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## Characterization of tourism and impacts on local communities in the Bijagós archipelago (Guinea-Bissau)

### Caracterização do turismo e impactos nas comunidades locais do arquipélago dos Bijagós (Guiné-Bissau)

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**Abstract:** The tourist effect has generated analyses, studies and research on the relationships it produces as a result of travel and the negative or positive effects produced on the host populations. Considering that residents of tourist destinations are generally not consulted when tourism begins to develop in their locality. This article aims to present a discussion of authors who describe the impacts of tourism on host communities and the importance of knowing the perception and attitude of residents of the Bijagós Archipelago regarding tourism and its impacts. The research methodology included a literature review and it was possible to see that the positive impacts of tourism are related to money from tourists, job creation and strengthening of local culture. The emergence of negative aspects such as crime, increased drug use, traffic jams, prostitution, environmental impacts, among others, make residents show a certain indifference towards tourism. Among the actions suggested to minimize impacts and improve tourism in the city, the following stood out: the importance of planning, standardization of tourist activities and the need for union between tourist actors and the local community.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; Culture; Planning.

**Resumo:** O efeito turístico tem gerado análises, estudos e pesquisas sobre as relações que produz em consequência das viagens e dos efeitos negativos ou positivos produzidos nas populações receptoras. Cabe destacar que os residentes de destinos turísticos geralmente não são consultados quando o turismo começa a se desenvolver em sua localidade. Esta pesquisa objetiva apresentar uma discussão de autores que descrevem a respeito dos impactos do turismo nas comunidades receptoras e a importância de conhecer a percepção e atitude dos moradores do Arquipélago dos Bijagós, a respeito do turismo e seus impactos. A metodologia da pesquisa contou com revisão bibliográfica, através da qual foi possível perceber que os impactos positivos do turismo estão relacionados com a renda gerada pelos turistas, geração de empregos e fortalecimento da cultura local. O surgimento de aspectos negativos como criminalidade, aumento no consumo de drogas, congestionamentos, prostituição, impactos ambientais entre outros, fazem com que os moradores apresentem certa indiferença com relação ao turismo. Chegou-se à conclusão, para que os impactos sejam minimizados e o turismo na cidade possa ser melhorado é preciso dar a devida importância para o planejamento, normatizando atividades turísticas e fazendo com que haja maior interação entre atores turísticos e a comunidade local.

**Palavras-chave:** Sustentabilidade; Cultura; Planejamento.

## 1. Introduction

The recent expansion of tourist activities in this decades reinforces its importance in the socioeconomic context. Globally, the number of international tourist arrivals reached 1.5 billion in 2019, representing a 4% growth over the previous year. The sector employed 319 million people worldwide and was responsible for opening 1 in 10 jobs (UNWTO, 2020).

Tourism planning must be directed in a sustainable way, ensuring that society guarantees its survival without exceeding the capacity of the environment, because the resources for the economy and social development depend on that.

The State has a duty to represent the community and the public interest. Therefore, this condition also applies to the tourism sector and the government in office, which, in its different instances – federal, state and local, acts as the maximum manager of the activity, elaborating and regulating measures to maximize the development of tourism, in a sustainable way (SWARBROOKE, 2000).

In this way, sustainable development is understood as being one that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the possibility of future generations to meet their own needs, promoting economic growth in an ecological and socially egalitarian way, that is, centered on the tripod: economic growth, protection of natural resources and social equity. (BRUNDTLAND, 1991).

For the UNWTO (2003), sustainable tourism development consists of meeting the needs of today's tourists and receiving regions, while protecting and expanding opportunities for the future. It is seen as a guide to the management of all resources, in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be satisfied without neglecting the maintenance of cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and systems that guarantee life.

According to Partidário (1999), sustainable tourism is tourism that is developed and maintained in an area (environment, community) in such a way, and at such a scale, that it guarantees its viability for an indefinite period of time without degrading or altering the environment (human or physical) in which it exists and without jeopardizing the development and well-being of other activities and processes

The development of tourism on islands, such as the Bijagós Archipelago (Guinea-Bissau), can cause excess demand and oversizing of supply, causing damage to the environment.

For developing countries, such as Guinea-Bissau, tourism also emerges as a strategy of economic dynamism, with the installation of lodging facilities and other equipment for the reception of visitors, despite the precarious supply of basic services for local residents. The country registers a high precariousness of infrastructure and also strong political instability. The Bijagós Archipelago, the study area of this research, has, however, a relevant tourist potential.

The Bijagós Archipelago (Bijagós-name given to local ethnic groups) was declared a Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) advocating the conciliation between conservation and sustainable use. The archipelago is made up of 88 islands and islets (Fig. 1), favoring the integrated development of tourism.

It is also worth noting, basic infrastructure problems present in the Bijagós Archipelago, such as poor access to basic sanitation, access to quality health services, treated water, garbage collection, transport, among others. With regard to health services, there is a lack of health posts and hospitals, there is a presence of doctors only in the large cities of the region and nurses in some villages, visits by health technicians on the islands are practically non-existent, generating as a consequence a high number of deaths of pregnant women and high infant mortality.

The present research seeks to describe the socio-environmental characteristics and deepen the knowledge about the Bijagós Archipelago. The research results may support future planning, directing efforts to minimize negative impacts and maximize the use of local and regional potential.

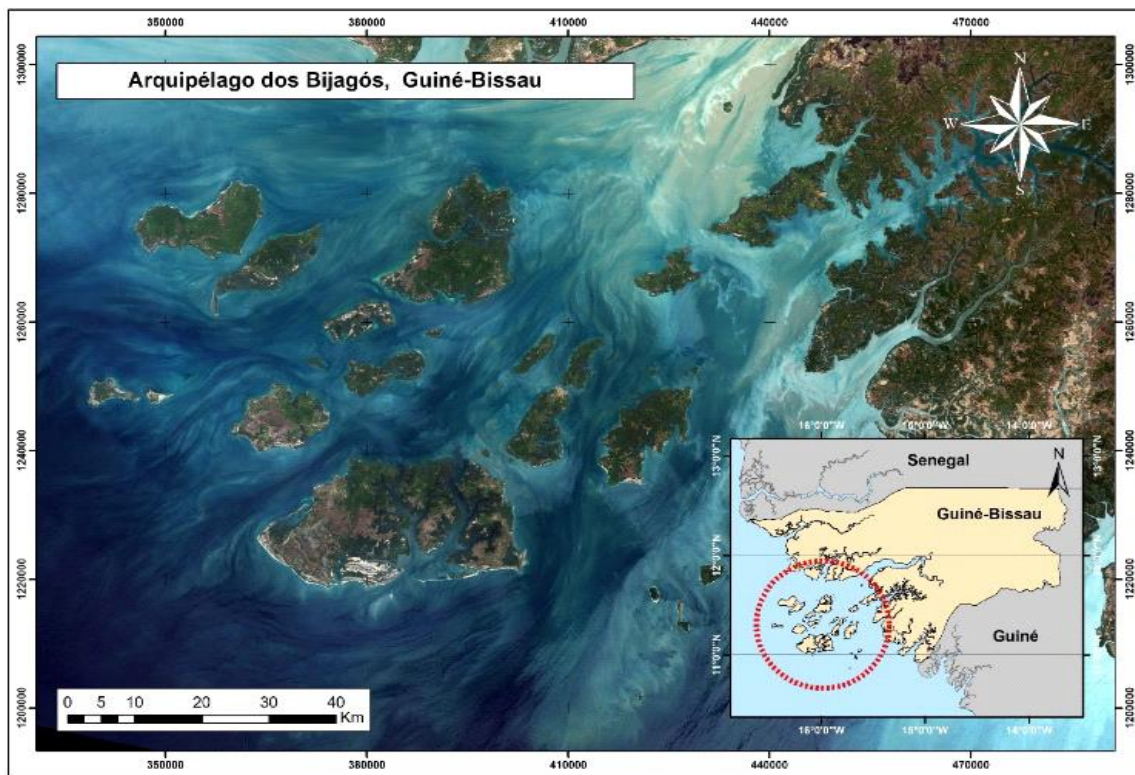


Figure 1 – Location of the Bijagós Archipelago (Guinea-Bissau).  
Source: Correia *et al.* (2017).

### 1.1 The Tourism Contextualization in the Bijagós Archipelago

The Bijagós Archipelago is located in the south of Guinea-Bissau, has about 10,000 square kilometers, and a population of 34,000 inhabitants (INEC, 2009). Its Human Development Index is among the lowest in the world (0.289), with 2/3 of the population living below the poverty line and an average life expectancy of 52 years (INEC, 2009). It is a place of great agricultural potential and high natural biodiversity, which is the basis of the economy and survival of the Bijagó ethnic group. These depend directly on the exploitation of natural resources and other biodiversity resources both at a sustainable macroeconomic level and at a local. The practice of shifting agriculture, the traditional way of fishing and the exploration of its natural resources, is the basis of the archipelago's sustainable economic development and occupy an important place in the daily life of Bijagós.

Compared to other ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau, the Bijagós are much darker-skinned, being one of the most conservative groups in the country in preserving their culture. Social organization is based on age classes, with young people having to go through a set of stages to obtain adult status. To transition from one age group to another, young people must go through a set of initiation ceremonies, where they make ritualized payments to the elders. These payments are usually made up of shellfish, fish, turtle meat, palm wine, among others, in order to obtain the secrets of knowledge in exchange. In these rituals, the one who offers it aims to obtain adult status and with it the right to land, marriage, and the prospect of a serene journey to the other world (NÓBREGA, 2009).

The majority of the Bijagós population traditionally follows an animist religion, in which public and natural spaces are believed to be inhabited by supernatural entities that direct human designs and life in general. In the same way, many natural places (sands, islands, beaches, forest, forests, rivers, sea) are considered as spaces where these beings inhabit or devoted to them and appropriate for a vast number of ritual actions and, as such, considered places sacred.

Guinea-Bissau still has a population with a low educational level, its greatest fortune currently is natural resources, as the country has few industries and services. Until nowadays, Guinea-Bissau's natural resources have been sufficient to sustain the national population (INEC, 2009). However, if the management of natural resources is not done in a sustainable way, food will begin to become scarce and the food security of populations may be threatened.

The situation of the Bijagós Archipelago benefits from the confluence of estuaries, southern and northern coastal currents and the existence of a submerged sandy strait and a mangrove surface of 37,000 ha. This fact favors the development of a varied fauna of ecological interest: fish, crustaceans, shorebirds, sea turtles, hippos, manatees, dolphins, etc. About 50% of the archipelago's land surface is made up of palm groves, with the remainder essentially occupied by dry and wet savannas (IBAP, 2014).

The natural heritage of these islands, especially their beaches and forests, favors leisure and tourism activities, namely sea bathing, nature tourism, ecotourism and adventure tourism. The sea and the climate are the main factors of tourist attraction. The islands that have beaches of greater tourist interest are: Bolama, Bubaque, Rubane, Maio, Caravela, Caraxe, Orango Grande, Orangozinho, Canhabaque, Quéré, Unhocumo, Unhocumozinho, Uno, João Vieira, among others. It appears that the largest number of tourist arrivals is recorded between the months of November and May due to the good weather conditions at this time of year. Figure 2 illustrates the scenic beauty of the site.



*Figure 2 – Aerial view of the landscape in the Bijagós Archipelago.  
Source: G.B. (2012).*

## **2. Metodology**

The methodology applied in the present study is based on the analysis of websites of tourism companies that sell tourist packages to the Bijagós Archipelago, partner networks, bibliographic content, including consultations with digital sources available on the internet, in the database of public institutions. This stage enabled a broad view of tourism in the region. In the next step, we sought to understand the economic and environmental impacts of tourism in the Bijagós Archipelago.

The research started with a literature review on the characterization of tourism and its impacts on local communities. This stage enabled a largely view of tourism impacts. In the next step, we sought to understand the economic and environmental impacts of tourism in Guinea-Bissau.

## **3. Results and discussion**

### **3.1 Communities and Tourism Actors Conflicts**

Community-based tourism (CBT) or community tourism, is a tourism development model centered on endogenous resources (human, natural and infrastructure) of a given location. Thus, it carries in its essence the protagonism of the receiving communities in the management and offer of tourist goods and services (COSTA, 2013).

Community-based tourism is a visitation management model carried out by the community, generating collective benefits, promoting intercultural experience, quality of life, valuing the history and culture of these populations, as well as sustainable use for recreational and educational purposes. The idea behind this concept is to promote fairer tourism, which puts the local population at the forefront at all stages (planning, implementation and monitoring) and takes into account the social and environmental sustainability of the activities.

Although there is no widely accepted definition of CBT, the specific literature considers, as a common element, the interpretation of the community as the subject of its own advancement, participating in the conception, development and management of tourism (LTDS, 2011; CORIOLANO, 2003, 2009; SANSOLO; BURSZTYN, 2009; IRVING, 2009).

For Irving (2009), a new look at the TBC occurs from the convergence of a series of factors that emerged at the national and international levels, namely: (i) the political interpretation of tourism as an alternative for social inclusion; (ii) strengthening themes such as social participation and democratic governance; (iii) the existence of social capital and the commitment to “stakeholder engagement” as fundamental elements in the actions undertaken by international projects; (iv) the inclusion of tourism in the agendas of NGOs of international scope, associated with social and environmental issues; (v) the subtle change in the profile of tourists, now more committed to social and environmental responsibility; (vi) the demand for new demands in the area of planning, as a result of the realization that the development of tourism, sometimes, does not favor local populations, contributing to social exclusion; (vii) the emergence of debates on “tourism and sustainability”.

Brazil outlines the following principles common to CBT: self-management; associativism and cooperativism; the democratization of opportunities and benefits; the centrality of collaboration, partnership and participation; the valorization of the local culture and, mainly, the protagonism of the local communities in the management of the activity and/or in the offer of tourist goods and services, aiming at the appropriation by them of the benefits arising from the development of the tourist activity.

For Sansolo et al. (2009), environmental conservation, valuing cultural identity and generating direct benefits for host communities are the sustaining components of this tourism proposal. According to these authors, community tourism does not represent just another segment of the market, but the possibility of a new paradigm for tourism. The potential activity's is not restricted to economic benefits, but also contributes to the process of reevaluation of cultural identity and keeping the way of life of traditional populations.

However, the development of community (or community-based) tourism can only occur if the protagonists of the destinations are subjects and not objects of the process, says Irving (2009). In an attempt to outline a conceptualization for community tourism, the author presents some premises that emerge as central elements of this activity: (i) endogenous basis of the initiative and local development; (ii) participation and social protagonism in the planning, implementation and evaluation of tourism projects; (iii) limited scale and controlled social and environmental impacts; (iv) generation of direct benefits to the local population; (v) cultural affirmation and interculturality; (vi) sharing and mutual learning between the tourist and local actors.

The local community is concerned about the risk arising from tourist activity, such as pollution in rivers, especially in places where several species reproduce. Tourists who have been visiting the islands often do not respect the places that are considered sacred by the local community, which for the people these places are very important, taking into account the traditions and customs practiced by the Bijagós people, and the operators for them these spaces. are strategic to build your ventures and leisure spaces.

Based on Pires' (2002) assumption that the active participation of the local community constitutes the only ethical guarantee of sustainability of an effective development process, and that this must occur throughout the implementation of the entire sustainable development project, and not just from your planning.

Barquero (2001) also highlights that local development aims to meet the needs of the resident population through the active participation of the community involved, seeking the economic, social and cultural well-being of the community and consequently improving the standard of living of these people. , because "local communities have their own identity, which leads them to take initiatives to ensure their development" (BARQUERO, 2001, p. 39).

The rules of environmental protection, in most cases, are not respected by tour operators, in terms of environmental preservation in protected places by the country's entities, in the case of the Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas of Guinea-Bissau (IBAP, 2008). It should be noted that on the islands of the Bijagós Archipelago there are four main groups of actors/ethnics who have different ways to use and explore the natural resources and looking at the environment , for example: 1) the traditional society of the Bijagós whose activity has allowed the conservation of the physiognomy of the environment and the terrestrial landscape; 2) other national ethnic groups, residing in the Bijagós Archipelago, who exploit various natural resources on a larger scale; 3) resident foreigners, attracted by the wealth of fisheries and tourist

resources, come from West African, European and American countries; and 4) foreign fishermen (Senegalese, Ghanaian, Mauritanian, European, among others), who frequent the Bijagós Archipelago community. These four groups of actors are mutually related, but with different interests, and therefore, they constantly come into conflict over the use of space and the exploitation of natural resources.

Queiroz, et al. (2014, p. 2) describe that “tourism in small islands is highly dependent on the quality of the marine and coastal environment”, consequently, it is necessary to plan a mild tourism, minimizing negative interference in these environments.

According to the UNWTO (2014), the development of tourism on islands must be guided to fulfill plans that are fully clear about their physical and spatial capacity, taking into account the limitation of resources, especially water, coast, biodiversity and energy.

It is also worth noting the real estate speculation, which ends up driving the local population away from their home territory and activity of origin. This process occurs in the most diverse ways, either physically selling their land and moving to another place, or participating informally in the economy, or belittling their own cultural values and submitting them to new cultures brought by tourists.

### 3.2 Economic and Environmental Impacts of Tourism

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According to Ruschmann (1997), as the environment is a fundamental element of tourism, its “healthy” diet is essential for the evolution of the activity. Intact nature can become economically viable as long as it is associated with the protection of natural spaces and the existence of services and equipment offered to tourists.

The impact on these natural spaces is not restricted only to nature, as the local community and its culture also suffer these impacts, since when the daily life is modified and new values are introduced in the community. When the imported culture starts to predominate, the local culture loses its value, causing real conflicts between the native population that cannot adapt to the new customs, exactly what is happening at the moment in the Bijagós Archipelagos, where there is a marked exclusion of the local population and marginalization of their culture.

The profits from tourism are not providing an improvement in the quality of life for the natives or the community in general. Policies prioritize foreign entrepreneurs, attracting more and more investments without proper environmental and economic planning. So that the social costs of tourism are minimized, it is necessary that programs and actions to increase tourism activity are associated with a global planning of the region.

In general, natives end up being excluded from the job market, as they are not qualified, losing their place to people from other locations with a higher level of education. Deficient education is a big problem in the municipality of Bijagós, there is only one school that offers the secondary level, and there are no professional courses. In this context, it is suggested the implementation of vocational courses, especially related to tourism, to prepare the local population for this new job market.

In Guinea-Bissau, tourism management is under the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Tourism, a body linked to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Tourism and Crafts. The tourism development strategy in Guinea-Bissau, adopted in the 2000s, identified the need for interventions to develop the activity: creating access to places of tourist interest, renewing infrastructure, strengthening institutional capacities, attracting investments and accessing funding. , but none of them were implemented (ENGLISH, 2009).

For Fernandes and Coelho (2002), the positive or negative results of the economic impacts of tourism on a community will largely depend on the degree of development of the region under study, as any industry can have two types of effects on the economy: I) intense investment activity, with periods of expansion when it is implemented; and II) operation itself.

In agreement with Carvalho et al. (2016), the mitigation of negative effects depends on planning and integration with the local population so that tourism can remain an economic activity.

It should be noted that in both cases the volume of impacts depends on the capacity of the local economy to provide the goods and services demanded by the tourism sector. For example, a hotelier who is expanding his enterprise has all the necessary conditions, such as good quality construction materials at affordable prices, labor, among others, better for him and for the city. According to Ruschmann (1997), as the environment is a fundamental element of tourism, its "healthy" diet is essential for the evolution of the activity. Intact nature can become economically viable as long as it is associated with the protection of natural spaces and the existence of services and equipment offered to tourists.

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The Bijagós culture is not only instrumentalized, but also disrupted by tourist opponents, on the one hand, the emphasis given to the authentic traditions of the local population, without consulting the latter, aims to seduce the western tourist who seeks authenticity. On the other hand, these same traditions are corrupted as soon as local chiefs are incited to sell the sacred spaces of their communities. The territorial and cultural dispossession that followed for a long time undermined the internal structures of Bijagós society undermining its ability to collectively manage the ongoing social change.

The problem lies with the descriptions of what society should be and the traditional ceremonies of the Bijagós, since the occupation of these spaces in areas reserved for specific ceremonies, such as the fanado, often prevents them from taking place. This occupation also has other harmful effects, linked to the environment, since the sandy areas of the archipelago are the spawning place for turtles, which do not do so if the space is permanently occupied.

Some beaches are places of ceremonial worship, but also places for the movement of cattle, shellfish collection and fishing. In other words, they have a cultural function as sacred places, as they are integrated into the "fanado" space, a crucial periodic ceremony to readjust and update the internal organization of communities and the relationship between their individuals.



Fonte: Jean François (2006).



Fonte: CDB-Habitat (2019).



Fonte: IMVF, (2013).



Fonte: Algarve Selvagem (2017).

*Figura 3 – Mulheres e homens de Bijagós com vestidos tradicionais.*  
 Fonte: Jean François (2006); CDB-Habitat (2019); IMVF. (2013); Algarve Selvagem (2017).

All these spaces and lands are often targets of attraction for the tourist sector and artisanal fishing. These spaces, in addition to their productive function, also have a social and religious function, and factors such as tourist pressure, the installation of artisanal fishermen's camps in these places represent strong threats to the Bijagó culture, because the notion of sacred spaces brings about the union between the idea that they are necessary for the preservation of the Bijago culture and the sorund environment.

There is an idea of a “basic” African cosmology, with a structure on two levels, where the first is that of the lesser spirits and the second that of the supreme being. The lesser spirits sustain the events and processes in the microcosm of the local community and its surroundings, while the supreme being sustains the events and processes in the macrocosm, that is, in the world as a whole. As the microcosm is part of the macrocosm, the lesser spirits are seen either as manifestations of the supreme being or as entities whose power ultimately derives from it (FRAZÃO, 2009).

The population of Bijagós expressed this nominalism most evidently in the relationships between the Bijagós population and society/nature, relationships that are expressed in religious rituals, in culture, in society and in the economy.

According to Lopes (1983), tradition is part of the cultural and socioeconomic heritage of the Guinean people and also of several African peoples. Also according to the aforementioned author, this concept must be protected and valued, always creating mechanisms that guarantee its manifestation, according to the standards conceived by the different Guinean ethnic groups.

For Bijagós society, nature is characterized as a sacred entity, thus subsisting a cultural, religious and mythical relationship between man and nature, which implies that social economic production in the appropriation of the use value of natural resources overlaps with the value exchange, in the current process of economic and capitalist mercantilist modernization. It should be noted that the Bijagós have occupied the archipelago for a long time and to this day have no legal record of individual private ownership of the land. They only define their place of residence as an individual plot, a small piece of land, with the rest of the territory considered as an area for community and collective use, with use regulated and regulated by custom and internally shared norms.



#### 4. Final Considerations

From the above, they a concern related to the negative effects that tourism can trigger in the receiving communities and the positive effects that can be enhanced, through the opinion of the local community.

To tourism development occur in a sustainable and adequate way, its approach needs to be interdisciplinary, with professionals from different areas working together, both in evaluating its positive and negative effects and in forwarding solutions for it. The population, when integrated into the tourist planning of their locality, can contribute by evaluating the dissatisfaction that this triggers, as well as evaluating their potential. However, monitoring the opinion of local residents is necessary after the initial stages of development. Monitoring the opinion of residents about tourism becomes, therefore, essential for proper planning in a tourist location.

There is no doubt about the need for improvements in tourism planning, adoption of measures, policies and coordinated actions, between the public and private sectors, that prioritize the environmental aspect, aiming at the conservation of the environment and sustainable tourism, which are indispensable and key to the long-term success of the tourism industry.

In order to minimize problems of environmental degradation in the region, it is suggested the implementation of Environmental Education actions in public schools, which can positively contribute to the awareness of communities regarding sustainable development based on sustainable and rational use of natural resources in the municipality of Arquipélagos dos Bijagós. To preserve and manage Guinea-Bissau's natural heritage on a lasting basis, it will be necessary to further strengthen the protection status and the connection between protected areas and ensure integrated management, with the active involvement of local communities and other authors who work in environmental protection.

In the context of socio-environmental and cultural contributions, traditional knowledge is defined as the set of ethnic knowledge of the Bijagós, containing a cosmivision of the natural and supernatural world, transmitted orally from generation to generation in the archipelago.

It is essential to develop a specific legal framework for the protection of the Bijagós population in relation to the current scenario of globalization, particularly with regard to access to land and sacred places that may be threatened, along with traditional Bijagós knowledge and the land of this ethnic community, following the example of the interests of tourist companies.

The land has been increasingly occupied by intense tourist, real estate, business and government activities. The invasion of sacred places, associated with the new problems caused by globalization and the tasks required by the tourist industry, affect the traditional way and style, customs of appropriation of the life of the Bijagós.

For Guinea-Bissau to be able to structure and qualify its municipalities, the direct involvement of the receiving communities is necessary. They are the protagonists of this story. All this movement translates into the capacity of mutual action of the Guinean citizen, who must perceive himself as a fundamental part of this process.

Finally, it is important to highlight the difficulty of accessing updated demographic data, given that the last census carried out by the National Institute of Statistics of Guinea-Bissau occurred in 2009. Also the lack of updated literature on tourism in that territory.

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