

**TO DO!99**  
**Contest Socially Responsible Tourism**

***Award Winner***

***Tourism Project by the Village Community of  
PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE***

represented by

**José Alberto Ribeiro de Lima**  
President of „Associação dos Moradores da Prainha do Canto Verde“  
(Prainha do Canto Verde Residents' Association)

**René Schärer, Chair of “Amigos de Prainha do Canto Verde” Association, and  
Co-founder of “Instituto Terramar” for promoting sustainable fisheries and  
integrated coastal development**

**Prainha do Canto Verde, Municipal Beberibe, Ceará State, Brazil**

**Rationale for the Award**

by

**Klaus Betz**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The fact-finding assessment relating to PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE's application took place between 23 November and 2 December, 1999. As requested by the Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V. (Institute for Tourism and Development) on-site verification of the concept and goals of the project as specified in the application documents was conducted smoothly and without problems, leading the authorised appraiser to propose that the Tourism Project of the PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE village community be awarded the TO DO!99 prize.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE is a fishing village of about 1,100 inhabitants located approximately 125 kilometres southeast of Fortaleza, the capital city of the Brazilian federal state of Ceará. Some 570 kilometres of shoreline stretch out both to the north and to the south of this 2.5-million metropolis, with seemingly endless sandy beaches, dune-covered landscapes, and in part also steep coastal terrain. The people living in direct proximity to the sea earn their living mainly from fishing (as a craft-type occupation carried out in small teams) in coastal waters. The population of the adjacent villages further inland support themselves by selling cashew products (nuts, juice) and palm wax, and by growing vegetables, manioc, maize and beans as part of subsistence farming. Average monthly income in all these villages corresponds to about DM 180, or a little more than the equivalent of the price of a new bicycle (DM 150).

In the areas further inland, in the *sertão* plagued by recurrent droughts, the often landless population is prone to even worse economic conditions, suffering as it does not only from poverty but also periods of hunger.

Fortaleza itself is often referred to as a "Tropical Manhattan", which is something of a euphemism for the outcome of 20 years of uncontrolled urban growth with mushrooming high-rises, banks, hotels and shopping centres. Fortaleza is where affluent and modern Brazil is conspicuous, but already on the outskirts the city is fringed with the *favelas*, or shanty-towns. Once outside the city limits, one is swiftly taken back to a time decades ago, where the present is in part still dominated by (post-)feudal structures in terms of both land tenure and the exercise of power on the part of individual mayors or provincial politicians. Ever so often, political recalcitrance would, and will, be punishable by direct discrimination. In the case of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE, connection to the electric power grid was only established (in June 1998) when the local power balance had finally changed as a result of elections. In the time before, the Beberibe region (which includes the nominated village) had been "ruled" virtually perpetually by the same family (with re-election being ensured, for example, by making little "presents" before election day, or by the unexpected visits of solicitous physicians or dentists to the villages).

## **3. PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE TOURISM PROJECT**

### **3.1 HISTORY OF THE PROJECT**

Between 1991 and (last) 1995, armed gangs acting on the instructions of a real estate firm, have repeatedly tried to intimidate the people of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE. Their objective was to expel the residents from their land in order to make room for building development in certain areas of the beach. For this purpose, they resorted to massive threats and in part even armed raids, in the course of which some of the "obstructing" huts were set on fire and building walls were pulled down. Before these events, in the late 80s, the said

real estate agents had been trying, in vain, to obtain land titles to parts of the beach of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE by means of judicial proceedings.

As a result of all those events and experiences, already more than ten years ago the first group of villagers got organised to defend themselves against externally directed developments. In doing so, they were supported by the then archbishop of Fortaleza through the “Centre for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights” founded by Cardinal Aloisio Lohscheider. Additionally, the fishers of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE had the backing of various NGOs (non-government organisations) as well as their allies among the fishing villages, some politicians, and the press.

### **3.2 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

This novel experience of successfully putting up resistance to the “elites” gave rise in PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE to a whole series of moves and measures leading to a degree of self-directed organisation which is probably unequalled in the whole of Brazil. One of the first measures taken in the wake of the successful resistance as described earlier, was the adoption of zoning regulations by the village general assembly, specifying who was to be entitled to build according to which standards in the village in future. This body, the general assembly, has since become the supreme representative of the residents’ association (Associação dos Moradores), which in turn breaks down into five different “councils”: a fisheries council, a health council, a council on education, a crafts council, and a council on tourism. Each of them, in turn, run and control a co-operative with the aim to engage in economic and fiscal activities. Thus, the fisheries co-operative has since begun to organise the profitable direct marketing of fish catches without intermediaries (as distinct from the past); the councils of health and education look after the areas of public health and education; the crafts council is in charge of the selling of embroidered articles and, most recently, its own beach fashion label; and the tourism council is the equivalent of a local tourism association with, as a rule, up to 70 members and a full-time paid co-ordinator. As all these activities are interdependent and overlap, there is intense networking taking place between these councils.

It would be a serious omission not to mention at this point the role of René Schärer (a former Swissair manager resident there since 1991), who has been instrumental in setting up the organisational structures previously described. A native of Switzerland, he has assumed there the role of a neutral moderator and counsellor, especially when it comes to establishing contacts with the outside world – e.g. the Brazilian press or politicians, entering for international contests as the TODO!, or the ongoing certification process with the London-based Marine Stewardship Council (for promoting sustainable fisheries), or channelling international contacts through “Amigos de Prainha do Canto Verde”, an association of just over 100 members in 22 countries, which he founded. This association and donations from Swiss-based foundations as well as funds received from the Swiss embassy and the municipal council of the city of Basle were the engines that set in motion the “help for self-help” campaigns in the first place. Until this very day, no support of any significance has been forthcoming from the government of the Brazilian federal state of Ceará.

Although it has not been possible to reduce adult illiteracy significantly between 1991 and 1999, great strides have been made with regard to children and adolescents. As many as 450 school students (of a population of 1,100) are attending classes in the newly erected school of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE, while the teachers’ pay has almost quadrupled since a decade ago (amounting to close to DM 120 per month as against DM 30). In addition to the general educational content, the tuition also focuses on ecological topics with a practical bend and relevant to the local setting. Topics thus treated include the marine ecosystem, the formation of shifting dunes and saltwater lagoons, the fundamentals of the

water cycle, and many others. As a consequence of this, the children may nowadays pass on to their parents the relevant knowledge about the ecology of the habitat.

### **3.3 OBJECTIVES**

All these measures combine to furnish the basis of a communal system (which incidentally also includes a village garbage collection service – by donkey cart). For the time being, the fishing village is still in a transitional phase, with its inhabitants still living in poverty but with the clear prospect of a change for the better in the years to come, for which the political and social foundations have already been provided. The main thrust currently is therefore directed at making the ideas and concepts work economically, which is where tourism comes in with its promise of providing one of the ways of obtaining additional income on a regular basis. Not the only one, however, as tourism is meant to complement the other two sources of income, i.e. fisheries (as the mainstay) and embroidery work (supplementary income of the women).

So far the tourist appeal of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE has only been targeted at the Brazilian market, in addition to a modest but increasingly important “seminar tourism” stemming from its reputation for solution-oriented grassroots projects. Thus it has become common now that delegates from other villages arrive to attend conferences (a) in order to study the model presented by PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE, and (b) to evaluate what opportunities exist for linking up the fishing villages and assessing the potential for expansion.

In the meantime, such alliances have been set up with more than 24 villages. Only after meeting these aspirations is there also scope for developing tourist links with the rest of the world (preferably not through agencies or tour operators but by means of the internet or word-of-mouth personal recommendation). Visiting holidaymakers from abroad are accorded a warm welcome, but they must be able to adjust accordingly. By local standards, the accommodation offered in the “pousadas” (boarding-house rooms within a family setting) leaves nothing to be desired, but internationally it will be rated rather “low-budget”.

Yet this kind of tourism based on low investment amounts to a conscious choice, partly also in response to the negative example in the immediate vicinity of the village. Many of the villagers are appalled by the by now (also internationally) notorious example of the former fishing village of “Canoa Quebrada” whose rise to tourist fame has meant that the local fishers scarcely retain any land title, the village centre has deteriorated into a “broadway” jumble of restaurants and taverns, and drugs and sex tourism are not unknown.

“Rather move ahead in little steps” might well describe in a nutshell the basic attitude of the PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE community, and added to this “and keep the problems out of our tourism”.

## **4. TOURISM FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES**

By now, PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE boasts a total of eight overnight accommodation facilities, each offering between one and five rooms (only partly equipped with separate shower / toilet), and five smallish restaurants. The overnight accommodation rate including breakfast is the equivalent of about DM 15, and one meal costs approximately DM 4 (the Real – DM exchange rate is about 1 : 1). Traditionally dishes are served from the local cuisine (“comida nativa”), which consists largely of variations of fish or chicken, rice, spaghetti, and beans, complemented with mango, orange or cashew juices, beer or coffee, and fruit like pineapples or bananas.

Some of the guides will lead the visitors across the surrounding dune landscape to a somewhat hidden saltwater lagoon or can arrange shorter sailing trips on board a “jangada” (sporting their classic triangular sails). These jangadas are primarily still used for fishing and may not always be available therefore.

Forming the backbone of village life, the jangadas furnish the all-encompassing and identity-giving theme of the village both in terms of cultural history and in their tourist appeal. Thus each year on the last Sunday of November, the so-called “eco-jangada regatta” is held, which attracts up to 10,000 visitors including numerous media representatives and TV teams as each year this regatta highlights a different marine ecology theme (e.g. the “bottom of the sea” in 1999). Much of this public attention is owed to the spectacular voyage of protest staged in 1993 by the jangada “S.O.S Sobrevivência”, which made it famous across Brazil. On this barely 6-metre jangada, six fishermen of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE spent two months sailing all the way to Rio de Janeiro (some 3,000 kilometres) in order to bring to the public’s attention their protest against predatory fishing practices which were threatening their very existence. Again, the inhabitants of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE succeeded, as they were able to rally the support of allied fishing villages in order to operate their own patrol vessel, protected by the guns of the military police, to drive out the spiny lobster pirates. Since 1995 the stocks of spiny lobster (commanding high prices at that) have been allowed to recover and rejuvenate in this part of the Brazilian coast. It must be mentioned for the sake of completeness that this form of protest is not without precedent, as already in 1941 jangadeiros from Ceará were driven by their plight to sail to Rio de Janeiro (the seat of government then) to call for an improvement in their living conditions.

## **5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT**

The comparison of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE with the TODO! Criteria for Socially Responsible Tourism has produced the following results:

### **Contest criterion:**

#### **Involvement of the different interests and requirements of the local people through participation**

As stated before, this project from its inception has been characterised by self-directedness and a high level of participation. This is in no small measure owed to the way in which the joint approach was planned and implemented with the use of questionnaires, group discussions and meetings in the relevant councils and bodies. Although the local tourism association is entrusted with the co-ordination of all tourist activities (public relations, reservations, assigning visitors to accommodation, organising the jangada regatta event), it goes without saying that the various visitors’ rooms and restaurant facilities are run and owned by local families according to the principles of private enterprise. This notwithstanding, the village community as such also owns three guest rooms in the communal assembly building and also runs a restaurant to cater for special occasions and larger groups (up to 50 people), or meet the requirements of seminar participants, in the most promising location of the village. Commonly used by the school, this restaurant, named “Bela Vista”, can be placed in readiness at very short notice by a “flying kitchen brigade” (consisting of 11 women and 1 man) to serve meals of up to three or four courses. The mentioned kitchen team (the more jobs are created, the better) is incidentally not identical with the restaurant owners but was especially trained for the job. In addition, there is a “coffee and cakes” team (made up of other people) and yet another women’s group doing the cleaning and tidying up.

### **Contest criterion:**

#### **Strengthening the awareness among the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural life**

As a result of negative examples from other villages (such as Canoa Quebrada as mentioned before), the residents of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE are quite aware of such dangers. They reason, however, that their community will not succumb to them as they are satisfied to have stayed in control and to be able to continue to keep control of the situation, with “control” invariably referring to the ownership of land and premises. All respondents (both younger and older men and women) were united in attaching key importance to this factor as a guarantee of self-determined and controllable development, or, conversely, as the slippery slope to externally directed and no longer controllable development should this ownership be lost. This topic is discussed already at school, as are, in purely precautionary terms, the dangers stemming from drugs and sex tourism / prostitution .

This said, it should not be a surprise that the residents of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE rather tend to see – as they put it – “self-administered tourism” as an opportunity, yielding as it does “additional income”, ensuring that “the money stays in the village”, and helping to “create new jobs” (more on this further on).

**Contest criterion:**

**Participation of a broad local population strata regarding the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism**

Although the situation as described above is rather one of low-budget tourism, the economic effects by themselves are highly significant. Visitors spending a week in bed and breakfast accommodation in PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE will have to settle a bill amounting to some DM 130 – 140 per person, corresponding to two thirds of a typical monthly income. When a seminar of, say, 40 participants is hosted by the village, the members of the kitchen or coffee-providing teams may even earn almost a complete monthly income in a matter of three to four days (while at the same time all accommodation in the pousadas is fully booked). Should the guests additionally visit the newly opened “loja de artesanato” (literal translation: arts and crafts lodge) to buy embroidered articles, beach fashions, postcards, films or the toys made by the school’s children, it will eventually mean that almost all of the village’s 150 families stand to gain financially (most of all the owners of the pousadas, as a matter of course). Move on to the time the annual jangada regatta is held (drawing up to 10,000 visitors) and you will have almost all inhabitants of the village engaged in full-time jobs keeping them perpetually busy for two to three days taking care of all kinds of tasks, even as waiters and ice-cream sellers. Also the youths find jobs during the time of the regatta, the organization of which is the sole responsibility of the local people. From an age of 14 onward, the youngsters act as assistants or personal guides everywhere, provided they – like all adults as well – have completed a “tourism course” provided through the school or tourism council beforehand.

Up to 20 per cent of the revenue from tourism is earmarked for the respective co-operative, for the purpose of providing the means for the social fund and the education fund and paying for communal tasks, such as student transportation by the village vehicle, medical centre, teacher in-service training, garbage collection, tools, solar panels etc.

For comments on the cultural effects of this form of tourism refer to next but one section.

**Contest criterion:**

**Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improvement of working conditions in relation to payment, social security, working hours, education and training**

In view of the conditions described before, this criterion is not applicable or applies only in a very limited fashion, as the first and foremost aim is still to overcome poverty, while at the

same time democratising the people's circumstances of life and aiming for economic independence – all this in the absence of any political support or tangible financial assistance on the part of the state. What matters primarily in this transition phase is to reach a situation which may be termed stable and predictable.

**Contest criterion:**

**Reinforcement of the local culture as well as of the cultural identity of those living in tourism destination areas.**

Cultural identity has so far remained undiminished and strong. It is deeply rooted in the concept of the “jangadeiros” (fishers who sail out to sea on their jangadas). As any schoolchild will learn in PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE, jangadeiros were the ones in the past century who refused to support the slave trade, staunchly resisting the demands for their small boats to be used to ferry slaves ashore from the big sailing ships. If one includes the aforementioned daring sailboat runs to Rio de Janeiro and the various fights against spiny lobster pirates, predatory fishing interests, and real estate racketeers, it can hardly surprise that this is an expression of an unbroken cultural identity.

The children's choir which has been in existence in the village since 1995 makes a point of taking those very episodes as its theme in the programme presented to groups of visitors or on the occasion of festivals and tours of other communities. The schoolchildren, by the way, are the ones who each year, under the guidance of a local artist, paint the eco-motifs on the sails of the jangadas prior to the regatta.

**Contest criterion:**

**Avoidance or minimisation of social and cultural damage caused by tourism in destination areas**

Overall PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE presents a situation in which this criterion has already been considered before tourist development had set in. But only because the negative examples described before are close at hand, which have served as eye-openers to many of the residents of PAINHA DO CANTO VERDE, making them realise what it means if a brand of tourism with a supposedly modern face can take root without due consideration for the local environment and mentality of the people, creating a situation in which the revenue ends up in other people's pockets while the now landless local fishing population with their jangadas are virtually relegated to providing a picturesque backdrop to it all.

In PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE none of this had to be especially precluded – it simply has not turned out that way until today. Among other factors, because education, both for adults and school pupils, has an excellent record, offering courses on tourism and ecological topics and workshops on the dangers of drugs and child prostitution, and an ecology textbook especially produced as a point of entry for the school students to get to know their immediate environment with its ecosystems.

**Contest criterion:**

**Application of new methods in qualifying partnership and co-operation between the external tourism industry and the local people**

As PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE wants growth to take place slowly in order to (as has been described) keep control of development at all times also in the future, there is a unanimous decision not to embark on co-operation schemes with travel agencies or tour operators for the time being. What is perceived as a market niche of priority standing is engaging in seminar tourism (with like-minded people on the same topics). Efforts are made to reach out to foreign visitors via the internet or through organisations like “Arbeitskreis für Tourismus

und Entwicklung" in Basle, Tourism Concern and Fair Tourism based in Great Britain, and such organisations as Eco-Society and Conservation International from the US and Canada. That indicates that those of the public targeted in the first place are to be found among the (supposedly) sensitive quarters of NGOs as well as conservation and/or environmental organisations.

Such apparent stringency in selection also relates to the particular conditions of Brazil's domestic tourism where tourist groups may turn up unexpectedly in the village in their large coaches, maybe just for a brief picnic on the beach, which usually puts tremendous strain on the local people to have their privacy, their boats and their premises respected, and to make sure that no garbage is left behind. Similar situations arise not infrequently when there is an invasion of fast-moving excursion groups on their crosscountry enduro motor bikes or equally noisy beach buggies "hitting" the village. This is when the modern Brazil of the nineties suddenly comes face to face with a world belonging to the thirties which still has traders on horseback plying the villages.

**Contest criterion:**

**Creation of other favourable conditions for a socially responsible tourism development in destination areas**

PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE can hardly be expected to make up for a socially responsible tourism policy of Ceará state, which is sadly missing. However, there are others already who are following the village's example. As has been mentioned, there are 24 allied fishing villages which are trying to adopt the overall concept of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE (ranging from sustainable fisheries to tourism) as far as possible or adapt it to the local conditions accordingly.

It appears that among these 24 communities only 5 are left that have not yet been affected by externally-directed, mainstream tourism. Which is why PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE is continually recommended as a model for universities and NGOs, contrasting so vividly with the official tourism policy of Ceará state.

**Contest criterion:**

**Projects and measures entered for the contest must be in line with the principles of environmental compatibility**

It can be duly acknowledged that the village community of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE is guided by the principles of environmental acceptability and sustainability in many areas, in particular fisheries (banning the catch of immature spiny lobster; fight against predatory fishing practices using highly toxic cyanide or explosives) but also covering other areas ranging from environmental education at school to organised garbage collection and disposal. There is, however, still an unsolved problem, i.e. that of drinking water and waste water disposal.

For each home, drinking water has to be drawn from a groundwater lake some 13 metres below the sandy surface using wind pumps. On the other hand, there is (still) no sewage management which means that waste water is (still) allowed to seep back into the soil without any prior treatment. In a more low-lying part of the village near the beach some sporadic cases of elevated values of coliform bacteria in the drinking water are said to have occurred. In the longer term, such a situation is highly problematic for the health of the local population and the visitors and highly detrimental to the concerns of ecologically oriented tourism development.

As a response to this, one of the homes has had a compost toilet installed for experimental purposes. Whether the situation can be changed for the better, will obviously depend on the verdict reached by the "testing family" and the cost involved (for the whole village).The

people of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE have travelled such a long and arduous road that it would be a tragedy if no solution should be found to this very problem.

**CONCLUSION:**

It would be desirable that the exemplary attitude and efforts of the residents of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE be politically recognised and financially supported, especially at regional level and by the federal state. The village community of PRAINHA DO CANTO VERDE is still waiting for a noticeable appreciation of its efforts – all the more so as since 1998 some 800 million US dollars are said to have been pouring in the development of tourism in the federal state of Ceará, with the aid of the World Bank.