

Planning Blues

Tenure rights in Brazil's small-scale fisheries are fading in the shadows of irrational, poorly designed, and socially and environmentally unjust 'blue planning' processes

In a recent exposition of challenges facing small-scale fisheries (SSF) in Brazil, Gerhardinger and others (*SAMUDRA Report* No. 76, May 2017) outlined the dramas faced by fisherfolk leadership, and SSF research and extension agents. Their actions are muddled by a policy arena dominated by corruption at several levels of government, lack of coherent, clearly defined focal points and lasting constructive engagement with government, making them feel like losing the sustainability transition battle to a never-ending agenda of backlashes in civil rights. Ever since, these and other dramas remain, and the

tones of *Our Ocean, Our Future: [United Nation's] Call for Action*" (a new soft governance mechanism for liaising multi-lateral voluntary commitments) and the proclaiming of the *UN's Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)*. Large polluter countries such as Brazil (with over 4 mn sq km of exclusive economic ocean zone) are buying in these calls for action, but the slow pace of sustainability-oriented transformations before us is really frightening.

Make no mistake—we cannot simply wait for 2021 new year's party to kick-off our samba beats around the defence of fishing tenure rights. Meanwhile, the grabbing of customary fishing territories rocks and rolls over fishers' livelihoods and will only lead to further dismay and even complete loss of artisanal fishing identities for several communities. On that cheerful musical metaphor, there is a saying in Brazil stressing that those playing the drums (in a given policy and advocacy arena) are leaders who put the players (for example, small-scale fisheries change agents) to dance, providing their lives with rhythm and, hopefully, some change for the good. We now briefly illustrate how shadows in blue planning can be formed at a wide territorial level, and how the lights of reason and social mobilization can be used to clear the house and silence these wicked enemies.

Fisher guilds

The Babitonga Bay shelters the southernmost large mangrove ecosystem in the subtropical Atlantic (Brazil) and is surrounded by six coastal municipalities (population: around 1 mn) in the northern coast

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expectations are for continued growth in complexity and political turmoil, as the country enters an electoral year that tends to mirror other highly polarized and tense elections being witnessed with other democracies worldwide. For instance, amongst the suite of scandals, the Brazilian president is being investigated over taking part in a corrupted port development scheme in Santos city (coast of São Paulo state).

There is the shaping of a new international scientific and policy discourse on blue growth, blue planning or any other big blue solution that may be associated with the healing of human-ocean interactions through reasonable combination of scientific methods and local ecological knowledge. Consider the frisson generated by the optimistic

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of Santa Catarina state. Despite its national-level status of ecological importance, it is also intensively used by over 1,700 fishers, has already two large active ports, another port already authorized, and four others currently pursuing environmental licensing either under Federal or State-level environmental authority. Such fragmented processes do not assess the cumulative impacts on the social and ecological systems. They foresee public consultations only at the given city where port facilities are intended, but not the fishing grounds of fishers coming from almost every city. Nor do they take into account all the ecological impacts to marine biodiversity caused by explosions of submerged rocky reefs and huge levels of dredging in existing and new navigation channels, which could create a plume of contaminated material and affect several fisheries and critically endangered porpoises.

Hidden in the shadows sleeps a whole suite of wicked social, ecological and political effects. Once every single port infrastructure creates its own additional fishing exclusion areas, redistribution—and hence concentration of fishing effort in alternative grounds—would progressively increase already-existing conflicts amongst fisher groups, and

augment pressure to marine life. Fragmentation in environmental licensing creates a perfect atmosphere for political speculation and unethical bargaining—for example, lobbyists distributing gifts to gain support (such as gillnets to fishers, painting the local public school and church, donating equipment to the local Navy office, etc.)—and proliferation of fallacious information to manipulate fisher's perceptions of the risks before them. The president of one of the main regional fisher guilds (in São Francisco do Sul), for instance, deeply believes there is no future for fishers, an understanding that justifies a strangely intimate alliance he maintains with some private port investors.

Fortunately, at least two intersecting initiatives have been launched to shed light on these shadows. Firstly, we refer to a recent fisher's movements in Babitonga Bay around small-scale fishing territories, "*1st Congress of Babitonga Bay Artisanal Fishers in Defence of Fishing Territories*", co-produced by the Sea Memories Collective (a marine conservation network), the National Artisanal Fishers Movement, fishers' leaders from other affected guilds and associations, and financially supported by Instituto Linha D'Água.

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Participants of the first congress of Babitonga Bay artisanal fishers in defense of fishing territories, March, 2016. The event enabled exchange of experiences and planning to come up with a united voice on the protection of fishing tenure rights

The event enabled exchange of experiences and campaign planning, gathering over 200 fishers to come up with a united voice on the protection of fishing tenure rights, which was materialized in a public statement, namely the “Letter of Itapoá”.

Another initiative relates to the Babitonga Bay project, led by the University of the Region of Joinville with several partners, a process maintained by the Public Ministry with funds derived from judicially deposited environmental fines. Since 2015, the project has been delivering a suite of social mobilization and strategic planning activities, co-ordinating dozens of governmental and societal organizations to co-design new multi-stakeholder coastal and marine governance platforms, as part of an inclusive marine spatial planning process for Babitonga Bay. A core objective has been to spatially identify and value critical ecosystem services to guide future negotiation of trade-offs in collective planning and zoning.

We present herein some of the project’s results derived from collaborative seascape mapping workshops with five resource user groups (fishing, aquaculture, aquatic transport, tourism and leisure, and sand mining) and over 177 people engaged in these workshops. We used an Overlap Analysis Model (InVEST software) to identify what areas are more important to each user group (methodological details about the project presented here can be found at the project’s website and reports). For instance, the Figure below depicts fishing use (crustaceans, molluscs and fishes) intensity in four graduated levels: high, medium-high, medium and low, and also depicts the intended location of every port being licensed, as well as already operational infrastructures. The figure shows the inner areas of the bay where overlapping use can be noticed. Only 0.33 per cent of the total area has a high fishing activity (red), and this is precisely where three new ports are being licensed. Areas with medium-high fishing

intensity represents 17.5 per cent of the total inner bay area, and those with medium and low intensity represents 44.1 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively. The map helps an integrated assessment of impact, something that is not being done by both Federal and State environmental agencies in charge of licensing. For instance, if all ports are authorized, 2.66 per cent of the inner bay area (87.73 per cent overlapping high-medium intensity fisheries grounds) will be claimed for navigation channels, turning into non-fishing zones customarily critical areas that currently support small-scale fisheries livelihoods.

Fishers and local environmental organizations are outraged. They are now entering a judicial battle to confront this largely asymmetrical and unjust power arena that is currently dominated by politically aggressive private investors and their lobbyists, such as manipulated fisher leaders and opportunistic technicians working in unethical consultancy companies. While the more proactive and positive agenda led by the Babitonga Ativa project promises the delivery of integrated governance decision-making processes, their results are still not being considered by environmental licensing authorities who claim lack of appropriate legislation and mandate for integrated assessment. In fact, some even doubt that they would ever take a firm step toward opening the windows of reason to illuminate an integrated, socially and ecologically just strategic environmental assessment without a thunder strike of justice, independent science and social mobilization hitting the playing field.

While our dearest dreams might resonate with the refreshing music of Sustainable Development Goals’ agenda and the coming of the Ocean Decade, it should not be a distraction to face head-on—and now—the shadows of poorly designed, socially and environmentally unjust blue-planning processes. In this brief article, we have provided an illustration of the solution-scape—small windows of opportunity—

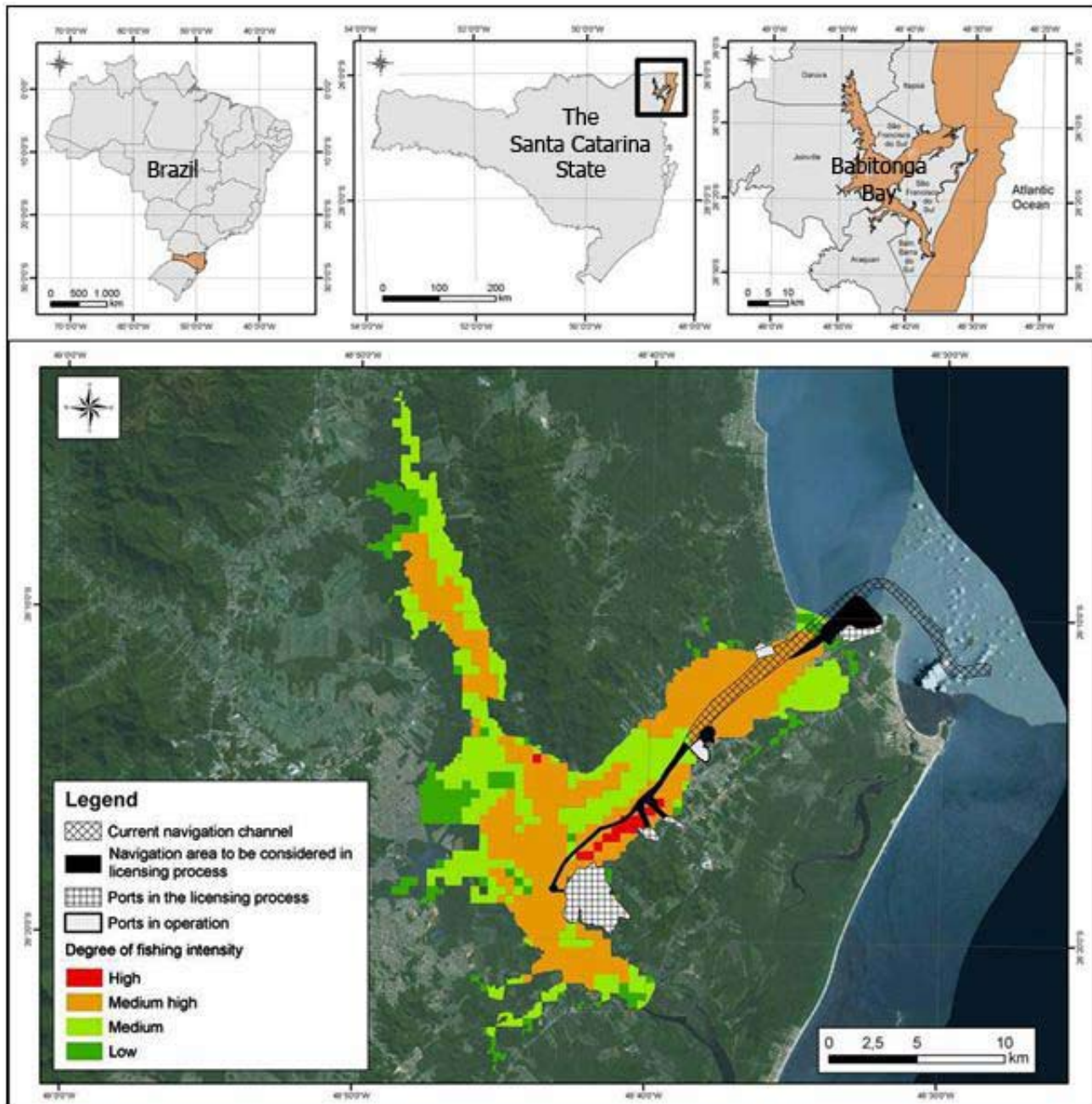


Figure: Spatial distribution of ports in operation, licenced or facing licensing process depicted against the level of fishing at Babitonga bay, Santa Catarina, Brazil

depicting how we ought to play the drums in science-policy arenas, to combat the viruses that thrive in the shadows of fragmented licensing processes.

Brazil and many other countries are already engaging in multi-year, national-level marine spatial planning processes. Social movements should seriously engage with concerned researchers and lawyers, as well as with conservation organizations. The pathological causations of such dreadful coastal planning, too often recorded at subnational levels, offer

us worrying hints of how national or transnational-level marine spatial planning ought to evolve. This year, several opportunities exist to strengthen the fight against ocean grabbing and empower fisherfolk leaders in national, regional and global debates. These include the World Social Forum (March, Brazil), the 3rd World Small Scale Fisheries Congress (October, Thailand), and upcoming developments in the structuring of a Knowledge-Action Network on Oceans by the Future Earth project, amongst others. ♣

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