



# Participation in protected area management planning in coastal Brazil



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## ABSTRACT

Over the past ten years, efforts have been made in the Paraty region of Brazil towards more active state governance of coastal resources through the implementation and enforcement of various types of protected areas. Trindade is one of the communities making efforts to advocate for themselves as the key stakeholders in a negotiation process for a no-take protected area management plan. As is happening across South America, there has been a shift in policy in Brazil towards participatory environmental governance practices. The objective of this paper is to analyze the quality of community participation in a resource governance process, the perceptions of participating and non-participating community members, and the actual influence of community participants on the protected area management plan under review (in 2012/2013). The research was conducted as interdisciplinary action research. Data were collected through a qualitative approach, using mixed methods of narratives, interviews, focus groups, participant observation and workshops. The negotiation process and community participation in this negotiation process was studied through observation of meetings. Analysis of the negotiation process revealed the importance that community participants place on their rights as Caiçaras, and four further key themes emerged; communication disconnect, opportunity and capacity to participate, representation and decision-making, and conflict. Meaningful participation in natural resources management has not yet been achieved in the process reviewed. The process described is the initial phase of a long-term relationship between community members and government authorities, and changes need to be made so that the desired outcomes for natural resources management are more likely to be achieved.

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## 1. Introduction

Participation in development has been both widely supported and harshly criticized. On the positive side, participation discourse offers more “voice and choice” to the poor in development (Cornwall, 2006), and participatory development is based on “involving ‘beneficiaries’, or more generally, ‘local people’, in development processes” (Eversole, 2003: 781). From a critical perspective, participation has often been oversimplified, decontextualized, exclusive and depoliticized. Even a thoughtfully designed program focused on a marginalized group can still exclude people or allow for elite capture (Sesan, 2014).

In the natural resources management literature, there has also been a great deal of focus on participation (Morinville and Harris,

2014; Coelho and Favareto, 2008), such as in the area of community-based natural resource management and in the discourse on protected area management. Although protected area management is still predominately executed through top-down approaches, Murray and King (2012: 385) explain that there has been a shift, and that the approach from the 1980s onwards can be characterized by what some call a ‘new approach’, based on a changing dialogue that includes concepts of “plurality, increased community participation, decentralization, and a broadening of the perceived objectives for protected areas”.

In Brazil, there has been a shift in terms of policy, to a certain extent. Like many countries, Brazil does not have a strong history of capable governmental natural resources management, and generally has favoured a top-down approach often more linked to political reasons than conservation (Adams, 2003). The approach was strongly influenced by the ‘fortress model’ of conservation that has roots in the United States (Dean 1997; Diegues, 1998; Adams, 2003; Rylands and Brandon, 2005). Brazil is signatory to the

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**Table 1**  
Criticisms of participation in the development literature.

Elite capture	Local elites can capture more power, influence development decisions, and/or enhance their control over services and resources. This also includes organizations.	Costa et al. (1997), Mohan (2002) and Sesan (2014)
Power	Lack of understanding about power relationships; failure to treat power as a central issue.	Hickey and Mohan (2005)
Co-optation	Can occur from above or below. From above, people may be coerced or only nominally participating for various reasons. From below, people can refuse to participate unless some demands are met.	White (1996), Cooke and Kothari (2001) and Mutamba (2004)
Depoliticised	Give people a role to participate, rather than change the existing system. Narrow focus on the technical aspects of participation.	White (1996), Cooke and Kothari (2001)
Localism	Focus is on the local situation, neglecting the broader institutions and forces causing injustice and oppression.	Hickey and Mohan (2005); Mohan and Stokke (2000)
Downloading without resourcing	Increasing burden on individuals and communities; cost cutting and blaming communities.	White (1996) and Marcus and Onjala (2008)
Lack of rigour	Dearth of evidence that participatory approaches meet claims made about their potential.	Cleaver (1999)
Assumption of heterogeneity	Underestimates complexity of communities, and discounts cultural differences.	Costa et al. (1997), Eversole (2003) and Reddel and Woolcock (2004)

Convention on Biological Diversity and considers protected areas<sup>1</sup>, known as Conservation Units, “the territorial space and its environmental resources . . . with conservation objectives and defined limits, under special management regime” (Brazil, 2000). Conservation Units may be of sustainable-use, such as an extractive reserve, or no-take strictly protected areas such as parks and ecological stations. In 2000, a law called the National System of Conservation Units (SNUC) was issued. Under this system, management structures and policies dictate that the process of developing or modifying environmental management plans must be participatory (Silva, 2005; Seixas et al., 2009), but in most cases only to the level of being consultative, not deliberative.<sup>2</sup>

Brazil is under significant international pressure to maximize conservation efforts in the Atlantic Forest. The Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve was created in 1991 (Adams et al., 2013), and it is one of the largest Reserves ever recognized by UNESCO (Rylands and Brandon, 2005). In 2010, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) a globally influential member organization, opened a new office in Brasilia, and its plans involved an emphasis on working closely with ICMBio,<sup>3</sup> the Federal Agency responsible for conservation of biodiversity (IUCN, 2010). In 2012, at the ‘World Conservation Congress’, IUCN passed a resolution to include the Atlantic Forest as a “priority biome for conservation” and requested the inclusion of programs with “specific and measurable initiatives to influence public policies to better protect the Atlantic Forest” (IUCN, 2012). In November 2014 at the IUCN World Parks Congress, Brazil pledged to protect five percent of its marine waters (IISD, 2014).

The Paraty region of Brazil is located in the Atlantic Forest biome. Over the past ten years, efforts have been made in the Paraty region towards more active state governance of coastal resources through the implementation and enforcement of various types of protected areas. Trindade is one of the communities making efforts to advocate for themselves as the key stakeholders in a negotiation process for a no-take protected area management plan. For more than 200 years, the community of Trindade self-governed their small-scale resource use for coastal fishing, agriculture, forestry, and shellfish harvesting. The combination of large amounts of tourists and associated revenue in an area with Atlantic Forest remnants makes Trindade an important area of interest for conservation. With the enforcement of the protected area on the community land and coastal waters, Trindade may

largely become a gateway community to the protected area, and the long-term outcomes of these changes are unknown.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the quality of community participation in a resource governance process, the perceptions of participating and non-participating community members, and the actual influence of community participants on the protected area management plan under review (in 2012/2013). There is a gap in the literature related to evaluating participation in natural resource management (Clarke, 2008), and evaluating participation in a negotiation process is also an area that needs exploration. In the experience that will be described in this paper, the policy regarding participation has not necessarily been fully operationalized. Although there were indeed some efforts to allow for community member participation, numerous issues remain with the process. In the absence of an enabling process, people will have to ask themselves if participation is really worth their time (Trimble et al., 2014).

The next section will consider the literature on participation in development and in the resource management literature. We will then describe the community and the process in question, and then present findings related to the management plan negotiation process as well as the key themes that emerged related to participation. ICMBio is the Federal Authority responsible for governance of the protected area discussed in this paper. The government officials involved in the specific management process are staff of the Serra da Bocaina National Park (PNSB), and will hereinafter be referred to as PNSB. Community members with official roles in the negotiation process as members of the Park Management Council will be referred to as Councillors.

## 2. Participation in development and natural resources management

A common theme in development and natural resources management literature is that making processes, programs, and management arrangements more participatory is valued, but there are many concerns related to the emphasis on participation. Much of the development literature on participation is focused on techniques of participation (Cleaver, 1999). Hickey and Mohan (2005: 11) argue that many of the problems are due to participation being dominated by a focus on “development interventions and experts” that “obscures an analysis of what makes participation difficult for marginal groups in the first place”.

There are a number of dichotomies apparent in the literature on participation – top-down/bottom-up; insider/outsider perspectives (Eversole, 2003); participation as a means/ends, or as a tool/process (Cleaver, 1999); instrumental/empowering (Cleaver, 1999); empowering/colonial, active/passive, objects/agents. Participatory development is generally framed as emerging due to the

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Protected Areas’ is used in Brazil to include Conservation Units, Indigenous land, and Marrons lands (Quilombolas).

<sup>2</sup> Deliberative participation takes place only within Extractive Reserves and Sustainable Development Reserves.

<sup>3</sup> Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade (Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation), a branch of the Ministry of Environment.

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