



Adaptive land use and subsistence strategies versus environmental policies: the case of the Wayãpi and Teko of French-Guiana

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Abstract: Amerindian people of French-Guiana undergo decades of socio-economic and territorial changes. The implementation of national infrastructures (school, health center), and policies promoting sedentary settlement, added to an important demographic growth and an increased access to market, have induced important transformations in their land use patterns. In the Oyapock River Area, land of the Wayãpi and Teko Amerindians, local stresses like illegal gold mining, natural protected areas and complex boundary relations with Brazil are intensifying the pressures on their natural resources management system and more broadly on their way of life. However, the intensity and the sustainability of the territorial transformations are not clear, mainly due to the complexity of the indigenous land use management systems.

To better understand this issue, we used a spatial and anthropological perspective to analyze the land use pattern of the Wayãpi and Teko in different contexts of socio-economic change and land pressure. Using Landsat and Spot satellites data covering a period between 1990 and 2010, we analyzed changes in land use. GIS data were combined with field data to analyze the land use and the subsistence strategies at household, village and community level.

The results showed a great adaptive potential of the Wayãpi and Teko land use management systems and underlined different subsistence strategies. There was a major influence of the socio-economic, political context and environmental policies on the indigenous land use pattern, with a particular weight for the localization of the service and assistance area. We emphasized a general trend toward habitat dispersion in response to the saturation of their last sedentarization area. Strong relationships exist between mobility and social network, explaining part of the strategies of territorial (re)appropriation.

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Finally we propose to highlight the antagonism between the environmental policies and the Amerindians practices of the land.

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