

Case Study: Prainha do Canto Verde (Ceará – Brazil)

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Summary :

On the North-East coast, a community of artisan fishermen have made inroads into community-based tourism.

1. Specification

- Name: Prainha do Canto Verde
- Short name: A Prainha
- Legal structure: Informal cooperative (between 2000 and 2009); Tourism Council (community-based organisation)
- Status: Active
- Date of creation: 1994
- Website: prainhadocantoverde.org/
- Organisations or networks that it belongs to: Network of Community-based Tourism of Ceara, (TUCUM, with head office in Fortaleza, tucum.org/)

2. Sector

- Category: Community-based tourism
- Reach: Local
- Context: Rural

3. Description

The beginnings: problem and start-up

It was the early 90s. There continued to be decreasing fish stocks, the price of land was increasing due to property speculation and the threat of mass tourism was becoming a reality. In response to this, the community decided to organise itself to find ways to protect their territory and improve their quality of life. They created a tourism council, amongst others, and following much research, reached a resounding conclusion: tourist entrepreneurs did not own the land and they were not focused on growth.

Antonio Aires, a fisherman of the community and one of the leaders of the project, explains how the initiative came into being: in 1998 the Council of Community-based Tourism was created (with over 100 members), and functioned as an informal cooperative from 2000 to 2009. The Council adhered to the values of “community-based and sustainable tourism.” This was the first experience of community-based tourism on the Brazilian coast, and it managed to win over the initial scepticism of some members of the community.

The concept: idea, innovation, social technology

Community-based tourism in La Prainha is mainly focused on the redistribution of income and on the cultural and environmental preservation of the area. Therefore, the products and services offered to tourists are provided

by community members (food, handicrafts, tourist guides) and there is no sense of competition between the inns (pousadas). This is a form of tourism which, according to Antonio, must continue being only one complementary source of income -it currently represents 15%- thus enabling improved living standards for the community's inhabitants without endangering their cultural traditions or environment. It is clear that they do not intend to abandon artisan fishing in order to dedicate themselves entirely to attending to tourists, nor are they willing to transform their culture and traditions in order to satisfy mass tourism, were it to come about.

Following this way of thinking, in 2008 they founded, along with other organised communities, the Network of Community-based Tourism of Ceara ([TUCUM](#)). Today, 11 coastal communities and two associations in Fortaleza (one for women and the other for the MST, the Landless Rural Workers' Movement) are part of the network. The main aims are to spread and increase the visibility of community-based tourism and to create strategies which lead to greater political awareness within the communities, in particular regarding systematic violations of their rights.

Evolution: problems faced and solutions implemented

Problem: The formalisation process is complicated and bureaucratic

Solution: Strengthening the Tucum network. The support of sister organisations, especially the [Terramar Institute](#)

Problem: Threats from landowners which sometimes lead to court action. The “*grelhagem*” (somebody claiming to be the owner of the land)

Solution: Tourism strengthened the community organisation and became a complementary source of income.

On 5th June 2009, the area was declared by presidential decree a *reserva extractivista*, thus creating a protected zone spanning almost 30,000 hectares in which mega-projects and industrial projects, which compromise the survival and wellbeing of the inhabitants, are prohibited.

Problem: People in the community were not used to having strangers stay in their homes.

Solution: With time they grew accustomed to it and now they see it as an enriching experience.

Problem: Predatory and illegal fishing, lack of monitoring (fiscalização) and presence of fishermen who are not from the community.

Solution: None has been found.

Aims

- Protection from the harmful effects of mass tourism.
- Controlling property speculation.
- Creating a complementary source of income to improve people's quality of life.
- Strengthening the community organisation and increasing recognition of the importance of the culture and environment.
- Protecting the ecosystem and the area's biodiversity.

Activities

- Principal: Traditional fishing (lobster)
- Secondary: Tourism; Rearing animals; Agriculture; Handicrafts

Beneficiaries / Clients

Beneficiaries:

- Owners of the inns (posadas).
- Providers of supplies and services, such as farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, tour guides, etc.
- The community in general: there is a notable improvement in quality of life. Nowadays they are more aware of their rights and how to stand up for them.

Clients:

- Responsible tourists (half are foreigners).

Financial backers

Self-financed community initiative.

Other organisations involved

Associação de moradores da Prainha do Canto Verde, Instituto Terramar, Red Turisol, Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra (MST)

Self-sufficiency and self-management

The majority of the tourist ventures are self-sufficient. However, the network does not yet have a system of reserves and is not self-managed (for now it relies on managerial support from the Instituto Terramar).

4. Analysis

Results obtained

The creation of the network has allowed entrepreneurs to have access to more training and the number of tourists in the Prainha has increased. Not only has there been increased visibility but links have also been established with groups of students studying tourism and the environment, who come to see for themselves how community-based tourism works.

The network won the TO DO!99 (Socially Responsible Tourism Competition).

In 2008 the Brazilian government recognised community-based tourism as a tool in eradicating poverty. The network managed to have the Government declare the area a *reserva extractivista*.

SWOT

- **Weaknesses:** Logistics; Infrastructure is sometimes inefficient. Lack of marketing, accounting and tourism management training.
- **Opportunities:** The zone has many tourist attractions (landscape, climate, beach, gastronomy, culture, etc). World Cup in 2014 and Olympic Games in 2016 (might also be a threat). Growth in demand for responsible eco-tourism.
- **Strengths:** Tourists come back. Ecosystems are preserved. Excellent gastronomy. Strong support from sister organisations. The community works together.
- **Threats:** Mass tourism. Property speculation. External instability.

Sustainability

- **Economic:** Tourism provides the community with a complementary source of income. It offers high-quality services at a fair price, which guarantees the financial viability. In the long term it is hoped that the community will be able to manage the whole service provision chain itself.
- **Social:** Income is redistributed and brings direct benefits to the majority of community members. People's quality of life has improved and today they are more aware of their rights. However, tourism is still not a viable option for young people in the community, who continue to emigrate to the cities.
- **Environmental:** Thanks to the community's efforts, today the area is protected by law. All tourist activities are carried out in a way that respects and protects the environment. The majority of foodstuffs come from local, peasant agriculture.
- **Cultural:** Tourism reclaims the culture of the community and allows for the preservation of traditional fishing methods and local handicrafts, applying fair trade principles.

Spreading good practices and transferring social technologies

The Prainha model can easily be replicated in any other community with a moderate to high potential for tourism. It constitutes an effective way of protecting against the harmful effects of mass tourism, such as property speculation, destruction of the environment and exploitation of workers.

The creation of community networks, community tourist operators and national networks strengthens these initiatives. The support of sister institutions (NGOs, social movements) is essential. Efforts should focus on developing a plan of action, manuals and guides, training or support workshops, with the aim of

- a) Strengthening the organisations and improving the services offered by communities that already operate in the sphere of tourism.
- b) Creating support structures and directly supporting communities who are looking to improve their tourist ventures.

- c) Allowing community tourism to acquire national and continental visibility, as the sum of many linked local initiatives which are along the same lines and following the same principles.