

# Cultural heritage impact assessments in the Tapajós river basin

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## SUMMARY

Recently, at the end of 2011, Brazilian cultural heritage authorities determined that from then on methods employed in all cultural heritage impact assessments should comply with the methodologies created under their own sponsorship specifically to help building a Brazilian cultural heritage inventory. Such inventory already exists specially for intangible heritage, and what is intended is to enrich that inventory with the results of cultural heritage impact assessments performed since the end of 2011. This paper gives a brief account of an attempt of reaching that compliance in the cultural heritage impact assessments of two hydropower plants to be constructed at the Tapajós river basin in Brazilian Amazon.

## INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that the idea of Cultural Heritage, although not foreign to other times and other cultures, began to be outlined in the Western World during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (POMIAN, 1984; CHOUAY, 2006; GONÇALVES, 2006; POULOT, 2009).

In Brazil, early on during the republican period, Cultural Heritage became a matter of state, and; similar to what later occurred with environmental issues, it became the focus of laws and regulations. It was by this path that Cultural Heritage got into environmental licensing process, with the issue of CONAMA resolution n° 001/86 which determined that archaeological, historical and cultural sites and monuments that belong to a community were object of technical work for the elaboration of environmental impact assessments (Resolução CONAMA n° 001/1986, artigo 6º, I, c)

However, it is noteworthy that during a long period only specially protected material cultural assets, archaeological sites included, were actually taken into consideration within environment impact assessment studies associated with environmental licensing process. Nevertheless, more recently both intangible cultural assets and their associated tangible cultural assets have been objects of standards and initiatives from public authorities, who have made mandatory their inclusion in the environmental licensing process.

Among recent standards and initiatives, stands-out the *Portaria Interministerial* n° 419 issued on October, 26, 2011, which determines that, during the identification of the cultural assets within affected areas being considered for environmental licensing, categorizations, concepts and methodologies implemented by IPHAN – the Brazilian national authority on cultural heritage – must be observed.

As for intangible cultural assets and tangible cultural assets associated to them, these categorizations, methodologies and concepts are part of the National Inventory of

Cultural References, known by the Portuguese acronym INRC (*Inventário Nacional de Referências Culturais*) created by IPHAN 13 years ago (IPHAN/DID, 2000).

Here, I briefly deal with how this challenge has been addressed within the environmental licensing process of two hydropower plants that will be implemented along the Tapajos river basin, in the State of Para, Northern Brazil; UHE São Luiz do Tapajós and UHE Jatobá.

## THE INRC

The “cultural reference” concept is central to INRC methodologies:

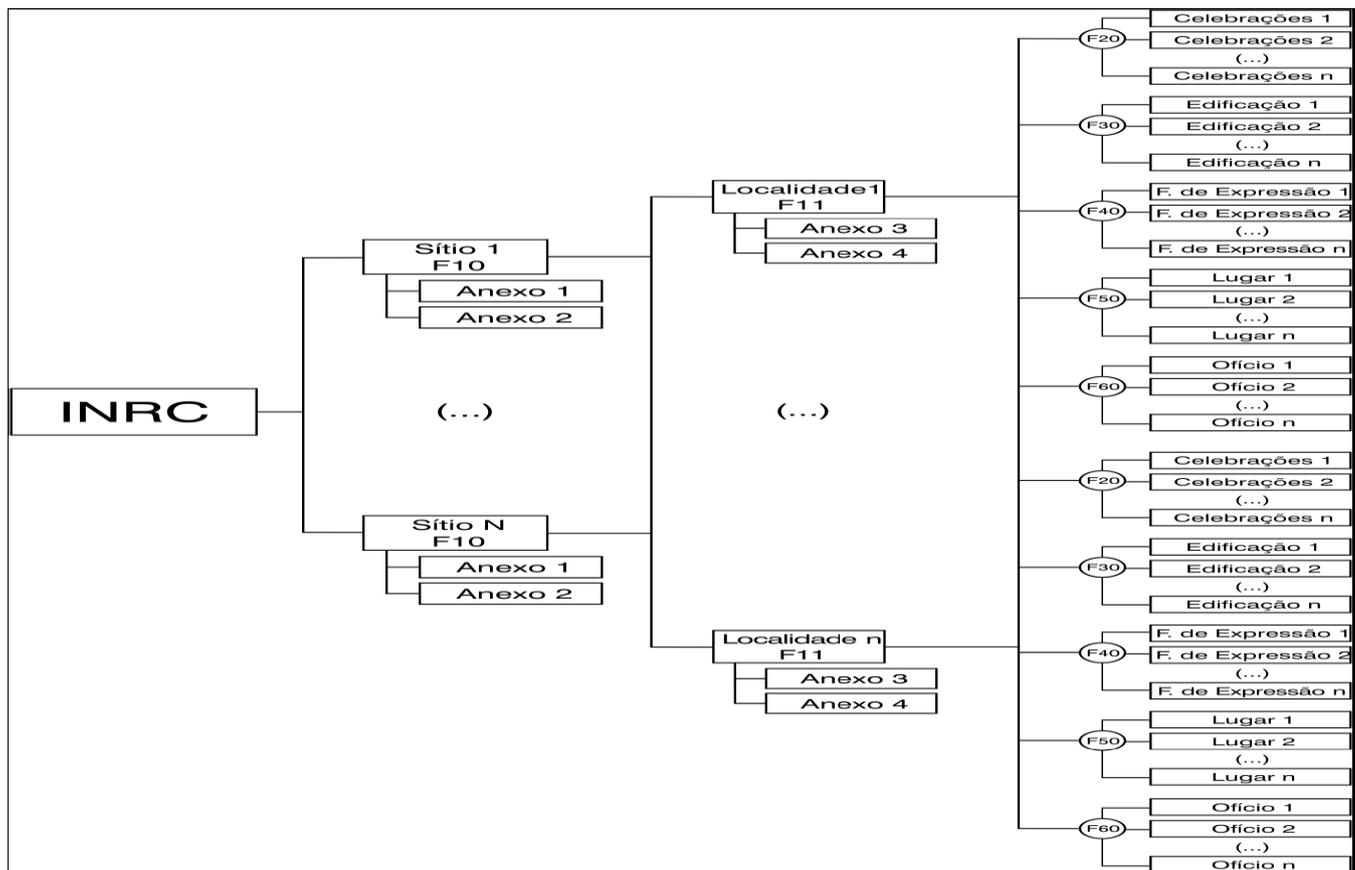
The term cultural reference has been mainly used in texts that are based on an anthropological concept of culture, and that emphasize the diversity not only of material production, but also of meanings and values attributed by different subjects to material culture and social practices. This plural perspective somehow came to decentralize criteria once considered objective, because it is grounded on knowledge considered legitimate that used to guide interpretations and actions in the sphere of cultural assets conservation”. (LONDRES FONSECA, M. C., 2001, p. 112/113).

Thus, bringing together material heritage and meaning and values, that is to say, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, the concept of cultural reference allows INRC to break from this duality and put together the different classes of cultural heritage into six categories in which the tangible and intangible cultural heritage are mixed.

- **Celebrations:** Rituals and festivities that mark collective experience of work, religious practices, entertainment, and other practices of social life;
- **Ways of expression:** Verbal and non-verbal forms of communication associated with specific social group or religion, developed by social actors acknowledged by the community. Literary, musical, artistic, scenic, ludic manifestations;
- **Crafts and Ways of doing:** Traditional knowledge and crafts. Knowledge and ways of doing rooted in communities’ everyday life;
- **Places:** Places that have special cultural significance for local community, here included Natural Heritage;
- **Buildings:** Buildings associate with certain uses, historical significance and memory.

Therefore, what is being done at INRC is, to begin with, to classify specific cultural references as being celebrations, forms of expressions, crafts, places and buildings. After that, these cultural references are described, one by one, into forms. Written and visual sources on each cultural reference described are added to the file, resulting in an ever increasing set of forms which systematize the cultural references of various sites and localities where these sites split up (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Form system at INRC (IPHAN/DID, 2000, p. 155).



In figure 1, , “Sítio” stands for “site”; “anexo” stands for “attachment”; “localidade” for “locality”; “celebrações” for “celebrations”; “edificações” for “buildings” and so forth.

Ultimately, the goal is to assure that places that will be affected by constructions under environmental licensing process to be treated as specific sites, and thus, incorporating them into the vast file system that INRC build.

The present work is under way both at UHE São Luiz do Tapajós as well as at UHE Jatobá, along the Tapajós river basin, with results – partial at this moment – that test INRC’s categorization, concepts and methodologies, very similar to what INRC itself just ended up questioning the binary opposition between tangible and intangible heritage.

#### **CULTURAL REFERENCES IN THE TAPAJÓS RIVER BASIN**

This short paper will present one case of how the work of accessing the impacts on Cultural Heritage by two hydropower projects being implemented at the Tapajós river basin questioned INRC’s categories, concepts and methodologies. The case presented here is the cult to “Saint” Guabiraba.

First of all, the cult is a religious ceremony headed by a priest from the Pimental community, which is located within the area that will be affected by UHE São Luís do Tapajós, and it takes place right after the festivities for Saint Sebastian in the same locality.

Second of all, the ceremony occurs at a site located within the National Forest of Itaituba II, where Guabiraba, a local pioneer rubber tapper, is buried. After his death, he began performing miracles, and taking requests “feitos em fé” (done in faith).

Thirdly, Guariba’s burial is found within a building (see Photo 1), together with his friend Vicente, whom was the first to be “valido” (rescued) by Guabiraba after he got lost in the forest during a hunting trip. Mr. Lázaro, “keeper” of this “little house”, remembers and tells many miracles performed by the rubber-tapper saint.

Guabiraba’s fame is vast, attracting “pagadores de promessa” (promise keepers) from many places along the Tapajós basin, reaching the area that will be affected by UHE Jatobá, and beyond, including the story of a lady who came from the state of Ceará, very far from the Tapajós, to thank for the grace fulfilled.

Lastly, the requests that are fulfilled by Guabiraba are represented in different forms inside the building that houses the burial; many offers to the saint a kerosene or diesel fuel lamp, which Mr. Lázaro makes sure to keep the fire on; others who have their requests fulfilled leave ex-votos in the form of wooden sculptures representing bodily parts that received the saint’s intervention. There are also those who, due to difficulties from living along the riverside are unable to buy fuel, ended up leaving their own clothes in the Guabiraba’s house that, according to Mr. Lázaro, accepts everything that the “valido” (rescued) can offer (see Photo 2).



**Photo 1.** House where Guabiraba and his friend Vicente are buried. Scientia’s archive/Carlos Gimenes.



**Photo 2.** Guabiraba and the ex-votos received like clothing items. Scientia's archive/Carlos Gimenes.

It is easy to observe in the brief statement made above about Saint Guabiraba's cult that in one cultural reference alone appears a celebration, a place, a building, and several crafts and forms of expression, so that, somehow affecting Saint Guabiraba's cult, the implementation of the hydropower plants will be affecting all the categories of cultural references that are part of the INRC, so that it makes much more sense to say that this total social fact – "fait total" (MAUSS, KARADY, 1974; GONÇALVES, 2005), which is the cult of Saint Guabiraba, is the one affected by the implementation of the UHEs and that the INRC categories can construct a discourse, among others, more or less suitable to describe Saint Guabiraba's cult but the assessment of impacts of both UHEs on that cult should never be based on INRC categories, for they hide that cult as a total social fact instead of showing it as such.

In this line of thought, the work to assess the impacts of hydropower projects being implemented along the Tapajós river basin on Cultural Heritage might contribute to INRC, the reversal of its methodology, taking - first - into account cultural references from one site and its localities as total social facts, and only after that, the convenience of using INRC categories as a written discourse.

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