

# Socio-environmental conflicts in the *Cerrado* Protected Areas of *Chapada dos Veadeiros*: a discursive treatment of tourism and development in Brazil

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Visitor flow to Brazilian national parks (NP) has rapidly increased in the last decade (300%). NPs are cornerstones of nature conservation strategies as well as important tourist destinations. This is particularly important in the Brazilian countryside, where commodities' production, such as mining, agriculture and cattle breeding compete with nature-based tourism, creating impacts on the *Cerrado* biome (the Brazilian Savannah), a world *hotspot* for conservation priorities (Myers et al., 2000). Since the 1970s, this biome has suffered an intensive land conversion, from natural vegetation to commodity production. Studies show that deforestation in *Cerrado* has been faster and larger than in the Amazon (Reis et al., 2017). Moreover, over 60% of the Brazilian production of soybeans grow within the *Cerrado* region, which also hosts large deposits of minerals, such as niobium, iron, manganese, tin, gold, ornamental stones, among others, which are globally important Brazilian products.

Tourism compete with such industries in the surroundings of protected areas. Such conflicts normally involve residents, visitors, entrepreneurs, and governmental and non-governmental agencies. Nature conservation and commodities' production became competing discourses in various Brazilian protected sites' contexts. Recent reports show that in 2016 there was an intensification of socio-environmental conflicts in the Brazilian Savannah. For instance, Fazito et al (2016) describe the manipulation of the sustainability discourse to displace tourism and implement mining in the regional development policies of the *Espinhaço* Range Biosphere Reserve.

The critical literature on tourism development would benefit from a discursive treatment of development policy contexts (Bianchi, 2009), and more specifically in protected sites' regions. To respond to this agenda, this ongoing research aims to analyze the socio-environmental conflicts between tourism and mining in the town of Cavalcante, in the state of Goiás. The case study area is located within the UNESCO's *Cerrado* Biosphere Reserve, in the border of the *Chapada of Veadeiros* National Park (CVNP), whose area was recently expanded from 65,000 to 240,000 hectares.

In order to address the proposed objective, we employed a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis method, seeking a deeper understanding of the empirical reality and its complexity. Studies have demonstrated that it is a successful research technique to analyze conflicts underpinning policy-making in development contexts because it helps incorporate the hidden power-play behind the development rhetoric (Hewitt, 2009). Following Hajer's (2006) recommended steps for conducting such analysis, data collection started in June 2017 with a desk research and three fieldwork visits to develop a global view of the conflicts. A longer fieldwork is planned for August. Semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted with other researchers, experts, environmental activists, members of the tourist industry and the affected communities in order to identify the conflicts and draft a first timeline of the important events

that resulted from such conflicts. To triangulate data, we assessed documentary evidence, such as legal and official documents, meeting minutes, international institutions' and academic documents.

### Preliminary results

Initial analysis highlighted the threats to biodiversity caused by commodities' production, which accounts for the deforestation frontier and other impacts in the region. Thus, there are different possibilities of development and land use in the study region, such as agriculture, cattle breeding, tourism, mining and dams. However, two events illustrate why mining in the town of Cavalcante emerged as a critical case study: mining industry interests have interrupted the attempt to establish two other parks in 2013, and mining sites were left out of the recent expansion of the *Chapada dos Veadeiros* NP (2017). In contrast, the opening of another gate to the national park continues to be debated between different stakeholders, especially the ones interested in tourism. We have mapped the stakeholders and their political capital to enrich the timeline of important events that guide the discourse dynamics and interests behind the competing discourses of mining and nature-based tourism in the region. The tourist flow to the region has increased in the last decade together with the applications for mineral research. A large part of the park is located within the boundaries of Cavalcante, that also hosts the largest mineral deposits of the region (among them manganese and tin). Cavalcante is a historic mining town, with a population of 9,829 inhabitants and an area of 6,953.7 Km<sup>2</sup>. It hosts an important former *quilombo* (fled slave settlement), named *Kalunga*. Figure 1 shows the location of the park with its expansion and the polygons of application for mineral research in Cavalcante (areas where mining and conservation interests overlap are highlighted).

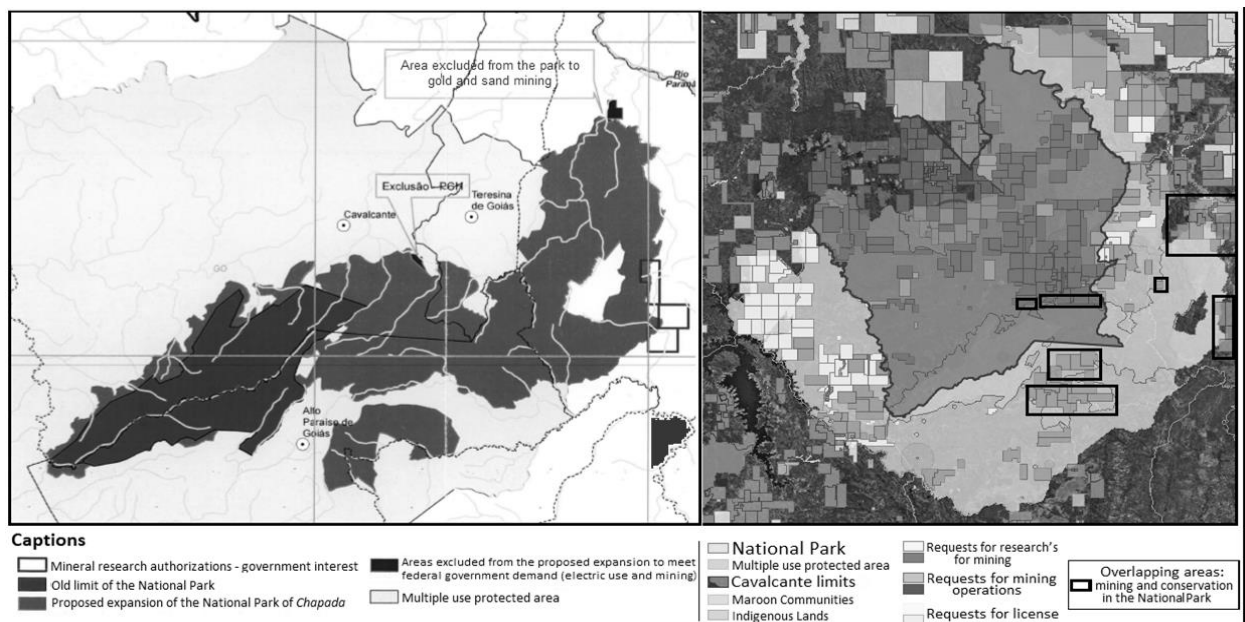


Figure1: Location of the recently expanded Chapada dos Veadeiros NP and the polygons of mineral research applications.

Source: Adapted from the Brazilian Ministries of Environment and of Mining and Energy, 2017.

Our planned actions for the coming months are a complementary desk research and another extended fieldwork visit, in which we intend to deepen data collection and analysis. We have planned to conclude this research in November 2018.

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