

Perspectives of Voluntary Tourism as fostering sustainable development and protecting biodiversity: a possible practice in Conservation Units?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the perspectives of Voluntary Tourism based on a bibliographic survey to contribute to the discussion of the relatively recent topic in the Brazilian academy. Furthermore, the study seeks to evaluate the practice of Voluntary Tourism in Conservation Units at a national level by surveying a sample of institutions that offer this practice in Brazil. The research also addresses the importance of Conservation Units for sustainable development whilst maintaining biodiversity, and Voluntary Tourism as a possible contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ensured in 2015 by the United Nations.

Keywords: Voluntary work; Voluntary Tourism; Conservation Units; Sustainability; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Perspectivas del Turismo Voluntario como fomento al desarrollo sostenible y a la protección de la biodiversidad: ¿una posible práctica en las Unidades de Conservación?

RESUMEN

Este estudio busca analizar las perspectivas del Turismo Voluntario a través de una encuesta bibliográfica para contribuir a la discusión del tema relativamente reciente en la academia brasileña, así como evaluar su práctica en Unidades de Conservación a nivel nacional a través de la obtención de una muestra de instituciones que ofrecen esta práctica en Brasil. La investigación también aborda la importancia de las Unidades de Conservación para el desarrollo sostenible y la manutención de la biodiversidad, y el Turismo Voluntario como una posible contribución a los Objetivos del Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) garantizados en 2015 por las Naciones Unidas.

Palabras clave: Voluntariado; Turismo Voluntario; *Volunturismo*; Unidades de Conservación; Sostenibilidad; Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS).

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Volunteers (2015) understands volunteering as a universal and inclusive activity, recognized in its diversity and the values it supports (free will, dedication, commitment, and solidarity). In this context, voluntary tourism or *voluntourism* share the same purposes as volunteering. According to Wearing (2001: 3), as part of the voluntary tourism experience, “self-awareness” is expanded, challenged, renewed, or reinforced, making it an experience that extends far beyond the conventional tourist visit.

Tourism with a social purpose aims to bring mutual benefits since it can contribute not only to the volunteer's personal development, but especially to the social, natural, economic, and environmental aspects of the experience (WEARING, 2011 apud BUTCHER; SMITH, 2010).

Providing alternative tourism experiences, such as ecotourism and voluntary tourism, are fundamentally aligned with sustainability to ensure resources and minimize impacts. Environmental factors, such as the local community, biodiversity, and avoiding irreversible environmental changes, are emphasized in the literature on sustainability (e.g., WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, 1987; CRONIN, 1990; ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUPS, 1991; SOFIELD, 1991 apud WEARING, 2001).

Thus, this study seeks to analyze the perspectives of voluntary tourism and evaluate its practice in national Conservation Units as a form to promote the development of sustainable tourism, and collaborate in the discussion of voluntary tourism as a possible contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Due to the scarce exploitation of this theme in scientific research and to better understand it, an exploratory study on scientific bases was conducted as part of the methodological procedure, using the keywords *voluntourism*, volunteering, and volunteer work. Therefore, the study is characterized by a systematic review of the literature and the analysis of a few cases.

A survey was conducted on a sample of institutions (government agency, NGO, state agency, and private foundation) to investigate possible voluntary tourism practices in Conservation Units, also applying a qualitative-quantitative questionnaire with their respective managers. There was difficulty in accessing volunteer data while applying the

questionnaires. As a result, the analysis mainly encompassing the perspective of the managers of each organization.

The theoretical contribution is part of the method to point out the indicators that portray the degree of development of *voluntourism* as a field of knowledge. In this sense, the first investigations found that academic production was built eminently from practical cases. Institutional bodies also contributed concepts to guide better their policies, programs, and actions, which resulted in different understandings in *voluntourism* actions.

Regarding the barriers in voluntary tourism, it was observed that some difficulties occur because many organizations do not recognize themselves as an integral part of the tourism system, although there are different types of voluntary tourism, which may be related to different areas (MCGEHEE; NORMAN, 2002). This resistance hinders the dimension of organizations that offer this practice. However, none of the institutions interviewed refused to answer the questionnaire because it is a voluntary tourism study. It is worth mentioning that the recognition of volunteering as part of *voluntourism* can facilitate the program's evolution and the meeting of multipliers.

The institutions sampled showed an imbalance between the large supply of nature in the country and the scarce development policy aimed at the debate of a sustainable nature. Thus, institutions must have good communication with each other and with the government to consider nature's actions to explore the interfaces that involve a practice based on sustainability principles.

In general, the bibliographic sources indicate that volunteering benefits both societies and individuals. This practice contributes both in the economic and social spheres and a more cohesive society by building trust and reciprocity between people. According to the United Nations (2015), a volunteer is a young person, adult, or elderly who, due to their interest and civic spirit, dedicate part of their time to various social welfare activities or other fields, with no remuneration.

Voluntary Tourism is a form of tourism that is growing in popularity and has been presented in the literature as alternative tourism that creates encounters promoting mutual understanding and respect. According to Wearing and McGehee (2013: 123), voluntary tourism or *voluntourism* focuses on humanitarian and environmental projects to serve the local community with no remuneration. Wearing (2001) also presents an appreciative meaning when defining *voluntourism* as one that offers a direct interactive experience and a change in the individual's value and conscience that can influence their lifestyle.

It was observed that the countries that emit the most *voluntourists* are located in the Northern hemisphere. On the other hand, the receptive countries with the most demand for voluntary work are in the Southern hemisphere, such as in Africa, Central America, and South America.

This study showed that the actions of the Southern Axis proved to be genuine, with no intermediaries, focused on local development, and aimed at mutual support between the community and the volunteer, from a humanitarian perspective. However, many institutions do not have enough funds to maintain programs with the basic structure, including accommodation and transportation, often hindering or preventing *voluntourist* participation.

Thus, in addition to the importance of public policies and well-structured partnerships to assist the institutions with financial investments, marketing through tour operators and agencies can also facilitate the interaction between *voluntourist* and institutions.

This relationship must identify both profiles (institution and *voluntourist*), combining mutual objectives and providing the necessary structure to ensure both sides' best experience. In addition to agencies focused on volunteering, personalized travel agencies, and operators that seek to understand the profile and the purpose of each traveler would also have an essential role in this context.

Recent years have shown an evolution of agencies and operators focused on experiences. However, *voluntourism* transcends the volunteer experience. This experience can be an opportunity, especially for citizens looking for trips with a greater purpose since it provides mutual benefits, both for the volunteer and for the community.

Many hotels, lodges, and projects in Tourism aim to make a difference, especially indirectly, whether with cash donations, purchases of local handcrafted products, or when tourists stay in hotels that donate part of the money to the local community. All the initiatives in question are significant and valid. However, the person who is contributing indirectly often does not feel like a part of the project. In this context, *voluntourism* provides a genuine experience where the *voluntourist* is an active agent in the visitation program and can feel like an integral part of the project. It is a form to make a difference, generate a direct impact, and multiply these benefits.

Furthermore, some agencies are focused on *voluntourism*, especially abroad, despite the vast potential for volunteering in Brazil. It is necessary to structure commercial partnerships and ensure adequate public policies without losing the essence, the genuine purpose, and the importance of public use of volunteering in Conservation Units to expand

the segment coherently and sustainably. A specific study is also recommended to explore this issue.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH VOLUNTARY TOURISM

Negotiations were concluded in 2015 that culminated in adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations Summit, succeeding, and updating the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs were established to guide national policies and international cooperation activities until 2030 (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 2015).

Brazil participated in all sessions of the intergovernmental negotiation. An agreement was reached, contemplating 17 Goals and 169 targets, involving diverse themes, sustainable production and consumption patterns, climate change, sustainable cities, and protection and sustainable use of the oceans and terrestrial ecosystems (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 2015).

It is noticeable that some of the more relevant goals, such as eradicating poverty, may have been boldly defined for a relatively short period for its completion. Moreover, eradicating poverty is a very complex objective and necessarily involves State policies with a view to structural reforms. However, in the study in question, the Goals are essential to contribute to sustainable development, even if indirectly or partially.

According to Haroldo Machado Filho, Program Officer for PNUD Brazil, the SDGs should focus on the three fundamental pillars of sustainability, namely social, environmental, and economic. Furthermore, the SDGs are more encompassing compared to the MDGs (PNUD, 2015).

For the post-2015 sustainable development agenda to succeed, improving governance, combating inequality, expanding voice, and participation must be addressed simultaneously. Volunteering can contribute towards giving stakeholders a voice and mobilize people and civil society organizations to contribute to solutions (CLARK, 2015: 6)¹. Thus, the forum recognizes that sustainable development depends on all actors' participation in civil society and considers governance a challenge for this practice.

¹ UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS. State of the World's Volunteerism Report: Transforming Governance. Washington: Communications Development Incorporated, 2015.

Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly approved, in late 2016, the adoption of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The resolution recognizes “the importance of international tourism and, specifically, the designation of an international year of sustainable tourism so that its development can promote better understanding among peoples worldwide, leading to greater awareness of the rich heritage of diverse civilizations” (UNITED NATIONS BRAZIL, 2016).

According to the secretary-general of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Taleb Rifai, the 2017 declaration by the UN as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development is a unique opportunity to advance the contribution of the tourism sector to the three pillars of sustainability - economic, social, and environmental - raising awareness on an industry that is often underestimated (UNITED NATIONS BRAZIL, 2016).

The decision to adopt 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development came at a critical moment when the international community adopted the new 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), approved by the UN General Assembly in September 2015. Tourism appears as a target in three of the goals, no. 8, 12, and 14 (NAÇÕES UNIDA BRASIL, 2016)².

The reasons presented above demonstrate that voluntary tourism, which is also a form of sustainable tourism, can add to some of the SDGs proposed in different areas. In the environmental area, voluntary tourism can occur, for example, in tropical forests, biological reserves, and conservation areas (WEARING, 2001: 2).

Some of the SDGs that can be helped through voluntary tourism include “ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all”, “promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth”, “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable”, “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”, “protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse degradation and loss and halt biodiversity loss

² Goal 8. Decent work and economic growth. Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

Goal 12. Responsible consumption and production. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 14. Life below water. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.

UNITED NATIONS BRAZIL. 17 Goals to transform our world. Access in July 1st, 2016, from <https://nacoesunidas.org/pos2015/>

"," strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development", among others.

Thus, even considering the SDGs established by the UN as bold, with demand focused on the exercise of tourism at the core of what is understood as a sustainable practice, considering the desire of those who are willing to volunteer, one could consider policies of interaction in CUs (Conservation Units) to qualify the relative fertility of collective experiences highlighted by Latour (2004: 328).

VOLUNTARY TOURISM IN NATIONAL CONSERVATION UNITS

Conservation Units, ecotourism, and its relationship with Voluntary Tourism

According to the National System of Conservation Units (SNUC), Conservation Units ensure the sustainable use of natural resources and provide the communities involved with the development of sustainable economic activities inside and in the surrounding areas (SECRETARIAT OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, 2014).

According to the SNUC, Conservation Units are categorized into "sustainable use" and "comprehensive protection". CUs focused on sustainability include the Environmental Protection Area, Area of Relevant Ecological Interest, Forest, Extractive Reserve, Fauna Reserve, Sustainable Development Reserve, and Private Natural Heritage Reserve. The integral protection CUs consist of Ecological Station, Biological Reserve, Park, Natural Monument, and Wildlife Refuge (MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT, 2015).

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined tourism sustainable development as "one that meets the needs of current tourists, without compromising the possibility of future use of resources" (CMMAD apud TELES, 2011: 149).

Teles (2011: 109) states that, in practice, conservation units in Brazil generally lack actions to organize and structure sustainable tourist activities. The tourism production chain in these areas lacks technical support and incentive policies.

The SNUC attests that the appropriation of CUs by society is an important element for the sustainability of these areas since public support legitimizes the importance of these spaces and directly affects the adoption of different conducts and policies regarding the environment. Visiting CUs can bring society closer and awaken its interest in nature conservation, given that it is an opportunity for recreation and learning while in contact with nature. However, the significant challenge is to develop responsible tourism integrated with

socio-cultural diversity, traditional knowledge, and biodiversity conservation (MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT, 2015).

Therefore, it is necessary to invest in planning ecotourism activities for its development based on respect for nature and local cultures, inserting the community in the decision-making, and contributing for tourists to have a rich and pleasant experience (RAIMUNDO *et al.*, 2007 apud TELES, 2011: 109).

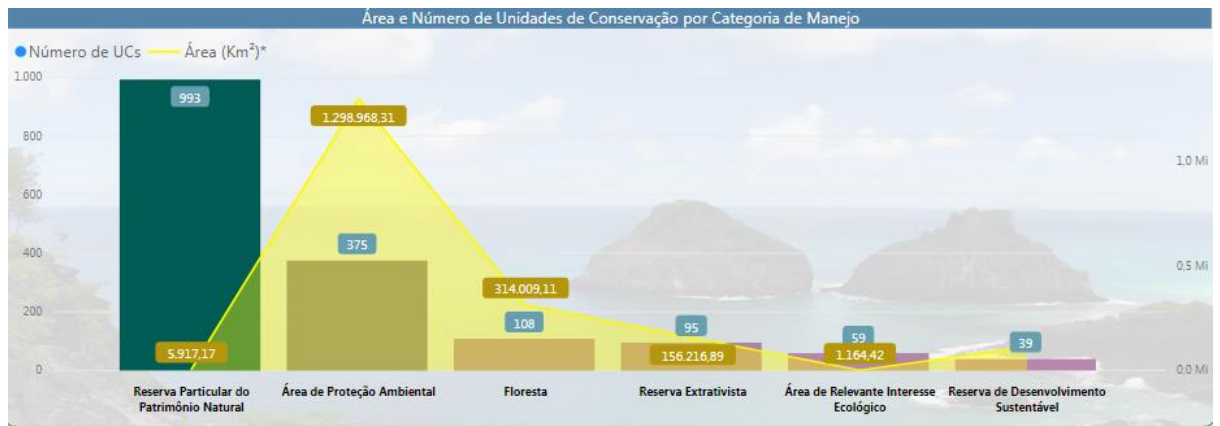
Furthermore, CUs have established themselves as legitimate spaces for the practice of Ecotourism in recent decades, partly because these places are considered the locus of sustainable exploration because of a legal and administrative apparatus which, at least theoretically, ensures limits to its use (SPINOLA, 2006 apud NOGUEIRA; TELES, 2013).

In this context, it is important that the values that support voluntary tourism also contribute to ecotourism. Wearing (2001: 12) argues that Volunteer Tourism “can be viewed as a development strategy leading to sustainable development and centering the convergence of natural resource qualities, locals and the visitor that all benefit from tourism activity”.

According to the National Register of Conservation Units (CNUC) maintained by the Ministry of the Environment, Brazil has approximately 1,669 CUs at federal, state, and municipal levels, with sustainable use representing 68% of the CUs in the country³. The sustainable use CUs include the following management categories: Private Natural Heritage Reserve (60%), Environmental Protection Area (22%), Forest (6%), Extractive Reserve (6%), Area of Relevant Ecological Interest (4%), and Sustainable Development Reserve (2%). In terms of the number of units, the Private Natural Heritage Reserve (RPPN) category stands out, while the Environmental Protection Area (APA) is predominant in territorial extension.

³ MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT. Department of Protected Areas. Access in June 22nd, 2019, at <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiMjUxMTU0NWMTODkyNC00NzNiLWJiNTQtNGI3NTI2NjliZDkzIiwidCI6IjM5NTdhMzY3LTZkMzgtNGMxZi1hNGJhLTMzZThmM2M1NTBjYjY3>

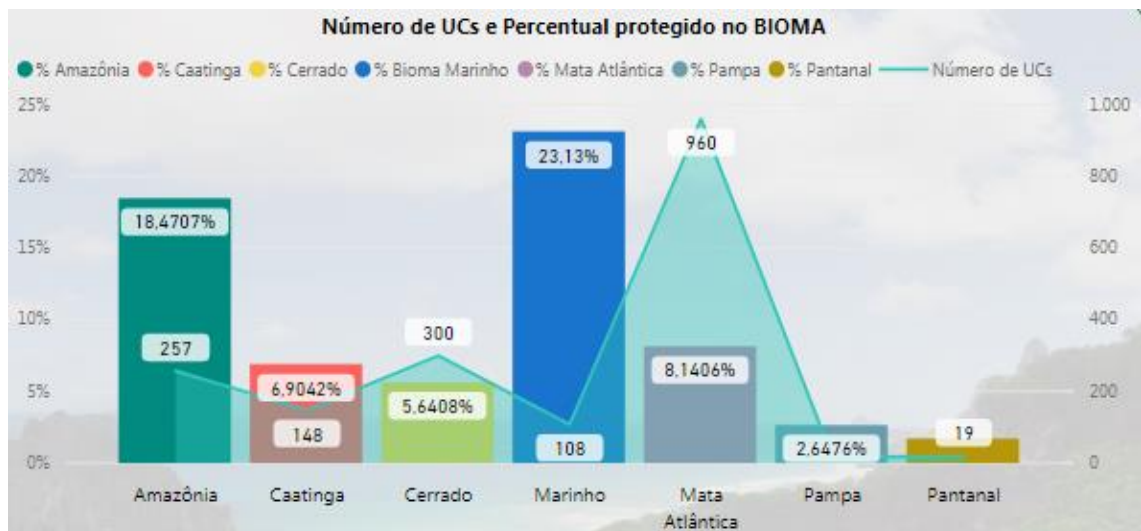
Figure 01. Area and number of Conservation Units per management category



Source: Ministry of Environment – Department of Protected Areas. 2019

Regarding the Brazilian Biomes included in the sustainable use CUs are Marine (23%), the Amazon (18%), Caatinga (7%), Cerrado (6%), Atlantic Forest (8%), Pampa (3%), and Pantanal (1%). In protected territorial extension, the marine biome stands out, while in terms of units, the Atlantic Forest is predominant.

Figure 02: Number of Cus and protected percentage in the BIOME



Source: Ministry of Environment – Department of Protected Areas. 2019

Thus, we can observe the relevance of all categories of sustainable use of CUs for safeguarding the ecosystems. Each category presents its specificities, has an eminent role in the conservation of biodiversity, and, consequently, in citizens' quality of life. Therefore,

Brazil has a vast potential to conduct *voluntourism* in CUs and contribute to the protection of biodiversity⁴.

Voluntary programs in Conservation Units in Brazil

To assess the practice of voluntary tourism in CUs in Brazil, a sample of institutions with an environmental focus and volunteer programs offers in CUs in Brazil was analyzed. Among the selected institutions are ICMBio (a government agency), IAP (a state agency), SOS Mata Atlântica Foundation (NGO), and Boticário Group Foundation for Nature Protection (a private institution).

A qualitative and quantitative questionnaire was developed to ascertain what voluntary tourism is like in these institutions, including the selection process, management, disclosure, restrictions, and volunteering objectives.

ICMBio - Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation

Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation is an autarchy under a special regime. The Institute was created on August 28th, 2007, by Law 11,516, and is linked to the Ministry of the Environment as part of the National Environment System (Sisnama). The Institute's responsibility is to act as the National System of Conservation Units by proposing, implementing, managing, protecting, inspecting, and monitoring the CUs instituted by the Union. It is also responsible for fostering and implementing research, protection, preservation, and conservation programs of biodiversity and exercise the power of environmental police to protect federal CUs. (ICMBio, 2015).

In 2009, the ICMBio implemented the Volunteer Program, regulated by Normative Instruction no. 03/2009. The objective was to encourage society's participation and bring it closer to the management of protected areas and the conservation of biodiversity through voluntary work in Federal CUs and Research and Conservation Centers. Therefore, the population can be responsible alongside the managers of these units for many actions of nature conservation, such as protection, research, public use, visitation, and environmental education (ICMBio, 2015)

⁴ MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT. Department of Protected Areas. Access in June 22nd, 2019, at <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiMjUxMTU0NWtODkyNC00NzNiLWJiNTQtNGI3NTI2NjliZDkzIiwidCI6IjM5NTdhMzY3LTZkMzgtNGMxZi1hNGJhLTMzZThmM2M1NTBjY9>

ICMBio's responses presented more details regarding the Institute and its volunteer program. The program was created in 2009 and conducted in 93 CUs and Research Centers across the country. The volunteering program has nationwide coverage. In 2015, when the interview was conducted, the program had no partners and was managed by the General Protection Coordination, linked to the Board for Creation and Management of Conservation Units.

The program is open to people from other municipalities and states, and the prerequisites for participation are relatively simple. According to Art. 3 of Normative Instruction no. 03, of September 2nd, 2009, the voluntary service in Decentralized Units, whether Conservation Units or Research Centers, must be used for support activities, covering the following thematic lines: conservation management; research and monitoring; socio-environmental management; public and business use; territorial consolidation; production and sustainable use; and environmental protection. The aims of the programme together with the volunteers' activities show the relevance of the activities for safeguarding the CUs and protecting nature.

Regarding the costs of the program, although some activities require life insurance, the Program Coordination states that ICMBio is unable to afford such expenses. The costs of travel and accommodation can be included in the planning of the CUs. However, this planning is approved according to the availability of resources at the headquarters. The Unit can often cover these expenses with resources from other projects, such as ARPA - Protected Areas of the Amazon Program. However, there is no standard for covering these types of expenses. Most CUs are unable to cover this sort of expenses. Hence, the large number of CUs and the few resources available can be factors that make it difficult to obtain coverage for these costs.

The Coordination's responses indicated that the volunteer program is published on the ICMBio website, Facebook page, and the closest municipalities' units. In addition to encouraging society's participation and bringing it closer to the management of protected areas and the conservation of biodiversity, the program also seeks to allow people to express their citizenship and their commitment to the future of the environment and the quality of local life.

According to the Program's Coordination, voluntary work is essential for the institution "because it provides fundamental support for the execution of various activities, especially due to the lack of personnel". This statement indicates that one must pay attention to the fact that voluntary work does not replace remunerated work since voluntary work, with the

values that support it, such as free will, dedication, commitment, and solidarity (UNV/UNDP apud UNITED NATIONS BRAZIL, 2015), should be used only as a support service, as established in Art. 3 of the Institution's Normative Instruction⁵.

On the other hand, according to the Coordination, the survival of the project also requires "involving the community in the work of the unit, leading to a feeling of appreciation of the environment and the unit itself", which is essential for the conservation of the unit and sustainable development from the perspective of the receiving community.

In 2016, there was a review of the standard and publication of normative instruction no. 03/2016 of the ICMBio Volunteer Program. With these changes, the program became the responsibility of the Socio-Environmental Management General Coordination (CGSAM). Furthermore, the scope of the volunteer work was also reviewed, as was the possibility for all organizational units to involve volunteers, including technical and administrative organizations. Currently, ICMBio has a partnership with IPÊ (Institute of Ecological Research) in the volunteer program⁶.

SOS Mata Atlântica Foundation

The SOS Mata Atlântica Foundation is a non-governmental organization created in 1986. It is a private non-profit organization and its mission is to promote the conservation of biological and cultural diversity in the Atlantic Forest biome and ecosystems under its influence, stimulating actions for sustainable development, and as promoting education and knowledge concerning the Atlantic Forest by mobilizing, training, and stimulating the exercise of socio-environmental citizenship (SOS MATA ATLÂNTICA, 2015).

The entity develops projects for environmental conservation, data production, mapping and monitoring the biome's forest cover, campaigns, action strategies in public policies, environmental education and forest restoration programs, volunteering, sustainable

⁵ Art. 3. The voluntary service in Decentralized Units, whether Conservation Units or Research Centers, shall be used for support activities, covering the following thematic lines: conservation management; research and monitoring; socio-environmental management; public and business use; territorial consolidation; production and sustainable use; and environmental protection. Sole paragraph. The volunteer activities in Conservation Units must comply with the directives and guidelines established in the Management and/or Use and/or Protection Plan for the Conservation Unit, if any, as well as the deliberations issued by the Unit's Deliberative or Advisory Council. ICMBio. NORMATIVE INSTRUCTION NO. 03, OF SEPTEMBER 2nd, 2009.

⁶ IPE INSTITUTE. Volunteer Management Guide. Access in June 11th, 2020, at https://issuu.com/institutoipe/docs/voluntariado_icmbio_guiade_gestao

development, and protection and management of ecosystems (SOS MATA ATLÂNTICA, 2015).

For the Volunteer Group of the SOS Mata Atlântica Foundation, working in diverse socio-environmental realities is an incentive that builds the path for enhancing and protecting the environment and the population (SOS MATA ATLÂNTICA, 2015). The activities of the Volunteer Group focused on environmental education, mobilization, and incentive to citizenship were developed 15 years ago (SOS MATA ATLÂNTICA, 2015). However, according to the Coordination's responses in 2015, the program has existed for more than 20 years, and there are participating units in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Paraíba. The SOS Mata Atlântica Foundation manages the volunteer program and has sponsors such as Bradesco Cartões and Akzo Nobel⁷.

To volunteer, it is necessary to be over 18 years of age and live where the activities take place. However, people from other municipalities/states can also participate. The volunteers perform activities aimed at environmental education, cleaning efforts, planting, and Foundation events participation. According to the Coordination, the Foundation has an annual budget for the volunteer program regarding the costs of travel and accommodation. Volunteering is promoted only through the institution's website⁸.

The program aims to raise public awareness of the importance of engaging in environmental issues, highlighting the importance of volunteering for environmental preservation. Moreover, the volunteer program helps to publicize the other projects conducted by the Foundation.

The Foundation receives daily emails from people who want to volunteer, organizing meetings for new volunteers every two or three months. The person only becomes a volunteer after participating in this meeting, in an activity, and signing the voluntary term. According to the Coordination, in 2015, the Foundation had approximately 800 volunteers.

Environmental Institute of Paraná (IAP)

Environmental Institute of Paraná (IAP) is a State Autarchy, the executive body of indirect administration, linked to SEMA, created by State Law no. 10,066/92, and amended by State Law no. 11,352/96. Its objectives are established in State Decree 1,502 of August

⁷ Companies such as Bradesco and Akzo Nobel act in the field of Green Marketing and are a source of financing for this type of project.

⁸ SOS MATA ATLÂNTICA. Access in August 5th, 2015, at <https://www.sosma.org.br>

4th, 1992. The IAP is responsible for the licensing, monitoring, and environmental inspection in Paraná and the management and operation of State Conservation Units. Its purpose is to standardize and ensure compliance with national and state environmental standards and policies (IAP, 2015).

The Volunteer Program in the Conservation Units of Paraná (VOU) was established in 2004 and promotes, encourages, and values volunteering in the Conservation Units of the State of Paraná, articulates the supply and demand for volunteer work and enables the exchange of experiences and actions between groups of volunteers and professionals from the Environmental Institute of Paraná (IAP, 2015).

According to the Voluntary Works Report of October 2010, 16 CUs use VOU's support, totaling 3,947 volunteer actions, developing 76,982 hours worked by more than 500 volunteers (IAP, 2015). However, according to the numbers of IAP volunteers sent on November 9th, 2015, by the Department of Conservation Units and Board of Biodiversity and Protected Areas, the monthly average from January to September 2015 is 30 volunteers participating in the VOU Program, totaling 210 volunteers and 4,992 hours worked.

The volunteer program has been running since 2004 and is currently managed by Coordination composed of a representative from the Department of Conservation Units, one from the Department of Human Resources, and two CU managers. The performance of Conservation Unit employees in the development of the program is notorious. Partner institutions consist of city halls, schools, universities, companies, among other partners who can nominate and provide volunteers to work in CUs in Paraná. Volunteering is disseminated through events, lectures, and on the IAP website.

Volunteering in the VOU program requires a minimum age of 18 years and the enrollment in the Volunteer Program, presenting a proposal for the development of activities at the CU you intend to work at, specifying available dates and times. Subsequently, the candidate is interviewed by the Conservation Unit management or IAP technicians appointed by the Department of Conservation Units. The candidate then signs the term of adhesion between the IAP and volunteer and awaits the summons, which, according to the Acting Head of the Department of Conservation Units, should be made to the capacity and need of the Conservation Units of the State of Paraná.

People from other municipalities and states can volunteer. The activities consist of visitor information; development of an Environmental Education project and research; maintaining trails and facilities; support to the surrounding population; administrative work; identify fire outbreaks and other incidents; be a part of a rescue or fire-fighting groups;

recover degraded areas; and assist in the implementation of management projects for Conservation Units.

Furthermore, there are no costs for participating in the program. IAP, DUC, and CU cover transport, food, and accommodation costs. However, if the volunteers live in another municipality, which is not on the route between the IAP and the CU, they must assume the cost of traveling to the institution's office.

The significance of the voluntary work for the survival of IAP projects resides in the effective participation of society in the management and administration of CUs, providing the practical exercise of volunteers in numerous activities, integrating students and citizens into the processes and actions of nature conservation, supporting managers and rangers. Also, the program's continuity is essential to complement human resources in the technical area and public use management in CUs.

Boticário Group Foundation

The Boticário Group Foundation was founded in 1990 as one of Brazil's first institutions linked to the private sector aimed at nature conservation. The activities began with initiatives from other institutions and became one of the primary financiers of environmental projects in the country. In 24 years of history, 1,436 initiatives from 482 institutions were supported. They operate in all regions of Brazil and have begun to develop their actions. They conserve more than 11 thousand hectares of Atlantic Forest and Cerrado in Nature Reserves, the country's two most threatened biomes (BOTICÁRIO FOUNDATION, 2015).

According to the Boticário Foundation's Communication and Relationship Department, the Foundation's volunteer program has been taking place at the Salto Morato Nature Reserve in Guaraqueçaba-PR since 1996 and at Nature Pantanal Station in Corumbá-MS since 2006. The Natural Salto Morato Reserve's volunteer program is managed by the Coordinator of Protected Areas of the Boticário Group Foundation for Nature Protection, while their administrator manages the Estação Natureza Pantanal program.

According to the Communication and Relationship Department, the volunteer program has no partners. However, during the interview period in 2015, the institution's website stated that the Salto Morato Nature Reserve had the following partners: ACRIAPA (Association of Native Bee Breeders of the Guaraqueçaba Environmental Protection Area), Green Force (Environmental Police Battalion), IAP (Paraná Environmental Institute), ICMBio, Guaju Institute, Neotropical Institute (Research and Conservation), Guaraqueçaba

City Hall, SPVS (Society for Wildlife Research and Environmental Education Institute), and The Nature Conservancy. The Pantanal Nature Station partners, according to the website, are Boticário Group, Pantaneiro Man Institute, Culture Incentive Law, Ministry of Culture, and the Federal Government (BOTICÁRIO FOUNDATION, 2015).

The activities performed by the volunteers include visitor assistance and tour groups, as well as administrative support. The activities do not have a strictly environmental character. Assuming that visitor assistance is linked to their environmental education, this would be the only activity of the program that could collaborate with the protection of the CU categories. Furthermore, the website contains no more information regarding volunteering, besides online registration in the program.

There are no costs for participating in the program. The institution provides accommodation, food, and transportation from Curitiba to Guaraqueçaba. Pantanal Nature Station provides only transportation. Regarding the distance limit for covering transportation costs for people from other municipalities or states for voluntary work in Salto Morato, travel is paid from Curitiba to the Reserve, while the volunteer bears the other costs. Transportation to the Nature Pantanal Station is covered only to the municipality. The volunteer also bears the other costs.

The Boticário Group Foundation advertises the Salto Morato Nature Reserve and Pantanal Nature Station. The latter also advertised through posters. The volunteer program provides an exchange relationship where the volunteer can experience the daily life of the Salto Morato Nature Reserve and Pantanal Nature Station while supporting the activities, contributing, and suggesting new ideas according to their professional and personal experiences.

The specific objectives of the program are to offer the volunteer an overview of the functioning of a nature reserve and its management aspects; provide direct contact with a conservation unit and its operational routines; rely on the support of volunteers to perform the activities of the reserve, especially in the public use routine (reception and information for visitors).

Regarding the importance of voluntary work for the survival of this institution's project, volunteers play a fundamental role in experiencing and bringing new perspectives to the actions conducted by the Boticário Group Foundation, in addition to providing important services for the daily lives of the Salto Morato Nature Reserve and Pantanal Nature Station. Moreover, the institution emphasizes that volunteers are passionate about what they do and help promote and perform nature conservation actions. Although the

questions regarding the volunteer activities did not mention exercises in direct contact with Conservation Units, at least the objectives of volunteering are aligned with environmental conservation purposes.

Other institutions

Another example of a Conservation Unit practice that was not included in the sample but which is worth mentioning is the Institute of Forest Development and Biodiversity of the State of Pará (Ideflor-bio), created to protect forests belonging to the Union, states, and municipalities, as well as regulating access to these areas, generating social, environmental, and economic benefits. Ideflor-bio is an entity governed by public law, constituted in the form of an autarchy, with technical, administrative, and financial autonomy, headquartered in Pará's capital, Belém, and circumscribed throughout the state. The institute's purpose is exercising the management of public forests for sustainable production and biodiversity, and managing the state policy for the production and development of the forestry chain, the implementation of policies for the preservation, conservation, and sustainable use of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity, fauna, and flora in the State of Pará (IDEFLOR-BIO, 2016).

Ideflor-bio has a Voluntary Environmental Agents program in the Algodão-Maiandea Environmental Protection Area in Maracanã, Pará. During the voluntary service, the agents are oriented regarding project execution of leisure, recreation, environmental awareness, performing environmental education actions aimed at ecotourism, protecting natural and cultural resources, archaeological heritage, public use, management effectiveness, and training voluntary environmental agents, forming multipliers, performing activities concerning visitor information and awareness (IDEFLOR-BIO, 2016).

The Environmental Protection Area (EPA) has a Voluntary Environmental Agents program. Volunteers are stimulated with qualified practical experiences in environmental conservation, community integration, environmental education, perception, and tourist awareness regarding environmental issues and sustainable development of the EPA. The volunteers also promote technical and operational support for strategic actions contained in the Management Plan of the Conservation Unit and assess the effectiveness of the actions (IDEFLOR-BIO, 2016).

Another institution worth mentioning is the State Forestry Institute (IEF), in Minas Gerais, which created the Volunteer Program in Conservation Units through the IEF Ordinance publication. 67 of July 1st, 2019. According to the institute, there was a great

demand for voluntary work by its CUs, either by students, people from the communities, or others interested in contributing to these protected areas' conservation. In this context, the IEF created a volunteer program in CUs (STATE FORESTRY INSTITUTE, 2020).

The IEF Volunteer Program is an opportunity for everyone to exercise their citizenship and contribute to a more balanced environment and improve the local quality of life. The population can work alongside the CU teams in many actions for nature conservation, such as research, visitation, communication, and environmental education and protection (STATE FORESTRY INSTITUTE, 2020).

For 12 years, the Caraguatatuba nucleus of the Serra do Mar State Park has relied on the Albatroz Civil Assistance Group's voluntary service in emergencies caused by natural accidents, fighting forest fires, and rescuing and providing relief within the park. The group currently has 60 volunteers, including firefighters and residents of the municipality. However, the official volunteer program of the São Paulo state parks - Friends of the Green - was recently created for citizens who wish to contribute in some form with the management of the São Paulo State Conservation Units (INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT, 2020).

The Friends of the Green program's primary objective is to implement a participatory management model in São Paulo CUs officially. “We wish to rely on the presence and support of the population in this preservation work”, explains the director of the Florestal Foundation, the body responsible for the administration of state CUs. The practice areas include providing information to visitors, environmental monitoring, support in maintaining and implementing trails, and environmental education (INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT, 2020).

The Friends of the Green initiative also aims to recognize researchers who already work within the parks, enriching knowledge about biodiversity. All Brazilians and foreigners aged 14 and over can be a Friend of the Green. Still, those under the age of 18 require authorization from their guardians. Legal entities that work in environmental conservation can also become Friends of the Green (INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT, 2020).

After conducting a general analysis of the institutions, the absence of a practice connected to the tourism development policy and the environmental field policies that demonstrate their integration is evident. Also, the practices performed to organize voluntary activities, for example, exist only in the sphere of institutions, as in the cases reported above,

indicating the lack of communication with the macro-politics, which may reflect in the poor management and lack of resources.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study enabled us to understand the perspectives of voluntary tourism, a relatively recent topic that has been growing internationally but is still little discussed in Brazil. It also sought to relate them to the national scope by evaluating its practice in Conservation Units.

We found that the literature on volunteering and *voluntourism* has not yet explored how these practices involve travel conditions. *Voluntourism* involves the basic infrastructure of a trip and the personal development of the *voluntourist*, benefiting the institution and community where the practice is performed and instituting a business relationship as a driving factor for this work. However, we also questioned whether the commercial sphere considers the dimension of this work's importance. Therefore, both parties must recognize this bond to facilitate performance and access to programs. This relationship should seek an identification between both profiles (institution and volunteer), combining mutual objectives, and providing the structure necessary to ensure the best experience for both sides. In addition to agencies focused on voluntourism, personalized travel agencies and operators that seek to understand the profile and the real purpose of each traveler would also have an essential role in this context.

Considering that voluntary tourism is fully aligned with ecotourism and sustainable development, it can be understood as an alternative to minimizing impacts and maintain Conservation Units, consequently maintaining biodiversity and sustainable development.

Furthermore, even considering the Sustainable Development Goals established by the UN to be bold, voluntary tourism in Conservation Units can add to some of the proposed goals and targets. Also, considering that voluntary tourism activities include many areas (medical, economic, environmental, educational, social, etc.), this segment can contribute to other SDGs, focusing on other than environmental issues. However, given the nature of tourism, it is necessary to investigate the interstices of voluntary tourism, searching for the intersection with other areas of knowledge.

The conclusion of the qualitative and quantitative methods employed at ICMBio, IAP, SOS Mata Atlântica Foundation, and Boticário Group Foundation revealed that the volunteer programs are generally well structured and eminently engaged with sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. Each institution has its specificities but similar

objectives, including fostering the protection, preservation, and conservation of biodiversity; stimulating actions for sustainable development; and expressing the commitment to the future of the environment and local quality of life.

Among the difficulties found throughout the research, we found that most CUs and their respective institutions cannot cover basic expenses, such as accommodation and travel. Thus, the large number of CUs and the scarce resources available may make it difficult to cover these costs and prevent individuals from volunteering since they must assume a good portion of the costs. Therefore, well-structured public policies and partnerships are necessary to maintain volunteering programs with financial investments (provided that the perspective of public use of these CUs in any category is not lost), consolidating and expanding them nationally and globally. The commercialization of *voluntourism* through tour operators and agencies in this context can intermediate between demand and institution. It is important to highlight that the real objectives and values of voluntary practice involve social purpose and mutual benefits. In other words, in addition to the satisfaction and personal development of the tourist, it adds values to the social, natural, economic, and environmental areas.

In summary, we sought to identify parameters that led to understanding *voluntourism*. Thus, we expect that the present study can highlight the importance of *voluntourism* in the commitment to sustainable development and offer theoretical subsidies, supported in real cases, to clarify the use of this term that has been used in the literature but without due clarification.

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