing – it is not the same now as it was in the past and will be in the future” (REAM, 2013, p.2).

The risk of abstracting this form of knowledge from its cultural and historical context is high and we must remember that ecological knowledge held by a group is but one aspect of their overall culture (Berkes 1999 apud REAM, 2013, p.3).

Local knowledge is “based knowledge of non-indigenous origin, these recognize that place-based knowledge often transcends ethnic heritage. They also alleviate the connotation that the knowledge in questions is a relic of a past time” (REAM, 2013, p.3).

In Brazil, the first Park created was Itatiaia, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1937, following the precepts of the American national parks and adopting a preservationist view, aiming to “promote scientific research and provide leisure to the urban populations” (DIEGUES, 1994, p.103).

At this time, based on the international debate, Brazil started to use the term “traditional communities” referring to the non-indigenous populations, but possessed of knowledge on forests and living directly on natural resources in their territories.

The movements in favour of traditional communities that lived in Parks erupted, including community representatives and researchers, among them, professor Dr. Antonio

Carlos Diegues. These movements are part of the conservationist view, which believes in the compatibility between Society and Nature.

Diegues (1992, p. 142) considers that traditional communities are those:

[...] related with a type of economic and social organization with little or no capital accumulation, not using salaried workforce. In it, independent producers are involved in small scale economic activities, such as agriculture and fishing, gathering and handicraft. Thus, economically, these communities are based on the use of renewable natural resources. An important characteristic of this mercantile production mode is the knowledge that the producers have of the natural resources, their biological cycles, eating habits, etc. This traditional know-how, passed down from generation to generation, is an important tool for conservation. Their consumption patterns, low population density and limited technologic development make that its interference in the environment be low. Other important characteristics of many traditional communities are: combination of several economic activities (within a complex calendar), reuse of waste and relatively low level of pollution. Conservation of natural resources is an integral part of their culture, an idea expressed in Brazil by the word “respect”, which applied not only to nature but also to other members of the community.

According to this conceptualization, Diegues (1994, p. 79) organized the description of a number of characteristics of the traditional communities, facilitating that studies carried out in conflict areas between Parks and local communities could have instruments to identify these communities. Thus, according to Diegues (1994, p. 79), traditional communities can be identified by the following characteristics:

- a) Dependence and even symbiosis with nature, natural cycles and renewable natural resources, around which a “way of life” is constructed;
- b) Thorough knowledge of nature and its cycles, which is reflected in the elaboration of strategies of use and management of natural resources. This knowledge is passed from generation to generation by orality,
- c) Notion of territory or space where the group reproduce economically and socially;
- d) Dwelling and occupation of this territory for several generations, although some individual members may have moved to urban centres and returned to the land of their ancestors;
- e) Importance of the subsistence activities, although the production of goods may be more or less developed, which implies a relationship with the market;
- f) Reduced capital accumulation;
- g) Importance given to the family, domestic or communal unity and the kinship and crony relations for the exercise of the economical, social and cultural activities;
- h) Importance of symbologies, myths and rituals associated with hunting, fishing and extractive activities;
- i) The technology used is relatively simple, of limited impact on the environment. There is a reduced technical and social division of the work, highlighting the handicraft. In it, the producer and his family master the work process until the final product;
- j) Weak political power, which in general resides in power groups of the urban centres; and
- k) Self-identification or identification by others of belonging to a culture different from the others.

Over time, other institutions or researchers have been debating the concept, strengthening it politically.

Cunha; Almeida (1999, p.3), references in studies with populations of Alto Juruá (Acre), conceptualizes traditional communities as:

[...] those who accept the implications of the definition that requires the sustainable use of natural resources, whether it is according to practices transmitted by tradition or by new practices. In this sense, even the oldest and culturally more conservationist of the human groups can become neotraditional.

[...] In short, participate of the category “traditional populations” means to have a local organization and legitimate leaderships, associate to traditions of sustainable use of natural resources in the past, and join into a specified territory to the use of techniques of low environmental impact in the future. Operationally it is what is verified, for example, when creating an extractive reserve, through the step that is claiming the unity by an association or syndicate, performance of reports that prove the state of the environment and the existence of forms of sustainable uses, and finally the elaboration of a plan of use and grant of use.

Cunha and Almeida (2002) explains that traditional communities have a kind of wisdom that is based on knowledge, practice and experimentation, i.e., are dynamic knowledge, experienced in their natural laboratories and thus not only passed knowledge from generation to generation. These concepts of traditional communities were essential to support the territorial fight of these peoples, but there is much controversy about the concepts due to the different views of the conservationists and preservationists. For example, the hope of the social movements or those that defended the traditional communities<sup>2</sup> was that the draft Law (2892 of 1992) would solve the overlapping issue of the areas enacted where these communities lived. However, after the approval of the project by the Law 9985 of 2000 that created the SNUC (Sistema Nacional de Unidades de Conservação) – National System of Conservation Unities, several articles that dealt with these issues were vetoed and there was no legal change within the tropical reality to allow the presence of communities in integral protection unities. On the contrary, it continued inside a preservationist view and did not follow the evolution of the concept as suggested by the main international conservation agencies such as IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature).

Fortunately, an opening was found in this hegemonic model in the national conservation policy through the contemplation in the SNUC of the categories of sustainable use unities as extractive reserves and reserves of sustainable development. These categories allow the permanence of traditional populations, and currently this conservationist model is being exported to the world with many positive experiences of compatibilization between society and nature.

The legal concept of traditional population or people/traditional communities came long after, via Decree. 6040 of 7 February 2007, in its Article 3 defines what people or traditional communities are:

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<sup>2</sup>As an example, Dr. Antonio Carlos Diegues (USP-NUPAUB), anthropologist, who helped many caíças and quilombolas communities of São Paulo State coast.

[...] culturally different groups and are recognized as such, which have their own forms of social organization, which occupy and use territories and natural resources as a condition for their cultural, social, religious, ancestral and economic reproduction, using knowledge, innovations and practices generated and transmitted by tradition (BRAZIL, 2007).

The concept serves chiefly to the issue of permanence in protected areas, which, in turn, involves legal, political and environmental issues. A community is characterized as such can not be expropriated from its place, but must comply with current legislation and know how to live with the restrictions in a protected area, and should seek other forms of income, considered sustainable in order to survive<sup>3</sup>.

Well, the “conservationist” character has become fundamental in the conceptualization of traditional communities.

So much so that there was a series of studies elaborating methods to prove (or not) the effectiveness of protected areas with community governance. Including the IUCN currently designated it as ICCAS – areas conserved by indigenous and traditional communities, which supports and recognizes the importance of these areas for environmental conservation, highlighting that the biological conservation depends on the cultural.

These researches<sup>4</sup> are related to ethno-conservation, which "allows the inclusion of a new perspective, sensitive to the perception that sustainable management of natural resources developed by these populations contributes to the conservation of the same" (PEREIRA; Diegues, 2010, p. 45).

Posey (1987) statements came from his experience with the Kaiapós in the Amazon region, to which was diagnosed several domesticated and semi-domesticated utilized species and affirmed in an unprecedented manner that "many varieties traditionally used by different family groups were taken to where its members were dispersed."

Robinson and Redford (1991, p.xvi) showed that the tropical wildlife use are important sources of protein for people and “anthropologists documented the reliance of both indigenous groups and colonists on wild game and other natural products.

Berkes e Folke (1998) presented several case studies of populations through concept of resilience, remain connected to their environment. The authors defined the concept of resilience as “the capacity of a system to absorb disturbances”.

Colchester (2000), in their study of the rainforest, showed that these forests were preserved and high biodiversity for livelihood and self management "sustainable" practiced by these people.

Silva (2003) analyzed the distribution of 94 primates. “Without the indigenous lands, most of the Amazon primates could be in the route to extinction” (Silva, 2003). The criterion used by him was that a single species can be considered protected when at least 20% of its distribution coincides with conservation unities or indigenous lands. When the integral protection conservation unities are analyzed separately, only one species of Amazon primate can be considered protected. Adding the protection unities of sustainable use to those of

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that the concept also serves to exclude, as communities considered non- traditional can be expropriated area, without any discussion (see Vianna, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Many authors aimed to understand the use of plants by communities came to understand the connections between conservation and management, and therefore founded discussions above ethno-conservation, ethno-knowledge within the call ethnoscience.

integral protection, the number of protected species goes to 13. Now, when the conservation unities of all the categories are computed together with the indigenous lands, the number jumps to 71 protected species. However, 23 “orphan” species, which live in areas without any kind of formal protection, remain. “We already knew that indigenous lands are fundamental to curb deforestation and maintain the biodiversity of the region, but it is the first time that this importance is quantified in terms of species and sub-species protected of a certain biological group”.

These studies (proof of ecological sustainability) are very relevant, but caution is needed to not subjugate and condemn these communities to naturalism (“From the naturalized indian to the naturalist indian” (Descola 1985, apud ALBERT, 2002, p. 256) much less how people with residual cultures, static, petrified.

As Descola (1996, p. 83) says, the dualism between society and nature is an inadequate tool because in many indigenous communities there are other ways and interactions with the physical environment. It can be said that the cosmologies of indigenous and traditional peoples go beyond this dichotomic thinking. For them there is a complex understanding of the universe.

For a long time, communities manage and conserve certain species or areas for reasons directly related with culture, such as food taboos, sacred places and subsistence practices. There was not an idea of preserving to preserve, within a modern conception of conservation, but the own way of life.

So environmental conservation by communities or indigenous and traditional peoples includes culture as a whole, not only the conservation of a species or environment itself. Indeed, it is vital that express intercultural dialogue regarding the discourse of occidental environmental conservation takes place in agonistic way for "reaffirmation of identity and purpose ethno-political claim" (ALBERT, 2002, p.14).

It refers to people who create and recreate their landscapes, the result of the mediation of people with nature. As claimed by Berque (1990, p.48) the landscape is a "sensitive and symbolic dimension of the environment, middle of a speech". According to the author, the landscape is brand and matrix. Brand, "because it expresses a civilization," and matrix because as "part of the schemes of perception, thinking and action, i.e. culture - that channel, in a sense, the relationship of a company with the space and the nature and therefore the landscape of your ecumenical community". Berque, 2004<sup>5</sup>, p.84).

Bonneimason (2002<sup>6</sup>, p.91) points out that the correspondence "between a company and its landscape is full of affection and expresses a cultural relationship in the broad sense of the word." The landscapes reflect these relations with the visible materiality, and other immaterial part of the world of representations, affections, perceptions, myths, legends, symbols, languages, memories, rituals, festivals, music, among others.

Both authors converged plural understanding of the relationships between societies and nature. Therefore, the landscapes are marked by the material universe and subjective created by humans (RISSO, 2008). Hence, the landscapes are cultural, not wildernesses (AMEND, AMEND, 1992 Diegues, 1994). And yet, in this sense, the territory of these people was formed not only material and political form, but symbolically (RISSO, 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> Originally published in 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Originally published in 1981.



The word traditional, referred to culture, should fails to nominate a static culture. The traditionalism is closely linked to the appreciation of the elements of culture on the part of a people. It is dynamic, historic (Le GOFF, 1997) and there are always elements that are replaced by others or even with other multi-functionality. Therefore, the traditional word as a people or community adjective, though adjective a history of struggle and territorial involvement, could be replaced by people who value their natural and cultural heritage, or even by people with local knowledge, in the case of non-indigenous, as exposed for Ream (2013).

It is crucial to demystify these communities are not harmonic, as every kind of relationship between culture and nature has an impact, both positive and negative. As for the negative, the difference of the impacts generated by our society is that indigenous and traditional communities allow the resumption of biostasis process, leaving the process of ecological succession happen in time. That's what Berkes and Folke (1998) demonstrated with examples of resilience in traditional peoples. About this Almeida and Cunha (1999) believe that "changes will not necessarily lead to situations of predatory super-exploitation", since for the traditional communities it is important to conserve the natural resources so that the social group maintain certain level of limitation on the use.

These considerations are important for the romantic view on the traditional people does not harm their social and cultural dynamics. The contradiction of the presence of protected areas is that it allows the permanence of the same, but they can not have changes in their territoriality, can not build houses, etc. Finally, many give up and leave their territories.

In fact, the intention of preservationists really is that people are taken from protected areas through a series of strategies and relocation policies. For those who hold this view [...] people of all kinds, whether indigenous or not, constitute serious threat to biodiversity of any park when their livelihoods are derived from the resources of the protected area" (TERBORGH; PERES, 2002, p.334), and the end goal is that the parks are "free people" (p.337).

This ends up being a discourse that realizes the nature as a distinct object from the Society and remit to an essential issue: why create protected areas after all? Before created for contemplation and leisure purposes, today, care should be taken with the countless economic interests in megadiverse countries such as Brazil, to which biodiversity has associated cultural values.

The discussion is complex. The protection of the natural/cultural areas must exist, as also the protection of indigenous and traditional peoples. We can then think of other ways to gestate, to democratic way and to recognize the rights of the people involved and their cultural reproduction freedoms. Facing all these external and prejudiced disturbances and neo-colonial thoughts, the indigenous and traditional communities are constantly having to reinvent, reinterpret themselves culturally; reaffirming themselves ethnically and territorially claiming.

## CONCLUSIONS

In fact, traditional indigenous populations always lived and conserved the tropical forests and other landscapes, true natural and cultural heritage.

So much so that many of these areas were converted into protected areas.

The word conservation cannot be used as if there is a consensus. The conservation discourse inserts the discussion of indigenous and traditional peoples, but “naturalizes” them. On the side of the indigenous peoples there is another logical of thinking. It is the culture that gives meaning to Nature. Everything is inseparable. Are we really considering these different views? Or are we still stuck on the dominant view that separates the human being from Nature?

Sometimes, this otherness is not understood, because it is necessary to break free from the ethnocentric and anthropocentric view to an holistic view, which understands the Nature not as alien to human being, but as part of it. We have much to learn with these communities. In general, traditional and indigenous territories cannot be in any hypothesis suffer the consequences such as expropriation, conflicts and impoverishment over the discourse of Nature protection. We long for a future that respects (indeed) the differences of the universe, as well as all the existent life forms.

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