Title of the Story: Guarairas Lagoon

Destination Name: Tibau do Sul – Rio Grande do Norte State

Country: Brazil

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Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

☐ Localizing the destination supply chain
☐ Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
☐ Culture & Communities
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Issues faced

Formerly, the Guarairas Lagoon was a common lagoon isolated from the sea. With fresh and calm waters, it was very rich in fish and species of local fauna such as the marine manatee. It was surrounded by villages of Potiguaras Indians. When it rained a lot, the lagoon overflowed, causing flooding in the surrounding villages. Then, around the 17th century, the Dutch who lived on one of their islands, and which managed to live in a totally peaceful way with the native Indians, decided, together, to build the first channel of connection with the sea. Not much is known about the old Dutch canal, only that it was wide enough to pass the huge Flemish ships, and that was approximately 800 meters from the sea. With the death of the Dutch and Indians, murdered by the Portuguese who furiously came to take back "their land", the channel was forgotten and was taken over by a sand dune, which made it disappear completely and remained so for almost 3 centuries. During this time, the periods in which the lagoon overflowed and gave the impression of communicating directly with the sea alternated. Some maps from the 17th century show the small line that connected the lagoon to the sea, others from the same period do not show the connection between the lagoon and the ocean. In 1890 there was an attempt to reopen the primitive canal, following a plan drawn up by engineer Thompson Viegas. The works left the channel partially reopened. In 1923, the desired channel was finally built, under the responsibility of engineer Júlio de Melo Rezende. The 10-meter-wide, 800-meter-long canal, the depth of which is greater than that of the old Dutch canal. But the construction techniques have left it too weak to withstand the force of rainwater. According to the author Hélio Galvão: "The village of Tibau, existing at the edge of the canal, was built by the flood of 1924:' One night in April, the waters broke out, unstoppable, and brought down the entire village, leaving the end of the street in which was the church, and the houses that were below it. It was a night of terror. All the families became homeless, under trees and bushes ". In a few hours, the original canal, which was 10 meters wide, went on to more than 200 meters, destroying the entire city and forever transforming the hydrography and geography of the place. The entire village was gone overnight. It was really scary and tragic, even though there were no records of deaths. Even today, walking along the beach of Tibau do Sul, there are small remains of tiles, roof tiles and bricks that used to be part of the houses of the old village.

The old ecosystem of the freshwater lagoon has been completely altered, giving way to an estuary ecosystem. Today being home to seahorses, dolphins, mere, many herons and birds of all types, in addition to having also gained mangrove vegetation. The area of the tributaries of the Guarairas basin, since we can hydrographically call it that, since 1999, it has been named an environmental protection area (APA - in Portuguese acronym). APA Bonfim / Guarairas has a total area of 42000 ha and was created by IDEMA (Institute for Sustainable Development and Environment), with the objective of ordering the use, protecting and preserving ecosystems of dune, Atlantic forest, mangrove, lagoons and rivers. It is located between the cities of Goianinha and Arez, Tibau do Sul, Nisia Floresta and Senador Georgino Avelino. Laws, Decrees, and ordering the practice of Tourism, shrimp farming, among others, make Guarairas Lagoon a successful case.
Methods, steps and tools applied

- Creation of the Environmental Protection Area through State Decree No. 14.369 of 03/22/99, where the Lagoon was contemplated - APA BONFIM-GUARAÍRA;

- The Tibau do Sul Coastal Wildlife Reserve - REFAUTS was created by Municipal Decree No. 014/2006, considering the need for maritime and wildlife protection and conservation, in addition to considering the importance of marine species and their preservation. The breeding objectives include “safeguarding the environmental conditions for the protection of marine fauna, especially the gray dolphin, sea turtles and other marine species that circulate or use the area for residence, food, reproduction or nursery” and “order the management of artisanal fishing, nautical practices associated with fishing activities, tourist and recreational visits and activities carried out on the beach, making them compatible with the protection needs of marine fauna in their territory”.

- Creation of Municipal Law No. 349 of 2007, which provides for the maritime transport of tourist visitors within the area of the Coastal Wildlife Reserve and its buffer zone for this municipality

- In 2015, two associations were created: Apasquil (Association of Small Aquaculture farmers from the Lagoon) and Aproostras (Association of Oyster Producers in RN)

- In 2019, Municipal Law No. 665 was created, which orders the circulation in the Lagoon, with permits for each type of operation in tourism.
- APA Bonfim-Guaraíra also has a Management Council. This collegiate body was established through State Decree No. 22,988 of September 18, 2012. It consists of 24 (twenty-four) institutions, including the federal public sector (SPU and IBAMA); state public sector, municipal executive powers and municipal legislative powers, productive sector operating in the area of the Unit and also entities representing civil society such as residents’ associations and unions.

- The creation of laws and the Management Plan for the Conservation Unit provides support and guidance for policy formulation and planning, ordering and management, reconciling economic and social development and growth with improving the quality of life of the population and reducing losses and damage to natural and cultural heritage

- The community is fully involved (ownership) with this space, creating a point of coexistence between local citizens, tourists, history and nature

- Development of a large number of educational, environmental and sustainability project.
- In 2020, the APA Management Plan is created and published, which is one of the most important documents of a Conservation Unit, as it defines action strategies, several programs to be implemented, such as, for example, the Unit’s dissemination and marketing, Inspection and Environmental Education. In addition, the Management Plan presents an Ecological Economic Zoning (ZEE), the same of which will be essential to the actions of inspection, monitoring and environmental licensing by the competent bodies, such as city halls and IDEMA itself

- The inspection of the APA Bonfim-Guaraíra occurs through frequent inspections of specific locations, which have already been identified as areas of territorial conflicts to be monitored. On the other hand, inspection at the Unit also occurs through anonymous or formalized complaints by the council members themselves at the Management Council meetings, in which the areas to be visited are indicated by the complainants.

Key success factors
The creation of laws and the Management Plan for the Conservation Unit provides support and guidance for policy formulation and planning, ordering and management, reconciling economic and social development and growth with improving the quality of life of the population and reducing losses and damage to natural and cultural heritage.

- The community is fully involved (ownership) with this space, creating a point of coexistence between local citizens, tourists, history and nature.
- Development of a large number of educational, environmental and sustainability project.

Lessons learned

The creation of an APA, having laws, inspection, and management plans avoid the degradation of the environment, maintaining a preservation of biological biodiversity and natural ecosystems, preservation and protection of rare, endemic, vulnerable or endangered species, preservation of flora and / or fauna resources, among others.

Community involvement, awareness raising, support for associations that operate there economically, make everyone become inspectors in the area.

Results, achievements and recognitions

We can mention two acknowledgments here: from the public authorities and the private sector, and see them, also, as a sensitization in the face of the community to increasingly rescue the pride of its Lagoon.

Public/ Private: The Guaraíras Cultural Festival comes with a different context: the proposal came from the contribution of a group of citizens and entities that work in the municipality and love their land, as a way to rescue an enormous cultural wealth of the region, valuing the local identity, and at the same time, raise the population’s self-esteem. The focus is on the entire collection created and preserved there over time, in the communities around Guaraíras Lagoon, seeking to keep all this wealth alive, contributing to the valorization of local culture, showing the entire history of its people (through works of art), their way of life, their manifestations and cultural riches, in addition to moving the economy.

As a curiosity, we can also mention the “logo” of the Festival: The Heron. With all their grace, herons (Ardea Alba) enchant. It is a bird of the Pelecaniformes family, very common to lakes, rivers and wetlands. Measuring between 50cm and 90cm, they have either all white or all blue body. The white ones have yellowish beaks, while the blue ones have black beaks, both with long black legs, just like the neck, which squirms and sneaks in search of food. In Tibau do Sul, during certain periods, we can easily find herons in the ebb of the tide where the natural pools form themselves, or in the Guaraíras lagoon, a true show of natural beauty.

Public: It has been three years since the “Shrimp and Oyster Meeting” started taking place, the second source of income in the municipality, that joins in its first income: Tourism. Great local gastronomy chefs are challenged to prepare new dishes based on shrimp and / or oyster, gastronomy workshops are offered to the population free of charge, as well as business roundtables where there is an exchange of information, needs, and agreements.

** both Festivals did not take place in 2020 due to Covid’s Pandemic - 19
Additional references

Guaraires Lagoon Photos :
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16acI_{RLD_3}7X8lO6Cz_CuV89cndTv2?usp=sharing

APA BONFIM GUARAIAS State Decree 14369 – 03/22/99 (Environmental Protection Area)
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Photos Guarairas Cultural Festival
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https://instagram.com/guarairascultural?igshid=16dpmw0rrr6i8
https://www.facebook.com/guarairascultural/

Photos Shrimp and Oyster Meeting