

Managing Natural Resources in Eastern Algarve, Portugal: An Assessment of the Policy Uses of Local Knowledge(s)

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When ecology is not an issue

In Portugal, the first ecologically-minded NGOs and associations were somewhat marginal forms that sprang from the political fever of the 1974 revolution. In many respects, it was Portugal's integration as a full member of the European Community (now European Union) that eventually led to the creation of a Secretary of State for the Environment. In other words, political issues deriving from human impact on the environment were initially fuelled not by popular concern but by administrative pressures from European institutions, which resulted in forms of imitative behaviour within Portugal's major political parties (strongly influenced by the political programmes of other European parties). Since then, the ecological debate has steadily gained in importance, if only because it easily lends itself to rhetorical manipulation in regional and national politics.

The creation of a number of 'Natural Parks' in the early eighties, however, resulted from a marriage between the hastened import of European ecological ideologies and the leftovers of the pre-revolutionary government's environmental policies, which had implemented some embryonic 'Nature Reserves' since the 1940s. Today, 'National Parks' are governed by an autonomous official institute called *Instituto Conservação da Natureza* (ICN, Institute for the Preservation of Nature), which inherited the functions and territories of the *Serviço de Parques e Florestas* (SPF, Park and Forestry Conservation Commission). But the role and organisational model of these 'Natural Parks', and of the ICN as a whole, are presently under scrutiny due to an upsurge in popular ecological awareness.

Paradise and loss

The present chapter considers the problematic survival of one 'Natural Park' in the coastal area of the Algarve, the southernmost region of Portugal. The focus is on the manipulative uses of the notion of 'traditional knowledge' as pertaining to the Algarve's fishing and shellfish-gathering communities. Under scrutiny are the social

consequences, at the local level, of a fragile balance between the artificial state-imposed introduction of environmental concerns, the socially and environmentally damaging impact of the tourist industry, and the general embrace of developmentalist policies by social players in the area.

In the face of widespread indifference to environmental issues, it is the Portuguese state which has become the supposed driving force in the implementation of preservationist ideologies. The state, however, can also be a major obstacle, as our team found when studying the administrative functions and political competence within the Natural Park of Ria Formosa (*Parque Natural da Ria Formosa*, PNRF), the institution in charge of the coastal lagoon system in eastern Algarve. Our team became struck by the fact that the most damaging ‘developments’ were the direct responsibility of the national administration: on the marshes of the lagoon are located the international airport of Faro; a deep-water international seaport; depots of artillery ammunition; and a naval base. This contradictory situation must be understood as resulting from an apparently paradoxical flux of discourses. Indeed, when trying to reconcile the precariousness of the lagoon ecosystem with its own policy decisions, the Park’s directorate regularly confronts juxtaposed administrative powers (municipalities, various regional delegations of the central government) and socio-economic interests (unions, industrialists associations, private investors, contractors, etc). Although the Park is shielded by a wide range of legal instruments, its directorate finds it very difficult – and frequently impossible – to implement eco-friendly policies within the protected area.

Facing irreconcilable priorities and pressures, and unable to enforce the law in sensitive areas of the territory under his jurisdiction, the Director of the PNRF resigned from his post in December 1999. By then it was known that the head offices of both the ICN and the Ministry for the Environment had overruled some of the Director’s decisions aiming to forbid the construction of new hotels and marinas inside the Park. These urbanising projects were deemed very disruptive to the environmental integrity of the marshes and lagoon by both the Park’s technical staff and by regional and national NGOs (Amaral, 2000:12-17). The Director’s resignation caused a crisis of legitimacy, and his protests were publicly aired in the local and national press. *O Independente* wrote:

The present situation of the Ria Formosa Natural Park is absurd. Its Director claimed in a local newspaper, some weeks ago, that he ‘must have been crazy’ and ‘out of [his] mind’ when accepting the responsibility of directing the Park. He stressed that ‘there are no [political] guarantees whatsoever to help solve a series of problems in the Park. (Pinheiro 1999)

Besides the hotel industry’s successful lobbying against certain Park rulings, the national government also licensed the plans by a state department, the *Instituto Portuário do Sul* (IPS, or Harbour Authority of Algarve), for the construction of 1,950 new moorings in new marinas, and some 3,000 beds in new seaside hotels¹. The fact that these environmentally damaging initiatives could be planned and approved, revealed that ambiguous administrative policies continued to erode the authority of the Park’s directorate. Particularly problematic was that the territorial boundaries with

which the Harbour Authority and the Park Authority exerted their jurisdiction had never been clearly established.

Despite the Director's resignation, many locals welcomed the new projects. These locals share the hoteliers' and local councils' view that building tourist infrastructure is good for progress; they also hope to grab a slice or crumb of the financial bonanza which, they hope, will generate more employment, greater social and professional mobility, and more foreign currency. Seemingly successful developments already exist. One example is the Cabanas de Tavira, where a large tourist infrastructure was built in the seventies and eighties (*Pedras de Rainha, Almargem, Pero Gil and Golden Club*). Here, as in most seaside areas in Algarve, tourism is perceived as a valuable commodity, i.e. linked directly to increased land and estate value, novel ideas in urbanisation, greater commercial activity, and more job alternatives to fishing and agriculture. The majority of the population here thinks little of controlled forms of tourism.

What are anthropologists for?

In 1998, the Park's Directorate proposed that a research project in anthropology be developed. Its chief aim would be the ethnographic study of the fishing communities inside the Park and under the Directorate's jurisdiction. Following a series of informal discussions between ICN and a Lisbon-based Department of Anthropology (at ISCTE, the *Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa*), a research project was launched under the name of 'Social Management of the Natural Resources in South-eastern Algarve'. A team from CEAS (*Centro de Estudos de Antropologia Social*) formally started research in March 1999. Financed by the ICN, the project was to run over 2 years and would involve five researchers, which was unusually large for a programme in Portuguese Anthropology. The team was granted full institutional support, free access to all PNRF archives and co-ownership of the research results.

The first and foremost research goal, according to the signed agreement, was to collect and organise data about the Park's maritime and coastal human settlements (Diegues 1995; Moreira 1987). The research was to cover not only villages where fishermen and shellfish gatherers lived, but also at least one of the most important fishing towns in Portugal. The contents of an initial non-official working text, which the team co-ordinators presented to the Park, itemised the following objectives:

- A social and economic profile of the fishing and shellfish-gathering settlements;
- Study of the traditional techniques for fishing and shellfish production and gathering;
- Description of the means and equipment used in the pursuit of these activities;
- Inquiry into the indigenous knowledge of the sea and the lagoon;
- Study of local oral traditions.

The final text of the Agreement clarified how the Park authority perceived the goals of the research; it conveyed a different meaning to the agenda initially suggested by the anthropologists who were to co-ordinate the project:

‘We thus consider it important to develop a pioneering study that may help understand the cultural specifications of each settlement, as well as the problems of social identity that affect them. This study is intended to identify cases demanding urgent social intervention, and to bring together the stakeholders that share the common territory [of the Ria Formosa lagoon], with a view to managing integrated forms of development. These should pay equal attention to the preservation of traditional fishing and shellfish production activities, and to environmentally-minded tourism in a protected area.’²

In the final text of the Agreement, the Park Authority stressed it wished to use anthropological knowledge in order to intervene in the management of human and natural resources. The Agreement thus endorsed the collaboration of academic researchers, normally guided by an independent status and self-declared scientific standards, with a state organism dependent both on national and regional levels of policy-making and managing a high-profile public campaign for environmental awareness. This train of events, culminating in the Agreement, reveals how the capacity of Portuguese ethnography and, more generally, anthropology, is commonly subject to misconceptions and clichés. As anthropologists, we were regarded as legitimately having the final word on issues like ‘popular culture’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘national identity’. The agreed proposal also suggested that the anthropologist’s work could offer an important contribution to the development of an environmentalist discourse. This idea, too, was based on a commonsensical and stereotyped understanding of what ‘ethnographic inquiry’ is and does. It was assumed that research rapidly directs anthropologists toward the identification and study of ‘fishing villages’, villages which conformed to the romantic vision expressed in the myth that non-industrialised cultures are environmentally benign (Milton 1996).

Importantly too, the Park authority was immersed in a logic of multilateral political and legal confrontations. The obvious potential for tension, now that the research team was poised to undertake applied anthropology, resulted in the above-mentioned clarification by the Park Authority. The call for applied research, however, also brought about the possibility, and indeed urgency, of a second level of inquiry, which the scientific co-ordinators at the ICN proposed in a report drafted before the signing of the Agreement (Branco et al 1998). This second level of inquiry enlarged the scope of the study by suggesting it include all the social players involved in the management of the Park’s natural resources. This broader scope directed the researchers’ attention to the Park’s officials and the policies for which they are responsible.

Using data gathered at both levels, the present chapter reflects upon the various kinds of knowledge produced and reproduced in the Ria Formosa, and uses to which such knowledge can be put. First, we present the empirical knowledge accumulated by the

local communities inhabiting the settlements – a knowledge that has “domestic” use, and which the team of anthropologists, by force of the Agreement, needed to collect and systematise. Next, we argue that the Park authority also produces and reproduces particular forms of technical and scientific knowledge about the area under its jurisdiction. The resulting discourse shapes the Park Authority’s relations with the inhabitants of the Ria Formosa, and with other social actors – the municipalities, the regional delegations of the central administration, the tourism industrialists and the non-governmental organisations. This is our second theme. Finally, the presence of the researchers themselves requires attention. Early on in the research, it became obvious how important it was for the development of the research constantly to take into account how Park officials and technicians, as well as the area’s residents, related to and coped with the presence and objectives of the anthropologists. The weighing up of the implications of the team’s work in this complex context would become an insurmountable issue. The team soon realised that the best way to guarantee a scientific standard for its research and freedom of discourse was to somewhat shift the focus of the study to the “*Parque Natural da Ria Formosa*” institution itself, and to guarantee the right to assess, and independently divulge, the information gathered both in the field (in the settlements and at the Park’s administrative centre) and in several public and reserved archives.

A natural environment

The Natural Park of Ria Formosa covers an area of 18,400 ha along the coastal line of five municipalities (Loulé, Faro, Olhão, Tavira and Vila Real de Santo António), that belong to the District of Faro. The physical territory of the Ria Formosa extends over a 60 km stretch of coastal lagoon, characterised by marshes, moors, a barrier island chain comprising five small islands and two peninsulas, and a series of tidal areas, islets and channels. This territory is an ecosystem partially inhabited by human settlements and surrounded by various urban conglomerations. The PNRF, created by decree in 1987, was legally superimposed on a previously declared ‘Nature Reserve’. As mentioned above, these successive classifications of the Ria Formosa reflect the introduction, in Portugal in the seventies, of ecological ideologies calling for the preservation of the natural environment. With time, these ideologies have produced an increasingly powerful rhetoric (Guerra 1989)³.

Recognised by various international conventions and organisations (the International Conservation Network, Natura 2000 Network, Ramsar Convention, Special Bird Protection Area, etc), the ecological importance of the Ria Formosa lies mainly in the biological richness of its fauna and flora. An important number of local and migrant bird species nest in the lagoon, which is also a nursery for a large number of important fish species. The Park also serves as a major reproductive area for shellfish (mainly clams [*Ruditapes decussata*] and oysters [*Crassostrea sp.*]) both in the wild on natural banks and shores, and in licensed nurseries in the lagoon’s tidal areas. These reproductive activities are important to the local economy.

Like shellfish production, traditional fishing continues as a key source of local income. Fishing is mainly coastal, local and marked by the use of multiple techniques, among which electronic detection (sonar) and positioning (GPS) systems are increasingly important. Although the fishing fleet is relatively large, motorised boats remain small in size, using minimal equipment but a wide range of capture techniques (Costa and Franca 1982; Cavaco 1976, vol 1)⁴. The fleet operates within the two hundred mile limit of the Exclusive Economic Zones of Portugal, Spain and Morocco (Leal 1990), and keeps mostly to the coast. In more distant as in recent times, fishing has led to the creation and development of fishermen's settlements (temporary and permanent, legal and illegal; Serrão 1990), not only on mainland shores, but also on the islands and peninsulas round the lagoon.

The tourist industry in the district of Faro (Algarve) has been growing since the 1960s, and is one of the region's major sources of income. The ongoing national importance of this activity must not be overlooked, since the Portuguese economy depends largely on the tertiary sector (Barreto 1996). Every year, many national and foreign (mainly European) tourists visit the southern coast of Algarve, especially during the summer season.⁵ During this period, the need for accommodation and complementary activities (food, leisure, transport) reaches well beyond the centres and resorts surrounding the Park, and into the Park's small popular settlements. Naturally benefiting from the Algarve's almost continuous stretch of sandy beaches, the tourist industry has boomed over the past thirty years, and has come to seasonally condition life in every community. Tourism also influences governmental policies, regional politics, the power games of the private investors and, consequently, the Park's ambiguous and shaky balance between its directives and its policy implementations.

In search of the native

Although the Park's islands and peninsulas have suffered extensive illegal occupation and building in recent years, both by the fishing communities and (in most cases) by outsiders wishing to cash in on the holiday boom, there is as yet no coherent policy line of relationship between the Park authority and other local actors. Park officials have adopted a mixture of attitudes, sometimes stopping or curtailing illegal occupation, sometimes tolerating it, sometimes drawing public attention to the preservation policies of the protected lagoon area. The practice of building on the shifting sands of islands at risk (Pilkey et al 1989) has seriously aggravated the conflict of interests between holiday makers, local communities, municipalities and Park staff. After an initial period in which many illegal houses and shacks were forcibly pulled down on the order of the Park officials and the Secretary of State, an approach widely criticised, a new approach was attempted. This approach attempted to win local communities over to the Park authority's perspective, which stressed the (seemingly desperate) need of preservation of the lagoon. A regulatory document of the PNRF stated clearly that local community members had the 'historical right' to occupy the islands and islets, as long as they demonstrated that their main professional activity was either fishing or shellfish-gathering. The document simultaneously recognised and conditioned their presence in

the Ria Formosa area (Raposo 1986). When we initiated our research, the team immediately became aware of the Park directorate's desire to enforce its perspective on who could legitimately live on the islands and peninsulas. The fishermen and shellfish-gatherers had this right, the tourists did not. For the directorate, its desire to lay down the law had been the starting point for creating a detailed but unsystematic database of settlements near the Park's administrative centre. The initiative later developed into a formal Agreement of collaboration with our research team. 'Local knowledge' had become a resource.

More recently, at a scientific meeting, the ex-Director of the PNRF had explicitly endorsed the rather dubious claim that local knowledge must be seen as a 'resource'. Within his vision, the 'sustainable' use of Nature was to be 'rediscovered' (by 'us') through the management and regulation – or rather 'promotion' – not only of the environment but also of indigenous knowledge and practices, which we, as anthropologists, were expected to reveal. The ex-Director declared:

'The Ria Formosa was classified as a Natural Park in 1987. The aims of this designation include: 1) promotion of the adequate use of the natural resources, 2) promotion of the cultural, social and economic development of the resident population, based on traditional activities, and 3) regulation of recreational activities in accordance with the natural and cultural resources. In order to conciliate human use of the territory (there are people living on the protected area – we are talking about a Natural Park, not an Integral Reserve), and the economic activities taking place there, a rational land management is required to allow the sustainable use of natural resources. Because preserving and protecting Nature doesn't mean (it cannot mean) 'not touching', 'not using'. For millennia this complex barrier-island system has provided the livelihood of countless generations of men who knew how to use it and shape it without risking its productivity and biodiversity. Can we, human beings at the dawn of the 3rd millennium, rediscover the sustainability of nature?' (Fonseca 1999)

The assumption that present-day fishermen and shellfish-gatherers are the direct heirs of an ancestral indigenous population, and now the 'guardians' of the lagoon's natural resources, is a social representation which strongly influenced the course of the research. In a nutshell, the assumption became a topic of discussion in its own right.

The acknowledged reason why the Park authority had decided to approach a university research team from Lisbon to produce an authoritative discourse on the Park's local population originated in growing scepticism regarding the feasibility of a strictly local response (i.e. by Park officials or local social scientists) to the multiple developmentalist visions held by investors, the municipalities and the regional delegations representing the central administration (Campos 1999; Wells and Brandon 1999). The Park authority believed that only outsiders could produce systematic, multi-layered scientific knowledge about the inhabitants of the lagoon, their 'traditional knowledge' and vision on how to manage a fragile natural environment. This belief

underpinned the establishment of the above-mentioned Agreement. It must be stressed though that the Park authority wished to fill in the knowledge gap as part of a larger discursive and political strategy which aimed to reinforce its authority and improve its public image through better social practices. The promoter of the research ultimately hoped to obtain a larger power base than that conferred by the central administration (always dependent on shifting political contexts and agendas).

The Park Authority's managing policy was shrouded in ambiguity. On the one hand, the Authority wanted to empower local communities (cf. Cheater 1999) through suggesting they participate in the preservation of their own cultural and natural heritage. On the other, Park officials also believed that the same people were carelessly destroying that heritage by adopting exogenous, 'non-traditional' ways of life. In two letters written to the President of the *Região de Turismo do Algarve* (RTA, the Tourist Board of Algarve)⁶, the Park's Director reacted against the stereotyped vision of idyllic 'fishing communities', a vision favoured by the RTA when promoting tourism in the Algarve. He countered the stereotype with the idea that local traditions had been systematically destroyed, and that the present community was therefore uncharacteristic:

The great majority of houses to be found 'everywhere in the islands' isn't (unfortunately) neither 'typical' nor does it 'belong to fishermen'; apart from a few fishermen's houses, Praia de Faro is a holiday resort. (...) Santa Luzia was once 'picturesque'; today it is just another uncharacteristic village, and the rare hints of singularity reside in the (less and less picturesque) boats and fishing equipment lying on the lagoon banks. (Letter 1, March 1998)

Only on the island of Culatra and in a small fraction of the Praia de Faro (...) do we actually find fishermen's houses. The other villages are composed of holidaymakers' houses. Furthermore, the fact that a house is inhabited by a fisherman and his family doesn't necessarily imply that it is a 'fisherman's typical house'. (...) The houses of the villages on the barrier islands are uncharacteristic, chaotic, built with low-quality materials (...). In Santa Luzia, we find the same: hollow brick, concrete, tiles, aluminium doors and windows, and a proliferation of sheds have obliterated all signs of the traditional architecture of the Algarve. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the Ria Formosa lagoon, but is happening everywhere in the coastal areas of the country (...). The 'typicality' of Santa Luzia – if there is such a thing there – is limited to the fishing activities of that village. (Letter 2, May 1998)

Moreover, most constructions are illegal deriving from a judicial fact: access to the coastal stretch, as in the whole of the country, is public (i.e. the land is owned and managed by the state) and managed for the common good. Nevertheless, some portions of the Park territory have benefited from a special legal regime, because they were alienated from the central administration as public heritage to be managed by local councils and other state organisms, which acquired them with the obvious goal of

making profit from tourism (Praia de Faro, in 1956; island of Tavira, in 1966; islands of Armona and Farol, since the sixties).

Praia de Faro village (an urban holiday resort and, simultaneously, the settlement of dozens of fishing and shellfish-gathering families) lies in the Ancão Peninsula and is subjected to strong coastal erosion (Pilkey et al 1989; Simões 1984; Sousa 1999), which the Park directorate tries to control by demolishing clandestine constructions and increasing political pressure through a range of legal dispositions. Frequently, the only way to preserve the thin dune line of the peninsula⁷ and the threatened lagoon system has been to demolish the more endangered and endangering houses (in 1984, 1987 and 1991). The arguments and actions, however, apply only to the fishermen's houses on the margins of the village, because the holidaymakers' houses are under the jurisdiction and responsibility of Faro Council, which favours construction over demolition. Consequently, it has not been possible, until now at least, to regulate the site through detailed urban planning.

The demolition of illegal houses, which brings with it the need to rehouse those evicted, is unpopular and costly, causes social unrest and has damaged the public image of the Park Authority. In response, the directorate tries to promote alternatives by transforming the *modus vivendi* of the social groups concerned with traditional fishing and shellfish-gathering. The intention is to promote eco-tourism and turn the groups concerned into living 'objects' (in the sense of museum pieces) who must preserve 'their tradition'. The Park Authority now views these groups as belonging to a 'community of memory'. The authority assumes that 'people agree that they do ... share some kind of cultural heritage, and [that] they talk about that heritage in ways that celebrate what is good or beautiful in it but criticise what is not' (Handler and Gable 1997:235).

By requesting a series of ethnographic reports on the daily life of the populations settled inside the Park, the directorate is opening the door for new developments in the discursive manipulation of tropes such as 'traditionalism' and 'authenticity' (cf Handler 1988). The continuous reference to traditional images of coastal Algarve before tourism took off confirms that Park officials do indeed imagine the place and its people as a set of community-based practices now remembered with nostalgia. (It is these new developments, and their practical consequences, which justified our research focus on the Park authority itself.) Most of the images popular with the Park authority originate in urban and literate circles, where they are divulged in texts, photos and films that depict a golden past with motifs such as (extinct) tuna fishing tackles, ichthyic bonanzas both at sea and in the lagoon, ancient environment-friendly fishing techniques, unpolluted sandy beaches and beautifully-adorned wooden boats⁸. Among these 'cultural assets', one is particularly valued in preservationist discourse: the traditional fishing techniques (see also Letter 1, above). Because they are considered less predatory than the modern ways, these techniques are thought to stand for and guarantee an empirically proven, sustained and balanced exploration of maritime and lagoon resources. Assuming that the tourist industry will continue, and assuming that the government will maintain the Park's legal status of preservation area, one can easily

envisage a future 'thematic' natural park which harbours a minimum of hotel-and-beach infrastructure and museum-like urban settlements in which the population takes responsibility as the privileged 'guardian' over the lagoon and the ocean's eco-systems; a respected role in accord with the current priorities of environmentalists (cf Wade 1999; see also Handler and Gable 1997). Within this framework, the Ordination Plan of the Parque Natural da Ria Formosa (see Raposo 1986) foresees the eviction of people deemed excessive to the endangered islands and peninsulas, and their subsequent relocation elsewhere in the Park.

Were they to go forward, these resettlement plans would affect mainly the socially and economically under-privileged, especially those groups without any prospect of finding immediate alternative housing, e.g. those possessing only an illegal house on the sandy islands (see above). According to these plans, the fishing and shellfish-gathering communities are supposed to recreate a reified past in which they keep to the use of angling lines for fishing, take care of shellfish nurseries, and live in 'fishermen's houses'. The fishing communities in the Ria Formosa are assumed to possess an exotic culture at the root of an Algarvian regional identity. At work here are the same ideological presuppositions that have, for more than a century, fed the urban representation of a Portuguese national identity which takes 'peasant culture' as its major reference. Other means of securing a livelihood will not be accepted. The Detailed Plan for the Praia de Faro (Plano de Pormenor da Praia de Faro, see above) even proposes to replace the existing brick, cement and plank houses with wooden shacks on stilts that imitate the extinct building style found in some coastal localities in central-northern Portugal. The Ria Formosa is by no means the only case, but is part of a more generalised international trend that has gradually become authoritative in the processes of inventing 'natives'.

Conclusion – finishing lines

We have presented the PNRF as a collective and, to some degree, autonomous institution. Its ideological lines of action condition both the daily management of the Park and the implementation of longer-term social policies. Unfortunately, the degree of visibility and protagonism which the Park's directorate lends to the marginalized social groups under its jurisdiction do not translate into concrete forms of empowerment. Empowerment, rather, reverts to the Park authority itself, for the PNRF has become the *de facto* guardian of the natural resources of the Ria Formosa. In many respects, the fishermen and shellfish-gatherers have become imaginary categories within an official discourse of environmental protection and preservation, while the Park officials, whose discourses can be read almost as the ritual enactment of a prescribed role, have become technical specialists who work in an environment where political, financial, and economic interests, public and private, are immensely strong.

There is some possibility, though, that the Park may disappear under the exceedingly unbearable pressures of the tourist industry and the rapid urbanisation of a coast still receiving migrant populations. These migrants come not only from the mountainous

areas of the Algarve, but also from other Portuguese regions and indeed other European countries (namely the United Kingdom, Germany and The Netherlands). The Park may also disappear because of what geological and geo-maritime studies (ordered by the Park) have described as the annihilation of the lagoon system itself; a destruction triggered by the changing pattern and density of the sand line along Portugal's south coast.

For their part, the 'natives' of the Park show little interest in the proposals and the promise of 'empowerment'. Their expectations rather are overshadowed by doubts regarding the PNR's capacity to deliver, and by a congenial suspicion that the institution's discourses and promised actions lack conviction. They seem aware that it is not they who destroy the lagoon's balance, even if they are ignorant (or pretend to be so) of the fact that they too play some small part through domestic pollution, the exhaustion of the lagoon's nursing fish population, and by building on the islands. For the 'native' populations, the most visible forms of ecological pollution – created by the presence of great numbers of tourists, or caused by industrial and naval accidents – are proof that local administrations are corrupt, and scientific authorities negligent. 'Pollution' is frequently discussed within the community, in interviews with the media, and in talking to social workers and social scientists. The 'native' rhetoric used in the public expression of concern masks and absolves the polluting and the depredating effect of the (legal and illegal) fishing and shellfish-gathering activities in the lagoon and open sea. 'We fishermen don't pollute or spoil the lagoon, it's the tourists who are responsible, and also the government who lets them, and the specialists who ignore all this.' The 'natives' also complain that the Park guards fine them when using illegal fishing techniques, while everyone else (the 'non-natives') seem allowed to abuse nature.

It is possible that a slow transformation in this state of affairs will occur via a growing regional civic sensitivity to environmental questions, in dialectic relation to the political weight that these questions are gaining in national political discourses. To this day, however, what is more noticeable is the perverse framework in which such discourses are expressed; the rhetorical claims about the need for sustained development with an environmental focus greatly disguise the *de facto* and unjustified depredation of the Ria Formosa environment. This is the general context in which scientists and environmentalists practice the 'virtues' of discursive self-empowerment; they lean on fishing and shellfish-gathering communities whom they endow with an imagined 'native' or 'indigenous' knowledge.

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Endnotes

- ¹ *Expresso*, weekly national newspaper, 18.12.99.
- ² Minute of the Cooperation Protocol between the ISCTE and ICN, Clase 1, 1999.
- ³ See *Conservação da Natureza*, 1982, Lisboa: Serviço de Estudos do Ambiente.
- ⁴ For an overview of the Portuguese fishing fleet, see Moreira 1987; Leal 1990; Brito 1994.
- ⁵ See *Estatísticas do Turismo*, 1997, INE: Lisboa.
- ⁶ Letters sent to the President of the RTA in response to the article ‘As ilhas formosas’ (*Região Sul*, 25.3.98), about the ‘natural and cultural heritage’ of the PNRF.
- ⁷ See Lopes and Cabeleira 1994.
- ⁸ See Cavaco 1991; Santos 1989 (local history textbooks supported by the PNRF).