

# **Mobilizing Social Capital for the Local Development of a Community of Fishermen in Northeastern Brazil: a Narrative Photographic Ethnography**

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## **Abstract**

This study considers that social capital is related to mutual help among community members due to social, leisure and economic factors. At the same time, the width of local development concepts is not exclusively linked to economic aspects. This is also perceived as a multidimensional process, involving a community full of history, interactions, institutions, and able to shape its own destiny in a permanent social capital motion for common goals. Based on the theoretic articulation among these issues, this research has as its main objective, to describe social capital used by 'Prainha do Canto Verde' dwellers (community of fishermen in northeastern Brazil), seeking local development. An ethnographic research was carried out based on the Visual Anthropology approach, using photographic ethnography as documentary technique and as a complement to written text. In this way, an on-field imagery narrative research was built, based on data obtained from interviews with 'Prainha do Canto Verde' dwellers, active observation and historical and documentary analysis. As a result, it was observed that in this case study, community development is a consequence of continuous participation, mobilization, learning and organization achieved by proximity, problem discussion, project elaboration, search for financing sources and solution implementation, which results in a positive context for social and human initiatives aimed at fostering local development.

**Keywords:** Local Development. Social Capital. Photographic Ethnography.

## **Introduction**

In this study, we consider that in addition to its socioeconomic dimension, a development project is linked to local culture, conceived as "the production of a human social initiative". Therefore, local development is associated with the effective use of community potential related to its own social and historical identity, which is territorially limited. This can also be considered as a degree of social interaction between people and organizations through available local funds, the setting of norms and regulations, trust and cooperation. In this respect, local development can be the consequence of the capacity of local communities to shape their own destiny with the use of social capital for common causes.

Articulating this discussion, this article proposes an ethnographic research in the 'Prainha do Canto Verde' community, located on the east coast of Ceará state (northeastern Brazil). The study was based on the Visual Anthropology approach, using photographic ethnography as documentary technique and as a complement to written text. In this way, we built a textual and imagery on-field research narrative with data based on interviews, active observation and historical analysis – a documentary that aims at describing social capital stock used by 'Prainha do Canto Verde' dwellers seeking local development.

Firstly, the article presents a discussion on social capital and local development issues. Then, methodological procedures and textual and visual descriptions of the studied community are introduced. In the final section, some concluding ideas are presented.

## **1 Social Capital and local development: conceptual aspects**

Fukuyama (1996) approaches the social capital issue through a social perspective, qualified by the trust and cooperation manifested in group initiatives. For this author, social

capital is related to the capacity of people and organizations that constitute the civil society, to work together for common causes. The ability of community participants to work together is something that depends on their level of rules and value sharing and their capacity to subordinate individual to collective interests inside the group. The existing social capital in a community depends on the level of trust and cooperation among community members. Fukuyama (1996) outlines that the relation between trust and development is key in social capital discussions, as the wellbeing of a nation, as well as its capacity to compete, are conditioned by the “trust level inherent to the society in question” (FUKUYAMA, 1996).

Following Fukuyama’s ideas, Putnam (1996) states that trust is fundamental in understanding the concept of social capital. Putnam (1996) considers that social capital stocks include public items, such as trust, norms, participation systems and social interaction chains, which “facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit” (CABREIRA, 2002), tend to be cumulative and generate feedback.

These social capital stocks collaborate in the construction of a “civilian community” seeking to reach social balance with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civism and collective wellbeing. Putnam (1996) advocates that low social capital stock levels mean low social development levels and they are related to social organization characteristics like trust, norms and systems that contribute to increase society efficiency, thus facilitating coordinated initiatives (PUTNAM, 1996).

According to Brusco and Solinas (1999), communities have a complex set of rules, which conduct diffused cooperation practices and enable participation. It is a trust code that guides the behavior of actors/agents. This trust code, deeply discussed by Fukuyama (1996), involves both issues related to life in working environments, as well as in a more general aspect, external conditions and life in society. The development of these “code of trust” that sets the behavior of community actors/agents affects initiative massification processes, making necessary the constitution of a coordination for different actions, thus allowing synergies to evolve in order to reach desired goals (BRUSCO; SOLINAS, 1999).

A common aspect can be highlighted in the above expressed ideas in regards to social capital, whatever the need for a continuous development of a relational context, based on the production of human social initiatives with the goal of generating and managing development projects in a particular community.

Development, the main focus of this study, is a result of social initiatives organized and materialized in a flexible physical space or territorialized, whereas the economic materialization of an activity depends on a certain location. For Santos (2005), location is the appropriate territory used by social actors, which use it as base and support to interact in a wider political economical dynamic.

According to Manfredini and Lopes (2005) the location approach in the context of development is justified by the “existing diversities that establish different conditions and therefore, need specific and adequate solutions”. For these authors, new means and instruments are necessary and must be thought of in order to enable interaction among local people, as well as to train them to self-manage development processes together.

According to Milani (2005) local development involves three social, cultural and political factors that are not exclusively regulated by the market system. Therefore, the acceptance of local development is related to initiatives with capacity to recognize the complexity of new situations. At the same time, in most cases, these situations require completely new answers in regards to proposition and action capacity at all levels, in a horizontal negotiation and meeting dynamics (FERRAZ, 2001). Consequently, local development involves choices and decisions that can only be made through the articulation between local and global, individual and collective and among the different social sectors that are part of a community (state, market and organized civil society) (ANDION, 2003).

Local development is also remarkable as a means and process of social cooperation among community sectors with common interests and concerns, as they occupy the same position in the production process of material conditions of human and social existence (SOUZA, 1996). Social participation, confronted with the contradictory implications of social reality, supposes an array of collective initiatives articulated with objectives clearly defined by the different actors/agents who participate in and lead a community (SOUZA, 1996).

In the context of a local development proposal, community participants occupy relative positions in source allocation and project elaboration, being these responsible for their management and development. Community members participation is therefore fundamental for local development and within this idea, the concept of social capital as “general cooperation expectation” (BERETTA; CURINI, 2003), emerges with a considerable dimension, affecting project materialization stimulated by cultural values, the construction of a relational context and the availability of community natural resources.

The expressed ideas imply the recognition that each locality has its own needs and demands. Individuals that are part of each locality, elaborate particular and different answers in terms of public policies and local development projects.

## **2 Methodological Procedures**

A study of the community of ‘Prainha do Canto Verde’ was carried out from an ethnographic perspective, based on the visual anthropology approach, considering the imagery element, (photography) that allows us to penetrate via image capture through spatial memory and image association, in a web of invisible meanings that surpass standards for both dimensions (MOREIRA LEITE, 1998). In this way, anthropology enters the research field to subsidize issues raised in regards to the interpretation of images captured from people’s lives in their own environment, featuring photographic ethnography as a documentary technique and a complement to written text (ACHUTTI, 1997).

Different sources have been used for evidence collection. Firstly, it was necessary to carry out a bibliographic and historic documentary research that permitted us to explain problems through theoretical reference published in documents and/or registered in an on-field diary (cf. MALINOWSKI, 1978). Afterwards, we performed direct observations of the events and contexts under analysis. Finally, we made contacts in the natural environment in which “the other” (subjects of research) who could provide data or suggest possible useful information sources through interviews and active observation were located.

In the present study, we identified four different groups with which evidence was collected. They were selected according to their influence, coexistence and knowledge of community history and local wisdom/affairs. We typified groups according to the following: (i) leaders, people directly involved in project planning and/or execution; (ii) fishermen, men and women who depend exclusively on fly-fishing; (iii) educators, people involved in the arts, crafts, technology use, carpentry, etc, thus somehow involved in formal learning processes (specific curricular activities); and (iv) the organizations, micro and small companies related to the community. Interviews were made between December 2006 and January 2007. For this purpose, a stimuli methodology was used through wide and focused questions that allowed us to obtain multidisciplinary information relevant to our study (ALBANDES-MOREIRA, 2002).

Images used in this study were taken in three different moments of field immersion. In the first visit to the ‘Prainha do Canto Verde’ community, we took photographs with the aim of preparing a visual inventory, a panoramic collection of work places – sea, beach, commerce, inns, fishermen associations, schools, health centers. In the second imagery “trip”, our standpoint experimented a metamorphosis in regards to people’s initiatives, habits, objects produced and previously recorded places, which enabled us to rescue new meanings from

local details. In the third one, there was already a certain familiarity with the people and the local context. People of different professions, age range, and community role already knew us and were aware of our reason for being there participating in the community. Therefore, they were supportive, helping to disclose reality meanings by the knowledgeable subject, proud to be portrayed. Many times, especially when proximity allowed it, they would ask to see the photographs. They would also ask to have them sent. This was possible for two reasons: images were digital and the community school had Internet facilities. Pictures were taken during the months of September, October and November 2006, in natural conditions, in daytime and with natural light.

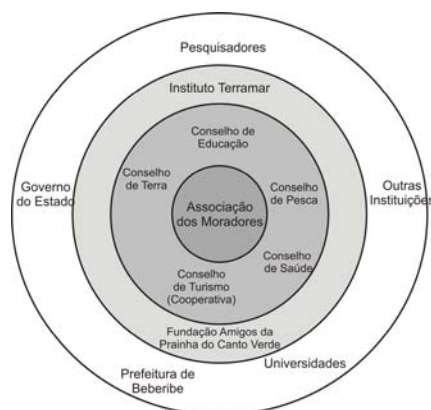
It is worth mentioning that when recording images, it was impossible to keep a distant and impartial perspective in on-field interactions with community people and places. It is also interesting to add that ‘emotion, far from being a restraint for research development, contributed to the deconstruction process necessary to materialize this study’ (CAVEDON; FACHIN, 2000). As Kossoy (2002), highlights, it is through sensitiveness, through the constant effort to understand documents and the multifaceted aspect of depicted moments that it is possible to go beyond photographic images and transpose the other side. With the aid of data registered in our “on field diary” and the words of interviewed people, we built both oral and imagery narrative. In the setup process, we selected suitable signs that were adequate for searched meaning standards, thus adding to images multiple dimensions of different meanings, which can only be perceived in their complexity when literal and symbolic images are combined (BITTENCOURT, 1998).

### **3 The ‘Prainha do Canto Verde’ Community**

‘Prainha do Canto Verde’ belongs to the district of Paripueira, in the city of Beberibe, on the east coast of Ceará State, northeastern Brazil. Its population totals around 196 families, with 1,200 dwellers (ALMEIDA, 2002; SCHÄRER, 2005). According to the community version, fisherman Raimundo Canto Verde’s family might have arrived in these lands in the 1850’s, after being freed from slavery. The place was named after the fisherman’s last name. The history of this community is largely dominated by land issues, intensified in the seventies, when fights against regional land grabbers began. These events united locals dwellers, which helped them become solution makers for their own problems. As a result, many communitarian projects are being proposed and developed at ‘Prainha do Canto Verde’. Among them we can mention: in the health department, a concern for prenatal health care; in education, the organization of a children’s choir and the installation of the *Escola dos Povos do Mar/Escola de Pesca* (Marine Populations and Fishing School), which operated for two years; in the environmental aspect, the fight and mobilization in favor of the marine extractive reserve and in the tourist sector, the setup of a community tourism project, which meets sustainable development standards. The main economic activity in the community continues to be fly-fishing.

The organization and management of all these initiatives, as well as issues related to real estate speculation and predatory fishing, are handled exclusively by community members through the ‘Prainha do Canto Verde’ Resident Association and Tourism Cooperative (COOPECANTUR) – thus constituting a favorable context for local development. It is worth highlighting the participation of organizations, especially non-governmental ones, offering support to community association members, seeking to assist them to obtain supplementary income in addition to their main economic activity. Among these organizations, the *Instituto Terramar*, a non-governmental organization located in Fortaleza (capital city of Ceará), offers logistic support to fishermen and a German organization called “*Amigos da Prainha*” (Friends of ‘Prainha’) offers advice on community strategic planning, sustainable tourism initiative communication and divulgation and external financial resource collection (PONTES, 2004;

GERAQUE, 2005; SCHÄRER, 2005). Besides these organizations, Ceará's federal and state universities collaborate through research developed on site. The State Government and the Beberibe Town Hall are present in basic maintenance functions. For a better comprehension of these topics, FIG.1 schematizes groups and local organizations that constitute the relational context of the community under study.



**FIGURE 1 – ‘Prainha do Canto Verde’ Community Relational Context**  
Source: elaborated by the authors, 2006.

#### 4 Reflections on imagery and textual narrative

Based on methodological procedures and considering the affirmation that “photographing is not just reflecting reality, but also thinking of it and being reflected by it” (ACHUTTI, 2004, p.71), imagery narrative was adapted to the situation in evidence, thus building texts through two simultaneous movements: the documentary mode, where image information can be obtained and described, and may also be used as a “data source for other universes and the historic context in which photography was created” (BITTENCOURT, 1998, p.2000) and the reflexive interpretation mode (BITTENCOURT, 1998) in the social context of the environment in which photographic images were taken as shaped by dialogism (HARTMANN, 2004) that helps reveal community features.

For analysis purposes, we compiled and organized empiric data on the following topics and subtopics elaborated according to a “thematic analysis”. (BARDIN, 1977): i) Social Capital, trust, civism and projects; ii) “Local development: results, initiatives for project continuity and future planning’. For Bardin (1977) the point is the significance unit, which is naturally independent from a text analyzed according to criteria related to the theory that guides its reading. Seeking resonances in literature mentioned in the first part of this article, we will now expose a final description based on empirical and analytical topics and subtopics defined during the interpretation process of this study.

##### 4.1 Initial moments

During our first on-field contact, we observed with special attention the area where community commercial activity was concentrated. ‘Prainha do Canto Verde’ is surrounded by moving dunes that already covered the original soil, which the natives call “red mud”, and it’s crossed by a paved road, the main access to the town, where the main stores are located, such as the bakery, the ice-cream parlor, the *mototaxi* stop, convenience stores, the “Tavern” and the inns. Also, throughout the 500 meters of road we can find the Catamaran shipyard-school, the kite surf school, the primary school, the health care center and the fisherman’s association.

One of the first things that impressed us was that the community was never surprised, neither by the questions nor by the digital pictures that were being taken. This happened because this community, due to its differentiated political and ideological position in the

region in so many occasions, has been studied in different areas, such as nursing, education, environment, geography, production engineering, fishing engineering, psychology, tourism and economy. René Schärer, a Swiss man married to Ms. Marly, a native of the region, lives in the community since 1992 and is one of the leaders responsible for making an inventory of studies carried out at 'Prainha do Canto Verde'. They saw our interest and dedication to capture images as a non-invasive activity, almost as a daily routine. We believe that the fact that community dwellers are used to the presence of researchers – many of them even posed for pictures – facilitated the construction of relationships with the locals. In the many encounters we had with the community, categories of our jobs were always manifested, be it in their speeches, their activities materialized in initiatives or works registered in our images. This way, we opted for working in a collaborative fashion with both the written and visual texts, as we understand them to be polysemic and complementary. Then, we shall present our analysis.

#### **4.2 Social Capital: trust, civism and projects**

For Putnam (1996) and Fukuyama (1996) trust promotes cooperation, making up for a relational context that facilitates human social initiatives (BRUSCO; SOLINAS, 1999; SANTOS, 2005). For Milani (2005), besides interdependence and cooperative relations, local development can also be evaluated as the result of conflict and competition interactions. In the statements of our speakers we perceive that as years go by, and after land conflicts were solved, trust levels among neighbors have declined, thus reducing their contribution to reinforce reciprocity rules.

According to the history of 'Prainha do Canto Verde', the history of fights, territory and land occupation, as well as different ways of organization (Associations and Councils) promoted initiatives that strengthened achievements reached by dwellers. According to Putnam (1996) reciprocity and participation rules at 'Prainha do Canto Verde' were put in practice through associations, councils, partnerships with other organizations and institutions through cooperative strategies, favoring the creation of the necessary relational context to find solutions for community problems and challenges (BRUSCO; SOLINAS, 1999).

Linking these aspects to the subtopic of "Civism", we emphasize the dissatisfaction expressed in statements made in regards to information, consultation and evaluation of current decision-making processes, contrary to the positive relative description of community organization in the past. In regards to the relational context at 'Prainha do Canto Verde', hints of social conflicts are evident. However, leaderships seem to be recognized by their project elaboration competence and responsibility, and we somehow detect from observed dynamics, that people and groups are making efforts to stay united through horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation. According to Putnam's ideas, (1996), a community is based on civic virtues, but is not exempted from opinion and path differences, even because civic community participants are active agents who do not avoid constructive differences.

The last subtopic related to "Social Capital" is "Projects". In the context of 'Prainha do Canto Verde', projects implemented and elaborated with and for the community, demonstrate how much the community has developed. Among these projects we can mention: the Association of Residents, Councils, Tourism and Art Crafts Cooperative, the 'Bom Jesus dos Navegantes' School, the implementation of the Zero Infant Mortality Program, the Shipyard- School, the *Povos do Mar* School (Marine Populations and Fishing School), with programs aimed at meeting fishermen's needs, the *Criança Contruir* (Child Building) program, community tourism, organic agro-ecology program, the 'Canto Verde' Digital Center, the Arts school, the extractive reserve, and the most recent 'Geração Muda Mundo' (Change-the-World Generation), aimed at training young entrepreneurs. In the analysis of data obtained and the social dynamics observed at 'Prainha do Canto Verde', we perceive that

the use of available social capital is dedicated to the implantation of projects that foster local development.

**CHART I – Capital Stock Dimensions**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Trust</b>	<b>Civism</b>	<b>Projects</b>
L.F	[...] when you work in a group, there has to be trust. We work here, I don't know the reason but there is a lot of trust.	[...] we had a public consultation, which is one of the steps to allocate funds. People from the Government came to consult the community.	Projects are born from council ideas and these ideas are based on community needs.
J.A	Fishermen said; "where are the returns? there is no more return" and some people added "then it's because they're already misusing" and then he couldn't understand that the system had changed [...].	[...] it was never a decision. It was just one or two people. Now it really is.	[...] with the community tourism project, people now see that tourism is an important activity for the local economy.
A.A	[...] Today, this management is very trustable. So nobody's trying to fool anyone because there's really no chance at all.	[...] these people aren't usually this quiet, they get together, organize meetings, speak their minds, you know?	Our tourism project is totally devoted to sustainable development. One of the issues people have been discussing in the community is basic sanitation, right?

Source: material collected from empiric sources

### **4.3 Local Development: results, continuous initiatives and future planning**

In regards to the topic of "Local Development", the first subtopic approaches the main "results" achieved by the studied community. Development at 'Prainha do Canto Verde' is the result of projects based on differentiated mechanisms of associativism, management and even cooperation strategies that connect regional and state governments, institutions and non-government organizations with community actors. We mention as symptoms of community local development strategies, the crafts and/or agricultural goods production and trades cooperatives, the fishing and trades cooperative, the environment-friendly tourist projects, the permanent problem discussion in task groups, the capacity to attract investment (SOUZA, 1996). In this respect, and considering that maintaining the social capital stock depends on the continuous activities of social interactions and other related activities for the 'Prainha do Canto Verde' community, we observe that the community presented during their meetings and productive social experiences, a permanent articulation of their efforts and initiatives in the search for solutions that favors local development.

In regards to the second subtopic, related to "Continuous Initiatives", Manfredini and Lopes (2005) state that local development is the result of group work, aimed at long-term initiatives. Continuous initiatives at 'Prainha do Canto Verde' are evident in education projects that contemplate training of young entrepreneurs to encourage new leadership and mainly, in the creation of the land and marine extractive reserve. This marine reserve represents continuity, as it guarantees certain achievements, such as land occupation rights, the possibility to reconstruct regional fishing stocks and the development of new local undertakings.

According to Franco (2000) the development of a certain locality does not only comprehend income access, but also education access, which enables community people to participate in political and administrative decisions. These evidences are related to the last subtopic, which refers to 'Future Planning'. Oriented future planning, including sustainable local development is an interactive process – that involves upward and downward procedures"

in a shared perspective based on collaborative arrangements (SACHS, 2004). The statements obtained in the interviews are convergent in regards to future initiatives. Reflections include a reevaluation of already consolidated processes, new projects, employment expectations and income generation. For them, it is in the present moment that the future is prepared, and it is in this present moment it is necessary to think about generating new leaderships, in order to strengthen community work and widen living opportunities.

**CHART 2 –Local Development Dimensions**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Main Results</b>	<b>Continuous Initiatives</b>	<b>Future Planning</b>
A.A	There are many families here using SODIS project water.	As far as tourism is concerned, it's not just tourist projects, but also projects related to local development issues.	I think that from now on, it's just a question of being more organized, now it's only a matter of waiting for tourists to arrive.
D.V	Education and health care improved because we didn't have any health in here. Housing conditions improved and declined. They declined because the sea is invading everything.	The reserve can be very helpful for community development in many respects, but only if native people are involved.	Now with the marine reserve, our Prainha is going to improve a great deal. It's going to grow a lot.
J.F.L	This used to be a place where... in a month, 2, 4 children would die because there were no treatment facilities, no doctors, nothing, right? Today it's much better. It's more than 15 years, maybe more since we had a child dying here...	With the reserve, maybe I'll get a job. But in Brazil it's not possible to employ everyone because not everyone is employed but anyway...	The reserve can help because it will open new working opportunities, right? For example, environment agents will be necessary. That's a good opportunity for young people and also for the elderly.

Source: material collected from empiric sources

#### 4.4 Images from 'Prainha do Canto Verde'

##### 4.4.1 The Community



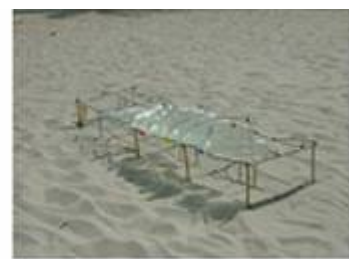
#### 4.4.2 The Fishing



#### 4.4.3 Education - Complex school: Canto Verde Digital, Estaleiro (Shipyard – School), Multi-media's room and Agro-ecological Project



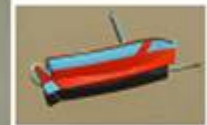
#### 4.4.4 Health



#### 4.4.5 Tourism at the Community



#### 4.4.6 Shapes and colors



#### Final Considerations

Our proposal in this article was to describe through ethnographic research and the use of photographic ethnography, how social capital is used for local development purposes at 'Prainha do Canto Verde'. In the field of study we perceived the existence of a sense of community in the capacity to identify problems, the collective thinking and learning processes to find solution proposals, and the cooperative and associative way in which dwellers and community groups organize, plan and direct their common future. On the other hand, the community still suffers low schooling levels and has no sustainable economic structure. Besides, perhaps affected by political issues related to land possession, 'Prainha do Canto Verde' does not seem to be attractive for investments, for state tourism standards. Consequently, the region has limited fund resources.

Even with all these hardship, current development at "Prainha do Canto Verde" is the result of its capacity to constantly transform itself by means of organization methods devoted to problem discussion, self-elaborated projects, the search for financing sources and the implementation of solutions for its problems. We recognize the intangible dimension of development through the interactions among social actors and institutions in the multiplication of local talent and existing resources aimed at improving quality of life, wellbeing and environmental sustainability. This seems to be the path community members have set.

Special mention should be made in regards to the photographic ethnography method: images have been constant interpretation instruments in this research. Its use widened on-field

perceptions, thus suggesting different explanations for social phenomena observed in the studied community. We took about 700 pictures and selected the ones that were more relevant to our research goals. It is worth remarking that in the final interpretation, our choices were not affected by subjective considerations of any kind.

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