

Between Common and no mans land: the case of the Jaú National Park in Brazil.

Muriel Saragoussi¹
Luíz Fernando de Souza Santos¹

Vitória Amazônica Foundation (FVA) is a nonprofit, non-governmental conservation organization based in Manaus, Amazonas, the largest state in Brazil. Created in 1990, FVA carry out multidisciplinary and local oriented programs including scientific research, socio-economic and environmental education field projects and a host of other conservation activities within the Rio Negro Basin.

Since 1993, FVA has an agreement with the Brazilian Environmental Agency (IBAMA) to elaborate and implement the management plan of the Jaú National Park (JNP) the largest in Brazil (2,27 M ha) (figure 1). The Park was decreed in 1980 and during 12 years nothing happens. In 1992, most of the inhabitants didn't know they were living in a park or even what was a National Park. According to the Brazilian law, park inhabitants should be taken out of it. From the beginning, FVA considered that this might go against the interests of protecting the park integrity.

In order to elaborate de management plan and to define the zoning of the park, biotic, abiotic and social researches were conduced. An extensive work was done with the park inhabitants, including mapping their use of natural resources and trying to understand their relation with the environment.

The Jaú Park has around 1000 inhabitants, 2/3 of them living in the northern frontier of the park, along the Unini river and its tributaries, and 1/3 along the main river, the Jaú, and its tributaries. It is a very low density of people (around 0,04 Hab. per Km²) and based in their information, they use less than 14% of the forested area of the park (extractive activities).

The park inhabitants normally use around 45 different species of animals and 27 species of plants for their activities, not taking in account medicinal plants, seasoning, and some roots and fruit collected fortuitously. Among the plants, only 5 are cultivated and the others collected in the forest. Only 2 are collected as aliments and the rest for selling (9) or for building their houses and daily life objects (11). The animals, 17 species of fish, 12 mammals, 9 reptiles and 7 birds, are mainly used for feeding (28). Some of them, 13, serve both for food and for commercial purpose and 4 species of ornamental fishes are collected only for selling.

A participatory methodology was developed to map their use of natural in order to subsidize the zoning of the park. Based on hydrologic maps, satellite images and their knowledge of the park reality, they put into maps small banner marking the places where the resources are collected, including their fields, houses and oven (figure 2).

¹ Fundação Vitória Amazônica
Rua R/S quadra Q casa 7, Conjunto Morada da Sol - Aleixo
69 060-080 - Manaus
Brazil
<muriel@fva.org.br> - <luiz@fva.org.br> - <www.fva.org.br>.

The methodology also includes the explanation of legal concepts, like national parks and zoning and a long discussion on the aim of the mapping: establish a special zone in the park that includes their activities and their resources. Their presence in the park had to be negotiated with the government (IBAMA) as part of the implementation of the management plan, making them actors in the park preservation.

The information gathered was transferred to a GIS and together with the researchers' information, subsidizes the difficult negotiation with IBAMA where finally the zoning of the Park was approved (figure 3).

Discussions and researches conducted by FVA creates awareness, but also, through the mapping activities, creates anxiety. In a region where most part of the people are illiterates, putting data into papers kind of crystallizes the situation it was suppose to illustrate.

Some persons interpreted their individual map as a form of legalization of their area and the map of each community as the territory the community had the right to explore. Some persons put in the map all the places they had explored in their all life, others only what they were using in the past few years. It took many meetings and discussion to overcome this problems and there are still peoples using their individual maps as an argument in territorial disputes as well as they use the management plan to avoid the invasion of the park by other users (mainly professional fishers). None of the park inhabitant has any legal title of their land, even if they have the legal right to an indemnity as "posseiro" (occupant).

The land and resources in the park can be classified as being private, communal or Commons. Each of these situations implies in different forms of use and responsibility to the users – park inhabitants and external users.

Private Lands normally include manioc field, houses, harbor and homegardens. They are part of the land transformed with familiar labor force. These areas are clearly associated to a family by the entire social group and respected as its. The vegetation is transformed and the local can be identified in maps and satellite images. Only a small part of the economy is based on these lands, although the subsistence of the family depends on it. Manioc flour and other derived products are the base of the alimentation: 38 different varieties of manioc are planted together with banana, pineapple, different kind of tubercles, pumpkin, seasoning and medicinal plants. Private lands can occupy around 0,05% of the park territory.

Communal land are the one used by social groups to develop the activities that consolidate their identity as a group. Following their own terminology, it will includes the community itself with the school, football fields, manioc flour oven and other communal structures. Many communities have churches or a communal house used for meetings and festivities (religious or non-religious). Normally these lands are transformed through a common effort ("mutirão" or "ajuri") where groups of people build or clean the places together. They are a "social property" and a mirror of the relations in the group. The president of the community, the teacher or the religious

representative have the duty to call the group for the activities but each of the communitarian must help to be seen as a real member of the community. Although there are problems among individuals, these communal spaces are considered everybody responsibility. The communal lands occupy less than 0,01% of the park.

Finally, forest, lakes, rivers and beaches can be considered Commons. There is a local understanding that if somebody wants to use a resource from a certain area, the family that traditionally manage this part of the forest or live near by the river or lake concerned should be asked for permission. This family is considered the primary beneficiary of the area but not the responsible to protect it against foreigners. Regarding the private or communal lands, there is a clear responsibility, individual or collective, in protect, manage, clean and use the land. The forest and the waters aren't considered one's property, although specific products and the management done to access them can belongs to the family that do the work: "rubber trees streets" (estradas de seringa), "Brazil nuts centers" (picos de castanha), "lianas centers" (centros de cipó). This indicates a clear relation between labor and property, with an appropriation of products that can be transferred from person to person according to the needs and agreement among them. Different families can manage different products in the same physical area, apparently without causing a depletion in their availability and in this sense the forest / lake / rivers as an all can be considered as a Common.

But as a National Park, the land is above all public, with a particular state responsibility performed by IBAMA and where no uses of natural resource are theoretically allowed. The State has no financial resources to pay indemnities and remove the people from the Park. Also, based on the information provided by FVA and on the negotiations around the management plan, this attitude will probably cause more damage to the Park integrity than the presence of its traditional inhabitants.

The impact of men activities depends on the ability, the necessity, and the urgency of the collector needs. It also depends on the ecology, dispersion and distribution of the product extracted. The data are scarce but subsistence activities (in its narrow definition) tend to be less damaging then the economic ones. Also, the activities performed by park inhabitants tend to be less damaging then the one performed by external users. The lack of definition about the park inhabitants' future and the low prices of their traditional products leads to a situation where the Commons start to be treated as nobody's responsibility, and the pressure on the resources can became a threaten to its availability. Some inhabitants allied themselves with fishermen or other external agents to perform what is called "smuggling": illegal extraction of ornamental and commercial fishes and turtles.

The legal framework doesn't support the better choice for the park, i. e. peoples permanence in the park, and the interpretation of the agreements depends on individual willing. IBAMA had only 3 persons to take care of the 2,27 M ha of the park. The dilution of responsibilities points to a clear need to increase the level of responsibility among the park dwellers, reinforcing their position as the Park protectors and as actors in the implementation of the management plan.

To overcome possible negative impacts on social and natural environment, FVA and its partners are developing new tools and agreements among social actors involved. Among the activities undertaken are: consolidate local leadership, strengthen social organization, foster legal organization, improve local decision making process, form local teachers into social and environmental concepts and form volunteers environmental agents.

Relations between men and nature are the reflect of the social and political trends. The management of what should be not only a public good but also a Common is being threatened by a lack of definition of responsibility among actors involved in the process. The maps of natural resources uses and the management plan became instruments to be appropriate by the inhabitants in their dialogue with the government developing a new, and maybe more real, participatory process in the definition of these responsibilities.

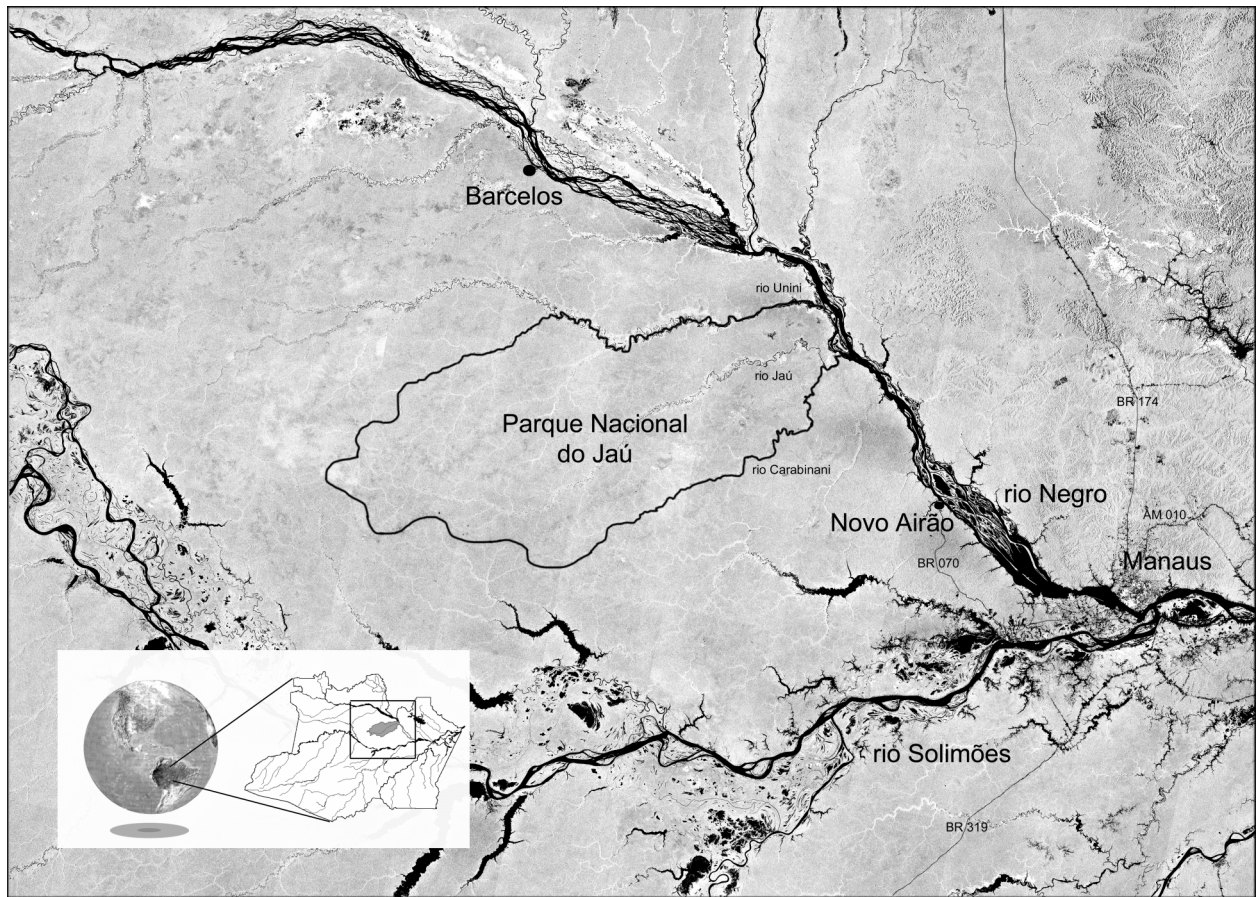


Figure 1: The Jaú National Park Localization - Amazonas - Brazil



Figure 2: Participatory Mapping of Natural Resource Uses by the Jaú National Park Inhabitants - Amazonas - Brazil

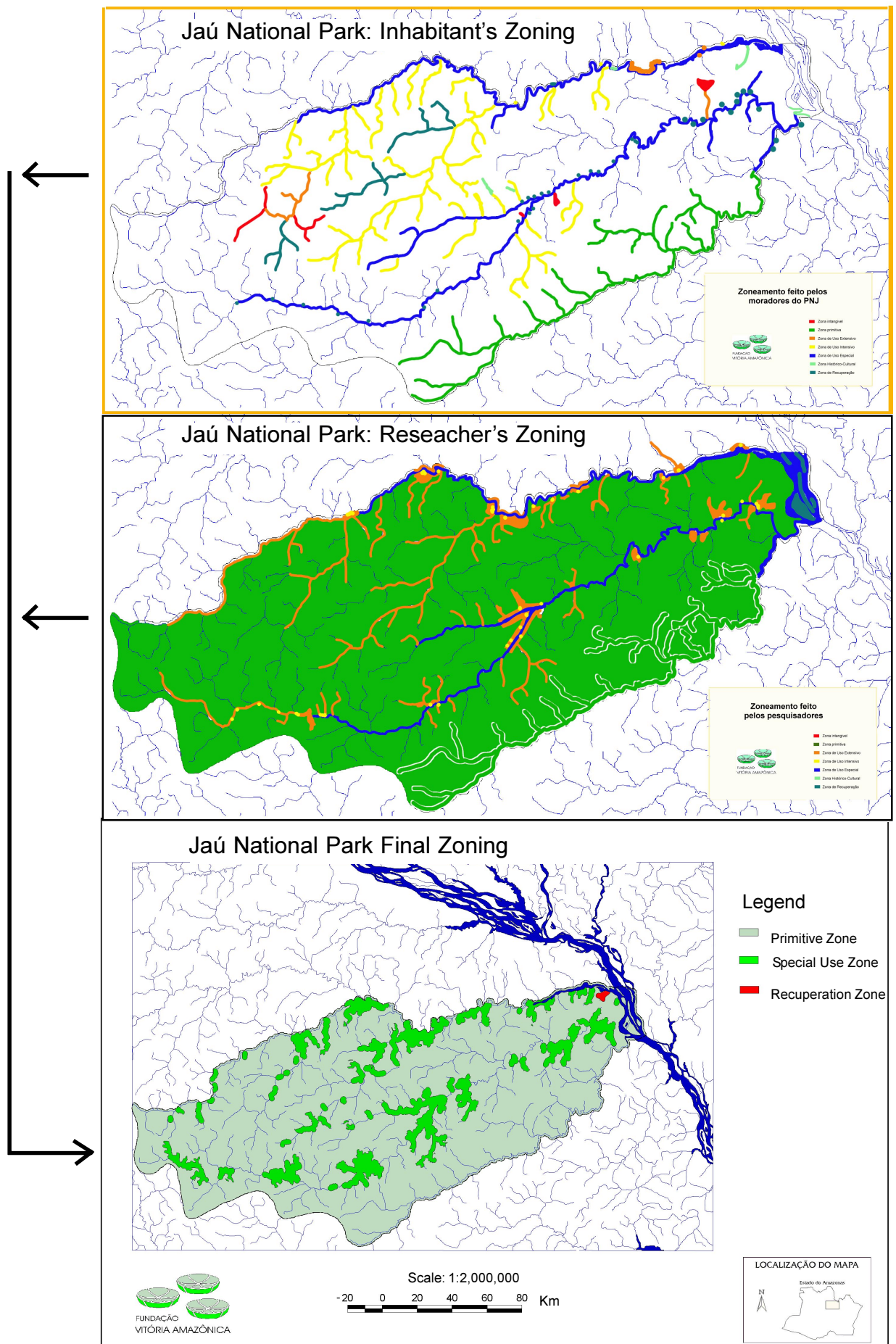


Figure 3: The zoning process of the Jaú National Park - Amazonas - Brazil