

## Small-scale Tourism Development in Brazilian Amazonia: The Creation of a ‘Tourist Bubble’

Mirjam A. F. Ros-Tonen and Anna Flora Werneck

*That golden evening I really wanted to go no farther;  
more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile  
in that conflux of two great rivers, Tapajós, Amazon,  
grandly, silently flowing, flowing east.*  
(From ‘Santarém’, poem by Elizabeth Bishop, 1978)

*Abstract:* In Brazil, tourism is promoted as a means of generating employment, tax revenues, foreign exchange and investments in infrastructure. The Amazon region is thereby primarily marketed as a ‘green’ destination. One such a destination is the village of Alter do Chão in the municipality of Santarém in the state of Pará, where tourism has expanded rapidly during the past decade. Looking at the main characteristics of tourism in the study area and the actors involved, the authors show that the notion of a ‘tourist bubble’, which was developed for large-scale enclave-like resorts, may apply equally to a small-scale destination. First, it is in the sense of abstracting from historical and cultural contexts in relation to the antecedents of the local population and by commercializing the local Sairé festival as ‘staged authenticity’. Second, a ‘tourist bubble’ is emerging as a result of increasing physical and functional segregation of tourism and residential areas. As far as the local population is concerned, the creation of the ‘bubble’ primarily represents new economic opportunities. However, the introduction of ‘invented traditions’ is also easily adopted because it fits in with the ongoing ethnic reclassification process in Brazil among culturally fragmented populations in search for their ‘roots’ and lost rights. The authors conclude that in order to fully understand the complexity and dynamics of cultural and economic transformations following tourism development, it is necessary to also look beyond the ‘tourist bubble’. *Keywords:* tourism, tourist bubble, staged authenticity, Brazilian Amazonia, Brazil.

Less developed countries, including Brazil, have welcomed tourism as a means of generating employment, tax revenues, foreign exchange and investments in infrastructure. Although Brazil does not yet take full advantage of the potential that tourism offers, the tourism industry is of growing importance to the economy. In ten years time the number of international tourists nearly doubled from 2.97 million in 1997 to 5.0 million in 2007 (Ministério de Turismo 2008). The tourism industry was estimated to contribute 2.8 per cent to Brazil’s gross domestic product and 3.9 per cent to its exports in 2006. It was expected to generate 6.4 per cent of all employment in the same year (WTTC 2006). With 5.2 per cent of all tourism establishments (Ministério de Turismo 2008) and 7.0 per cent of all tourism-related employment (Pinto Coelho 2008), the Amazon region’s share in Brazil’s tourism industry is relatively small. However, tourism-related employment in Amazonia increased by 47 per cent between 2002 and 2006, which is far above the average growth of 14 per cent for Brazil as a whole. In this article we explore how tourism developed in a small-scale destination in the Amazon region – the village of Alter do Chão in the municipality of Santarém in the western part of the state of Pará. Specific attention will thereby be given to the question of whether the ‘tourist

bubble' concept, which was developed for large-scale enclave-like resorts, may apply equally to a small-scale destination.

### **The concept of a 'tourist bubble'**

The concept of a 'tourist bubble' – which is similar to what Cohen (1972, 166) has called the environmental bubble – was coined by Smith (1978, 6) to denote the tendency of tourists to stay among themselves and to be 'physically "in" a foreign place but socially "outside" its culture'. It was later used for the segregation of tourism areas from local residential spaces as a way to create familiar cultural environments where tourists could feel safe. Judd (1999, 36) employed the tourist bubble concept in this sense with respect to the refurbishment of downtown areas in American cities to form tourism and leisure areas that were meant to provide the traveller with a 'secured, protected and normalized environment'. Minca (2000) employed the term 'Bali syndrome' to denote a similar process of spatial segregation ('re-territorialization') of tourist spaces in Bali.

At first sight, the tourist bubble concept seems to be relevant primarily to enclave-like forms of mass tourism such as theme parks (Smith 1978), all-inclusive resorts (Torres 2002), international style hotels (Jacobsen 2003) or cruise ships (Jaakson 2004) and less so for small-scale destinations like the one studied in this paper. Several authors have shown, however, that the tourist bubble may equally apply to alternative forms of tourism such as backpacking (Jacobsen 2003, 74; Noy and Cohen 2005) or ecotourism (Carrier and Macleod 2005). Based on their study of ecotourism destinations in Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, Carrier and Macleod (2005) have shown that the interactions between ecotourists and their attention to the local nature and culture are often abstracted from historical and social contexts. They coined the notion of 'ecotourist bubble' to refer to the ignorance of context in ecotourism.

Abstraction from cultural contexts also occurs in the 'commoditization of culture process' (Greenwood 1978, 137) that occurs in response to tourists' desire for 'authentic' experiences (MacCannell 1973, 597). In this process, often a 'staged authenticity' emerges (MacCannell 1973, 595-596) with 'invented traditions' which are disconnected from the population's historical context<sup>1</sup>. In Alter do Chão the changes in a local cultural event, the Sairé festival, can be interpreted as such a 'commoditization of culture' process. As we will illustrate below, this festival evolved from a local cultural festivity into a big commercial event in which reference is made to the disputed notion of 'Borari Indians', and new elements were introduced in order to attract a larger number of tourists. A similar process is described by Grünewald (2002) in his study of tourism and cultural revival among the 'Pataxó Indians' in southern Bahia, Brazil. Stimulated by the agents in the tourist industry, the Pataxó – in reality consisting of five ethnicities with no common language or background – were turned into 'performing primitives' (p. 1018) who sell 'invented objects' (p. 1013) and 'produced traditions' (p. 1012). Rather than losing authenticity, the Pataxó experience this change as 'cultural revival' that gives them a special status in the region.

The easy adoption of a 'new' indigenous identity and 'invented traditions' and the interpretation of these as a 'cultural revival' suggests a relationship with what

Perz *et al.* (2008) call the racial-ethnic reclassification process that occurred in Brazil during the 1990s. Following the new constitutional rights that indigenous people acquired in 1988, self-identification as being 'indigenous' emerged as a way to reassert political and territorial claims. This process created a new 'post-traditional Indian' (Warren 2001) who Perz *et al.* (2008, 13) describe as follows:

These are people of indigenous descent who live in the fragmented remnants of their traditional cultures but for whom those remnants constitute a central reference for their identity. Post-traditional Indians actively seek to rediscover, recuperate, and reinvigorate cultures that conquest and colonization disrupted. It is this orientation that distinguishes post-traditional Indians from non-Indians and often proves infectious, especially given the legal avenue that indigenous identity offers for land acquisition.

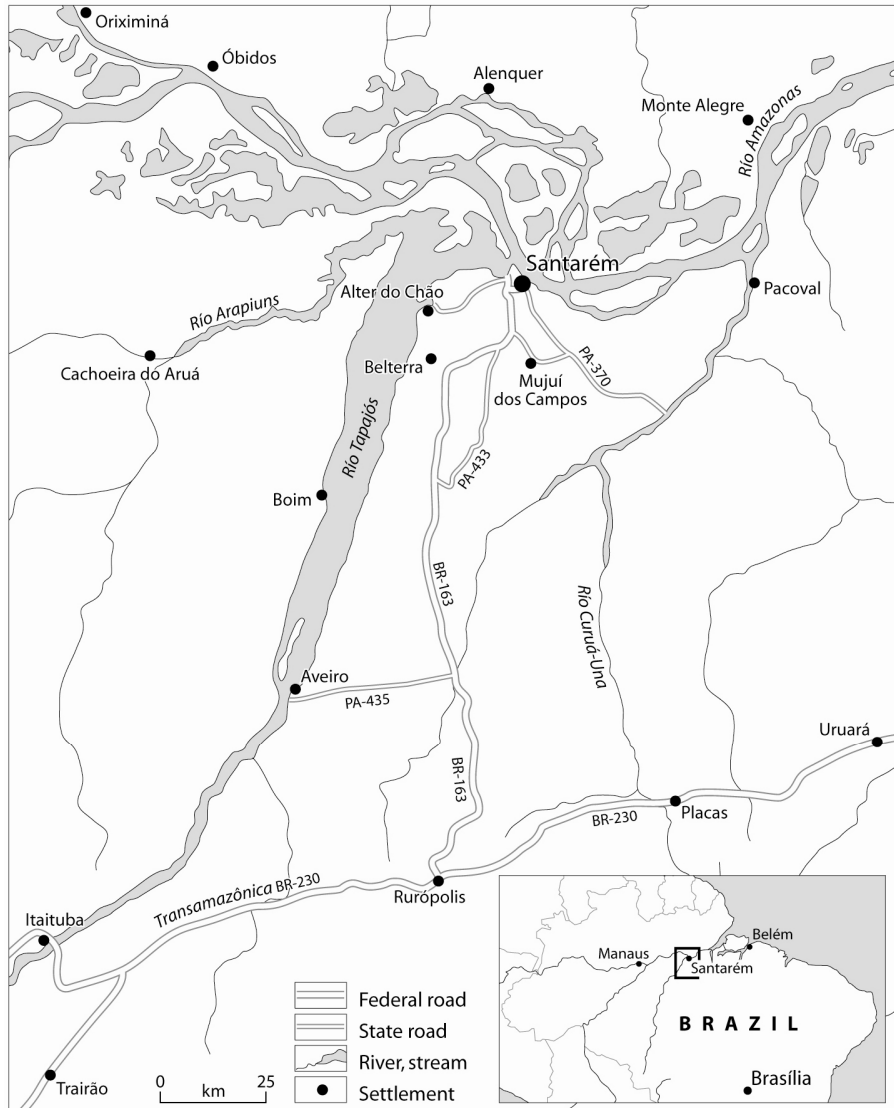
The authors (Perz *et al.* 2008, 27) estimate that reclassified indigenous people constituted almost half of Brazil's indigenous population in 2008 and that the process accounted for 79 per cent of indigenous population growth in Brazil during the 1990s.

## **Methodology**

Fieldwork for this study was carried out between August and October 2005 in the municipality of Santarém in the western part of the state of Pará in the Brazilian Amazon region. Both qualitative and quantitative data gathering methods were employed, including (1) a survey among travel agencies in Santarém and tourism-related establishments in Alter do Chão ( $n = 40$ ); (2) semi-structured interviews with key informants among governmental, non-governmental and private actors in the regional and local tourism industry ( $n = 16$ ); (3) a questionnaire and informal conversations with villagers ( $n = 40$ ) focusing on their opinion and perceptions of local tourism development; and (4) direct (participant) observation through participation in meetings at which tourism development in the village was discussed. Secondary material was also collected, such as government and non-government reports, policy papers and statistics on tourism development. A few key informants were approached again in October 2006 and August 2007 with a view to updating and verifying some of the information gathered in 2005.

## **The study area**

The municipality of Santarém in which the village of Alter do Chão is located is the second largest city of the state of Pará in the Amazon region outside the metropolitan area of Belém (which includes Ananindeua). It covers an area of 22,887 km<sup>2</sup> and had an estimated population of 275,571 in 2008 (IBGE 2008), 71 per cent of which are concentrated in the urban area. Santarém is located strategically at the confluence of the Amazon River and the Tapajós River. The Arapiuns River is another important waterway in the municipality and flows into the Tapajós River before the latter passes Santarém (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1.** Map of the study area

Since colonial times, Santarém's economy has typically evolved in boom-and-bust cycles based on the trade of extractive or agricultural products (Futemma and Brondizio 2003, WinklerPrins 2006). The period of military government (1965-1985) had a tremendous impact on the region, particularly in the 1970s. During this decade the road from Santarém to Cuiabá (BR-163) was built, which resulted in massive immigration of peasants from northeast Brazil, for some of whom colonization (re-settlement) projects had been set up along the Transamazônica and BR-163. Additional infrastructural investments during this period included the construction of the harbour and airport of Santarém and the Curua Una hydroelectric dam and installation of the sewage system in the city of Santarém. Another invest-

ment which is relevant from a tourism point of view was the construction of the once luxurious 240-room hotel Tropical (now Amazon Park hotel) in 1971, which had to accommodate government officials who had to supervise the infrastructural works (Ramos 2004). During most of the cycles, and increasingly since the region was opened up in the 1970s, commerce, logging, fishing, small-scale farming and cattle ranching have been key economic activities. Today the region's economy relies on agriculture (with soybean cultivation becoming increasingly important), fisheries, cattle ranching, commerce and the use of natural resources, notably timber.

Despite its potential and the recent investments made, tourism plays a secondary role in the local economy. The tourism development plan of the state of Pará (PARATUR 2001) mentions the precarious infrastructure with impassable roads during the rainy season, expensive air transport, deficient and slow river transportation, and limited capacity of tourism services and accommodation as the main impeding factors. As can be seen from Table 1, tourism is not included as a separate category in statistics on the composition of the Gross Internal Product (GIP). However, taking 'Accommodations and restaurants' and 'Transportation (and storage)' as proxies for tourism development, we estimate that the contribution of tourism to the Gross Internal Product of the municipality of Santarém lies at around 5 per cent.<sup>2</sup> As the table shows, this contribution doubled between 1994 and 2003.

The municipality of Santarém is particularly suitable for nature-based tourism thanks to five nature reserves. Three of these are particularly relevant to the village under study, namely the National Tapajós Forest, the Tapajós-Arapicuns extractive reserve and the Environmental Protection Area (*Área de Proteção Ambiental*; APA) Alter-do-Chão. The region has a diverse vegetation, including rain forest, savannah (*cerrado*) and flooded forest (*várzea*).

Alter do Chão, referred to as 'the Amazonian Caribbean' by explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau, is a charming village located 35 km southwest from Santarém city with numerous river beaches of white sand and green river waters. Until the mid 1980s the village had a subsistence-based economy in which people lived mainly from fishing, the cultivation and processing of manioc, and the cultivation of regional fruits (mainly cashew, the *açaí* fruit of the *Euterpe* palm tree, *cupuaçu* (*Theobroma grandiflorum*) and *murici* (*Byrsonima crassifolia*). Since then, the village has undergone many changes. Electricity power lines were installed in the village in 1985, in the same year that a municipal primary school was inaugurated. As will be seen later, the paving, in 1992, of the road that links the village with Santarém was an important development as far as tourism is concerned. The first bed and breakfast facility in the village, *pousada* Alter do Chão, opened in 1981. From then on, other inns (*pousadas*), hotels, restaurants and shops were established and an increasing number of Santarenos (starting with those who had earned a lot of money during the 1980s gold rush to the Tapajós region) began to build second homes in the village. It is currently estimated that there are some 600 'second' homes in the village, a number which is higher than the approximately 500 homes of the village's actual inhabitants (Franklin Rego Campos, District Administrator for Alter do Chão, pers. comm. 2007). A lot of these 'second' homes are currently inhabited permanently by upper and middle class people who work in Santarém.

Table 1. Gross Internal Product Santarém 1994 – 2003 (R\$ million)

Sector / year	1994	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2003
	(%)											(%)
Agriculture	34.9	114	121	130	139	142	156	160	189	270	375	30.4
Mining	2.8	9	12	14	16	16	19	26	30	30	32	2.6
Transformation industry	11.0	36	60	64	70	69	78	91	101	103	111	9.0
Construction	8.6	28	48	54	58	62	62	69	75	77	95	7.7
Public services and utilities	0.6	2	6	7	6	6	7	7	7	8	14	1.1
Trade and commerce	6.7	22	29	38	35	37	45	52	62	75	95	7.7
Rentals	3.1	10	26	45	53	55	60	75	86	90	104	8.4
Communication	0.6	2	4	5	10	14	20	27	35	40	60	4.9
Public administration and social security	22.3	73	66	83	89	97	102	113	121	120	135	10.9
Health and education	3.4	11	13	15	16	17	17	22	26	30	37	3.0
Financial services	2.1	7	6	14	14	16	16	25	35	40	60	4.9
Domestic services	0.3	1	1	2	2	3	5	6	6	9	12	1.0
Other services	1.2	4	9	10	12	13	13	21	29	33	45	3.6
<i>Accommodation and restaurants</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>1.2</i>
<i>Transport and storage</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>3.6</i>
<b>GIP – SANTARÉM</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>832</b>	<b>965</b>	<b>1.235</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: IBGE / Secretaria Executiva de Planejamento e Coordenação Geral do Pará / Banco Central do Brasil. Presented in a slide presentation by Santarém mayor, Maria do Carmo Martins Lima (2005).

The development of tourism accelerated the village's transformation into a cash economy in which a substantial proportion of the villagers (26 per cent) live mainly from tourism and the sale of crafts to visitors. The growing demand for housekeepers, cleaners, construction workers and labourers in tourism-related jobs acted as a pull factor which increased the flow of migrants into the village. The push factor related to this migration flow can be found in the land concentration process following the expansion of soy cultivation in the municipality of Santarém and the neighbouring municipality of Belterra (see Carvalho 1999, Fearnside 2001 and Steward 2004 for more details). It is estimated that Alter do Chão currently has about 4,000 inhabitants.

### **The antecedents of the inhabitants of Alter do Chão**

The origin of Alter do Chão dates back to pre-colonial times when it was a small village inhabited by an indigenous tribe in the literature referred to as the Tapuysús (Reis 1979), Tapuiçuç (Fonseca 1987) or Tapaiçuç (SEPOF 2007). The Portuguese, who arrived in the region in 1637, used the word Tapajó to refer to this tribe and named what is now the city of Santarém 'Aldeia (hamlet or settlement) dos Tapajós'. The alleged existence of a tribe called the Borari is probably derived from the fact that the Portuguese named the village of what is now Alter do Chão 'Aldeia dos Boraris' (Fonseca 1987, 22). However, historical sources do not confirm the existence of such an ethnicity, nor does it feature on the list of indigenous peoples of the National Indigenous Foundation<sup>3</sup> (*Fundação Nacional do Índio*; FUNAI) or the Indigenist Missionary Council (*Conselho Missionária Indígena*; CIMI).<sup>4</sup> Palmatary (1960,8) suggests, based on the work of the entomologist Herbert Huntingdon Smith (1851-1919), that the village's proper name was Puerary, derived from *puera* (bead), after the polished ornaments shaped in the form of a frog called *muiraquitãs* (greenstones) that were found in the lake. This interpretation is more likely, considering that the *Lago Verde* is locally also known as *Lago dos Muiraquitãs*. Combined with the uncertainty of the existence of a Borari tribe in various sources we therefore assume that the ethnicity of the pre-colonial population was the same as that of the inhabitants of Santarém.

Irrespective of the true tribal origins, the village underwent a drastic ethnic amalgamation process which started when Jesuit missionaries became active in the region from 1650 onwards. The Jesuits established the mission settlement (*Missão*) of Nossa Senhora da Purificação dos Boraris (Azevedo 2002) where Alter do Chão now is. This marked the beginning of the massive dislocation of indigenous peoples who were brought together in ethnically mixed mission settlements by the missionaries to facilitate catechization. In these settlements, the Jesuits promoted the use of the *Lingua Geral* or *Nhengatu* – a pidgin of Tupi and Guarani languages (Ioris 2005).

A further disruption of the native culture occurred with the implementation of Marques Pombal's Directorate of the Indians from 1758 onwards. This Directorate comprised a set of rules to promote the 'civilization' of indigenous peoples, including the use of Portuguese instead of the *Lingua Geral*, promotion of intermarriage of Indians with Portuguese settlers and the replacement of 'barbaric native names' of towns and villages with those of cities and villages in Portugal (Fonseca 1987,

22; see also Reis, 67-68). It was in this context that Alter do Chão was given its current name in March 1758; the same month in which the Aldeia dos Tapajós became Santarém. A lot of ethnicities disappeared from the Amazon region as a result of the Pombal's Directorate, while others weakened to such an extent that they were replaced by more powerful tribes. In the Lower Tapajós, the Munducuru from the Upper Tapajós succeeded in doing just that and, by the end of the eighteenth century, they dominated the entire Tapajós region (Ioris 2005, 56-57).

The indigenous people who inhabited Alter do Chão were further decimated when they participated in the *Cabanagem* separatist movement against the Portuguese Crown during the Santarém revolt in 1836-37. When visiting Alter do Chão in 1851, the naturalist and explorer Henri Walter Bates (1962, 241-242) noted that 'few of them escaped the subsequent slaughter, and for this reason there is now scarcely an old or middle-aged man in the place'. Many others fled away from the repression that followed and the indigenous people from Alter do Chão dispersed over the region, provoking another 'reconfiguration of inter-ethnic relations in the post-independence period' (Ioris 2005, 62). When Bates (1962, 242) arrived at the place he found a 'semi-civilized village', where 'the original orderly and industrious habits of the Indian [had] been lost' and 'the inhabitants live[d] in the greatest poverty.'

By the end of the 1870s, the discovery of productive concentrations of planted rubber trees (*seringais*) along the Tapajós River provoked a 'rubber rush' into the region which attracted immigrants from north-eastern Brazil, mainly the state of Ceará. According to censuses cited in Reis (1979, 156), this immigration did not affect Alter do Chão directly, as the number of inhabitants declined from 593 in 1862 to 525 in 1883 despite a rise from 14,730 inhabitants to 22,797 for the region as a whole during the same period. This could mean either that the population of Alter do Chão took part in the out-migration to more productive rubber tapping areas elsewhere in the Amazon region, as was common in the region during the rubber boom, or that the population numbers suffered due to the extreme violence meted out to the indigenous peoples during this period (Ribeiro 1979, 41). In most villages along the Lower Amazon and Tapajós, the indigenous population ultimately mixed with Portuguese descendants to an extent that no expedition account in the second half of the nineteenth century makes reference to indigenous population groups in the Lower Tapajós, except for a small number of Mundurucu settlements (Ioris 2005, 68).

Scientists (see Ioris 2005, 69-70 for an overview) who studied the region in the first half of the twentieth century reported the virtual extinction of indigenous groups in the Tapajós region. The inhabitants of the Tapajós region had become *caboclos* – a concept related to *mestizo* (mixed Indians and Europeans) but different from it due to it being associated with particular eco-zones (the riverside, hence the local synonym *ribeirinhos* or riverside dwellers) as well as a particular (traditional, natural) way of life (Nugent 1993). They are traditional to the extent that their origins are linked to the earliest Portuguese attempts to conquer the Amazon interior and that they pursue a livelihood based largely on subsistence farming, fishing, gathering and hunting (Nugent 1993, 8). However, as was made clear above, any link with pre-colonial Amerindian societies is 'extremely complicated and impossible to reconstruct in any but the sketchiest form' (Nugent 1993, 31). In



spite of this complexity, the ethnic reclassification process described by Perz et al. (2008) is taking place in the region with increasing numbers of local people now self-identifying as being indigenous. The notion of ‘Borari Indian’ proved to be highly helpful in this process, however doubtful the link is between the actual population and such an ethnicity.

### Characteristics of tourism in the region

The city of Santarém is the gateway to the Tapajós pole, the region explored in this study. According to the state of Pará Tourism Company – a mixed company that falls under the Special Secretary of Production – the main tourism attractions of the municipality of Santarém are the meeting of the waters (where the brownish Amazonas and the greenish Tapajós Rivers flow side by side before they merge), the city’s colonial buildings and museums, the National Tapajós Forest and the fluvial beaches of Alter do Chão and Ponta de Pedras (PARATUR 2001). The fluvial beaches emerge during the dry season from April to October – the period locally known as summer – when the water level drops. At some distance from the city, Belterra and Fordlândia are the remnants of Henry Ford’s efforts to revive the Amazon rubber trade in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In Alter do Chão, the main attraction is the *Ilha do Amor* (Love Island) (Fig. 2a), which is connected to the village’s mainland during the dry season, but only accessible by *catraias* (small one-person rowing boats) operated by local people during the wet season. In addition, the village attracts thousands of visitors during



**Figure 2a.** Alter do Chão, *Ilha do Amor* (Love Island), 2008. Photograph courtesy of Mirjam Ros-Tonen.

the Sairé Festival in September, during which allegedly indigenous traditions are mixed with Christian and secular elements (Fig. 2b). Other events held in the village such as carnival, New Year's Eve, the Borari festival and the patron saint festival also attract a lot of tourists throughout the year (Franklin Rego Campos, District Administrator for Alter do Chão, pers. comm. 2007).



**Figure 2b.** Women carrying the arch of Sairé during the festival in September, 2006. Photograph courtesy of Barbara Volland Lemos.

Travel accounts from the region have existed since colonial times but tourism as a significant economic activity is a relatively recent phenomenon in both Santarém and Alter do Chão. In Santarém it has existed on a small scale, but never represented a major economic activity, nor was it a prominent feature of local policies. In Alter do Chão, tourism is currently the most important economic activity and it is rapidly changing the way of life in the village. Here, the tourism industry has been growing since the 1980s and particularly during the last decade. Although the first inn that was constructed in the village dates back to 1981, it was only after the year 2000 that the sector truly underwent rapid expansion. This is illustrated in Table 2 which shows the year in which the surveyed tourism-related businesses in Alter do Chão were established.

**Table 2.** Initial years of tourism establishments in Alter do Chão

Year established	Arts & crafts	Hotels & inns	Restaurants	Tourism agencies	Total
Prior to 2000	2	4	3	-	9 (28%)
2000-2002	3	5	1	-	9 (28%)
2003-2005	2	4	4	4	14 (44%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>32 (100%)</b>

Source: Werneck 2006.

### The actors involved in tourism development

As regards the actors involved in tourism, we distinguish between the public sector, tourists, the private sector and the local population.

#### *Public sector*

The public sector played an important role in the growth of tourism in Alter do Chão after 2000. Part of the growth can be explained by a general growth in domestic tourism in the 1990s following democratization and economic reforms (Santana 2000, 425). However, according to key informants in Alter do Chão, the local growth of tourism in the past 15 years, and particularly since 2000, can be attributed mainly to government interventions in three fields. First, the state government invested in the improvement of infrastructure, starting with the paving of the road to Santarém in 1992. After 2000 these investments increased with the construction of a tourist port in the Tapajós River and the creation of a tourism information centre (*Centro de Atendimento ao Turista*; CAT) with federal funds of the Programme for Ecotourism Development (PROECOTUR) in both Alter do Chão (2005) and Santarém (2006). In Alter do Chão public funds were also invested in the renovation of the main *7 de Setembro* square and a refurbishment of the water front, both inaugurated in 2007. Second, both the federal and local governments at state and municipal level invested in the promotion of the village as a tourism destination, mainly through the National Tourism Fair (*Salão Nacional de Turismo*) and the Brazil Itineraries Programme (*Programa Roteiros do Brasil*). The municipal government of Santarém, through the Coordinating Agency for Culture (*Coordenaria de Cultura*), also participated actively in the organization of the Sairé festival particularly since 1997. Third, the parastatal Brazilian Support Service to Mi-

cro and Small Enterprises (*Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio à Micro e Pequenas Empresas*; SEBRAE) – controlled by the federal government and financed by a tax charged to national enterprises – has an important role in building capacity in tourism-related services. With a view to promoting the sustainable development of small enterprises, SEBRAE fosters cooperation between enterprises and provides financial services as well as affordable courses in English, business skills, gastronomy and tourism services. SEBRAE has regional offices in each Brazilian state as well as offices in some municipalities such as Santarém.<sup>5</sup>

### *Tourists*

Originally, Alter do Chão was known mainly as a sun and beach destination for people from Santarém and as a stopover location for international cruise tourists. With improved infrastructure and exposure of the village in tourism fairs, the number of tourists from other regions increased as well.

The number of one-day and weekend tourists from Santarém has increased significantly since the road was paved in 1992, which has made access to the village easier, cheaper and – thanks also to the use of qualitatively better buses – more comfortable (Albernaz 2001). Bus fares dropped by more than 200 per cent after the road was paved, and travelling time by bus was reduced from three hours to less than one. The paving also led to a substantial increase in the number of second homes.

Cruise tourists – who are primarily, but not exclusively, foreigners – visit the village during the ‘winter’ months from November to March. During these months, many cruise ships sail along the Amazon and Tapajós rivers and stop in Alter do Chão for a day or two so that passengers can enjoy the fluvial beaches and visit the village. Before the road between the village and Santarém was paved, most income generated by tourism came from cruise tourists buying local crafts (Albernaz 2001). In that time, more than 40 boats made a stopover in Alter do Chão each year. This number dropped considerably (to around 30 per year) after 9/11, but thousands of cruise tourists still spend a few days in the village during a stopover.

Tourists from other regions in Pará and Brazil come mainly from the neighbouring state of Amazonas and other places in the Amazon region and, to a lesser extent, from south and south-eastern Brazil.

### *Private sector*

As a consequence of the growing influx of tourists from other regions in Amazonia and Brazil, the number of private sector actors has also increased. Though tourism growth in the 1990s after the paving of the road can be attributed mainly to increased day and weekend tourism by Santareños, it did not provoke a greater demand for tourist accommodation. It was only after the number of tourists from other regions began to increase from 2000 onwards as a result of several government programmes that the number of tourism establishments also grew (Table 2). Of the 32 establishments surveyed in 2005, 23 establishments (72 per cent) opened after 2000. Four tourism agencies opened between 2003 and 2005, offering visitors a range of tour options, including cultural and folkloristic activities, nature-based

tourism and ecotourism (Albernaz 2001, Pastana et al. 1999). Together with these agencies, ten other establishments were opened between 2003 and 2005, thereby nearly doubling the number of tourism-oriented establishments in Alter do Chão. The survey revealed a low proportion of local ownership of the tourism establishments (31 per cent).

### *Local actors*

The fourth group of actors is the local population, of which an increasing number work directly or indirectly in the tourism industry. According to SEBRAE (2003) 26 per cent of the inhabitants of Alter do Chão work in tourism-related activities as beach tent holders, rowers (to get the visitors to the Love Island in time of high water), cooks, waiters, traders, artisans, dancers, etc. They are organized in professional associations that are represented in the Community Council. The associations that play a major role in the decisions concerning tourism development are those which represent the most important segments of the tourism industry, such as the Association of *Catraieiros* (row-boat owners), the Beach Tent Association, the Sairé Festival Association and the folkloric dolphin (*boto*) groups (which are explained below). People who control the tourism-related associations are mainly those who own tourism-related businesses, who actively participate in the events, and who were able to keep their houses and land in the village centre. It's fair to say that they represent the local elite who have the greatest influence on local decisions.

### **The creation of a tourist bubble**

Being marketed as a rustic sun and beach destination in a natural and authentic environment, Alter do Chão is very unlike the enclave-like tourism destinations to which the concept of 'tourist bubble' usually applies. However, as we will illustrate below, both a de-contextualized 'tourist bubble' is being created through the way the Sairé festival is evolving, while a physical 'tourist bubble' is emerging through spatial segregation.

### *The Sairé festival as 'staged authenticity'*

One of the great events in Alter do Chão that attracts thousands of visitors to the village each year is the five-day Sairé festival held in September. It is advertised by the tourism industry as a 'celebration [that] originated from the Borari Indians that was later combined with the Catholic ceremony of Nossa Senhora da Saúde (Our Lady of Health)'. It is hard to find reliable information about the true origins of the festivity. However, according to legend, the first Portuguese soldiers who landed in the region held shields that attracted the attention of the indigenous people. The natives tried to imitate the soldiers by creating their own shields with materials available in nature (Azevedo 2002, 3). When the Jesuits arrived, they incorporated the Sairé symbol (a half circle decorated with coloured ribbons, red and white feathers and other ornaments which represent the Arch of Noah [see Fig. 2b]) into the native's shield with a view to facilitating catechization. The indigenous tradi-

tion thus adopted the Sairé symbol and, together with the Jesuit influence, the celebration acquired a strong religious focus. As such it was celebrated until 1944, when North American and local priests abolished it because they wished to maintain ‘authentic Catholicism’. It was only in 1973, after almost 30 years, that the Sairé was reconstituted by local dwellers. As opposed to being solely religiously oriented, the local population was also motivated by the prospects for economic turnover that the festivity could bring to the village (Azevedo 2002, 8).

The reconstitution of the Sairé festival in July 1973 had a greater folkloric connotation with a mixture of sacred and profane elements that attracted an increasing number of tourists. The most important change occurred in 1998 when the organization – consisting of the dolphin and Sairé associations in partnership with the municipality of Santarém – decided to add the disputes between two folkloric groups to the Sairé festival. This decision was inspired by the famous Boi Bumbá celebrations in Parintins (Box 1), a town in the state of Amazonas halfway between Santarém and Manaus. Since then, the event has transformed into a massive event (Azevedo 2002, 11) to the extent that its organization was transferred to a third party, the Fortaleza-based Duetto enterprise, in 2008.

The names of the folkloric groups refer to the two types of freshwater dolphins that occur in the Tapajós river, namely the greyish *boto tucuxi* and the pink-coloured *boto cor de rosa*. The idea behind the introduction of these groups was to ‘recall’ the local traditions and costumes through the competition between the two groups and to adapt the dolphin legend. According to this legend, the pink-coloured dolphin always appears at community dance parties – principally during the Saint John festivities in June (*feira junina*) – in the form of an enchanting and elegant young man dressed in white. The youngster seduces the young and beautiful women and leaves them pregnant, as none of them is (supposedly) able to resist his charm. Every year the dolphin groups select a topic that highlights local culture and traditions and prepare costumes and music throughout the year to be presented during the festival. This presentation has a strong competitive element. The dispute between the two dolphin groups takes place in parallel to the religious festivities and is nowadays the most important feature of Sairé.

The increase in the number of visitors attending this event led to the construction of a big arena, called the Sairódromo, with a capacity for six thousand people. In addition, the celebration was transferred to September in the midst of the low water season when fluvial beaches emerge, with a view to attracting even a larger number of tourists. Although the litanies and processions for the Holy Trinity and other local traditional activities like folkloristic dances still occur, the introduction of this new element led to radical changes in Sairé’s nature and the village’s preparation to the event.

The introduction of the dispute between the two dolphin groups is an example of ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell 1973) with ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm 1992), be it that these were easily adopted by the local population. Several reasons may explain this easy acceptance, the first being that the dolphin legend is one of most popular ones in the interior of the Amazon, commonly cited when a girl gets pregnant from an unknown father. Second, it added a commercial element to the festival that created much-needed economic opportunities, both in terms of revenues for the village as a whole and in terms of employment for the local popula-

tion. In interviews held by Pereira (2007) in the village, many of the respondents put forward that they participated in the event mainly because they were paid for it. As one of the villagers worded it: ‘*a cultura gera renda*’ (the culture generates income) (Pereira 2007, 238). Also from the survey held for this study the overall appreciation of the economic opportunities generated by the tourism industry came to the fore (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Local perceptions of the impacts of tourism in Alter do Chão (n = 40)

Perceived positive impacts		Perceived negative impacts	
o More income opportunities	100.0%	o Rising prices	100.0%
o Economic diversification	75.0%	o Increase of litter on the streets	80.0%
o Development and improved quality of life	62.5%	o Environmental degradation	37.5%
o Better infrastructure (e.g. bus station)	50.0%	o More people in deprived neighbourhoods	17.5%
o Increased purchasing power	37.5%	o Increase in the number of inhabitants	12.5%
o Opportunities to start up new businesses	12.5%	o More noise	12.5%
o More capacity building and access to new technologies	10.0%	o Vandalism	7.5%
o Less need to go to downtown Santarém	5.0%	o Cultural loss	5.0%

Source: Werneck 2006.

The third reason for easy acceptance of the ‘invented traditions’ among the population and popularity among, mostly regional, tourists is the resemblance with the Boi Bumbá festival in Parintins. This event, that finds its origin in Northeast Brazil, was brought to the Amazon by the *Nordestinos* who migrated to Amazonia to try their luck in the rubber boom. It is a re-enactment of the rivalry between two families who lived in the late nineteenth century in the state of Amazonas, both of whom built a model of a bull to celebrate the legend of two slaves (Box 1). Other Amazonian villages, such as Jurutí between Parintins and Santarém, are also copying the idea.<sup>6</sup>

**Box 1.** The Boi Bumbá festival in Parintins

The story – that is similar to the one underlying the Bumbá Meu Boi festival in Maranhão in North-East Brazil – goes that a pregnant slave, Mãe Catarina, had the craving to eat a beef tongue. Her husband, Pai Francisco, decided to kill a bull to meet her desire. When this turned out to be his master’s favourite, Francisco was threatened with severe punishment unless he was able to resurrect the bull. Thanks to a shaman he eventually succeeded in doing so and escaped his penalty.

In remembrance of this legend, Lindolfo Monteverde who came to the Amazon in the late nineteenth century, created a model of the bull in 1913 which he called Garantido. Shortly after, the bull Caprichoso was created by the Cid brothers Roque and Antônio. Parading through the streets with their bulls, the Monteverde and Cid families entered into a rivalry. This rivalry is being re-enacted in the streets since the Juventude Alegre Católica (JAC) took the initiative to create a folkloric festival in 1965. The festival was a success and expanded to an event that since 1988 is held in the Bumbódromo, a newly constructed stadium in the centre of Parintins with a capacity of 35,000 spectators. Here, the two groups representing each bull dispute during a three-hour show on the evenings of 28-30 June for the fanciest bull parade and presentation of folkloric traditions.

Source: Calvacanti 2000.

Last, but not least, the creation of social spaces to share cultural knowledge has resulted in a valorization of local traditions and crafts. The fact that the Sairé festival has been attracting a growing number of tourists has made local people prouder of their traditions, including the invented ones. Expressed in the words of one of the respondents, ‘We really take an interest in our culture and in knowing more about ourselves and our roots’. Here we see a similarity with the aforementioned case of the Pataxó Indians in southern Bahia (Grünewald 2002): in both cases the alleged ethnical background of the population is not based in its factual historical antecedents. However, both cases show that the cultural transformations reflect a dynamic process, which in the end results in a stronger identity of the native population (Grünewald 2002, 1019).

The racial-ethnic reclassification process mentioned above (Perz *et al.* 2008) is part and parcel of this process. The story of the president of the Borari Association, ‘Dona Neca’, is exemplary in this respect. Always having been self-identified as a *cabocla*, she has never been aware of being an indigenous person. Only when she got involved in a struggle for land she heard from an anthropologist from Brasília that it was possible to claim the land as being ancestral if the local people would self-identify as being indigenous. ‘And the anthropologist began to tell the history of the Borari *that no-one knew here*’ (Ludinéia Gonçalves Marinho in Pereira 2007, 264, italics by the authors). The notion of ‘Borari Indian’ subsequently became instrumental in a claim for ‘indigenous’ land that FUNAI started to verify in July 2008.<sup>7</sup> This makes clear that the creation of a de-contextualized ‘tourist bubble’ to seize economic opportunities eventually may transform into a complex and dynamic process of cultural transformation that combines economic opportunity-seeking with ‘cultural revival’ and reasserted territorial claims.

### *Spatial segregation*

Tourism development in Alter do Chão significantly changed the village structure. We argue that this has led to a tourist bubble as a functional segregation of tourism and residential areas and as a place where tourists could feel safe. About twenty years ago, the village consisted of a few houses made from straw and mud, located around the village church near the lake. At that time the village’s population used to consist primarily of *caboclos*, but this has changed drastically due to hundreds of new individuals, families and business people moving in. As explained above, this process combines push as well as pull factors. As a result, the prices of houses and land in the village centre began to rise and the original inhabitants were tempted to sell their houses. In addition to the attractiveness of a good price for their place, through which they were able to build a brick house elsewhere in the village, selling their property was also appealing because the influx of newcomers provoked profound social changes. The local people faced increasing nuisance due to noise pollution and drunkenness at the weekends, the replacement of their former neighbours with newcomers who only stayed in the village for a couple of days at the weekend, and disturbances to their habits such as bathing in the lake in the afternoon. More and more people started to sell their houses and move away from the village centre. In combination with the influx of people from other communities,



**Figure 3.** Map of Alter do Chão

this resulted in the formation of new neighbourhoods and the growth of the neighbouring community of Carazanal (Fig. 3). Especially those who had relatives and/or land there, but also those who could not afford to buy a small plot of land even in the poorest area of Alter do Chão, moved to Carazanal, which is growing so rapidly that it is expected to become an outskirts of Alter do Chão soon.

Another group of the original residents of the village centre resettled in the new neighbourhood of Jacundá along the Tapajós river to the southeast of the village centre (Fig. 3). In contrast to the village's main centre, this neighbourhood lacks public services such as electricity, water and sewage treatment (although some families use these services clandestinely) and at the time of fieldwork there appeared to be no plans whatsoever to implement such public services in the short term. Although Jacundá is the poorest neighbourhood in the village, some of the inhabitants were able to afford a brick house instead of one made from straw and mud, and some 'luxury' items like a refrigerator. In most cases these people are former residents of the village centre who acquired some money when they sold their properties.

Newcomers from Santarém and neighbouring communities, who are employed mainly in tourism-related services, settled in Nova União along the road to Santarém (Fig. 3), south of the village centre. Here, the municipality of Santarém supported the development of a new neighbourhood by allocating plots of land and by supplying electricity. While there were only four houses in 2002, this neighbourhood now consists of around 200 houses and there is no more space for any further expansion. As a result, the village is expanding along the road in the direction of the community of Carazanal.

The second homes are concentrated in the Lago Verde neighbourhood to the northeast of the centre, where the houses of the middle and upper class with well-paid jobs in Santarém are also located. Some of the second homes can also be found in Jacundá.

Through the spatial segregation process, the village centre is gradually transforming into a 'tourist bubble' where the tourism establishments – hotels, inns, restaurants, tourism agencies and art and crafts shops – are concentrated and where there is no more space for the residential function. Here and along the beaches is the space where tourists can stay among themselves and feel safe, while avoiding the outskirts where the local poor are living. This transformation of the centre into a physical tourist bubble was reinforced by recent investments by public authorities in public spaces such as the *7 de Setembro* square and the water front. Both investments changed the community landscape fundamentally. As regards the square, the new layout – with wooden benches and bandstands having been replaced with cement ones – is generally perceived by the original inhabitants as being in disharmony with the architecture of the nineteenth century church. 'Improvements' along the water front included largely cement-based street paving, the replacement of mango trees with palms, and the construction of public toilets and parking lots. These investments, too, are being opposed by a discontented population.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, these investments in concrete structures and exotic tree species were made using PROECOTUR funds, which are meant to promote ecotourism.

## Conclusions

This study shows that even in a small-scale destination like the Amazonian village of Alter do Chão, the notion of 'tourist bubble' can be applied as an analytical device to study segregation resulting from tourism development in several senses. First, tourism development is accompanied by increasing abstraction from historical and cultural contexts, as witnessed by the commoditization of the Sairé festival that is being associated with the disputed notion of 'Borari Indians' and which goes together with the introduction of several 'invented traditions'. Second, it leads to an increasing physical and functional segregation between the tourism areas (the *Ilha do Amor* and the village centre), the neighbourhoods where the second homes and summerhouses are located (Lago Verde), and the residential areas where the original population is living (Jacundá, Nova União and Caranazal). The local population perceive these developments mainly as positive. They consider the 'commoditization of culture' primarily as an income-generating opportunity, while some also perceive it as a valorization of their culture. As such it fits in with the ongoing ethnic reclassification process in which a post-traditional Indian emerges in search of his or her 'roots' and lost territorial rights. The spatial segregation of tourism and residential areas allowed former residents of the centre to build improved dwellings elsewhere in the village, while it enables them to continue old habits and avoid the nuisance caused by tourists. For the tourists, the tourist bubble created a space where they could stay among themselves and feel safe, while avoiding the village's outskirts that are undergoing increasing marginalization due to the growing influx of low-qualified migrants.

We conclude that the notion of ‘tourist bubble’ is an interesting concept to analyse tourism development in small-scale destinations. However, a view ‘beyond the bubble’ is needed in order not to lose sight of the dynamics and complexity of cultural and economic transformations.

\* \* \*

**Mirjam A.F. Ros-Tonen** is a Human Geographer with a PhD degree in policy sciences. She is affiliated to the Amsterdam institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDSt) of the University of Amsterdam as senior researcher and coordinator of the (Netherlands) Development Policy Review Network (DPRN). She recently published *Partnerships for Sustainable Forest Resource Development: Learning from Latin America* published by Brill Publishers (2007). Mirjam Ros-Tonen is currently engaged in research into forest use and governance in the Brazilian Amazon. <M.A.F.Ros-Tonen@uva.nl>

**Anna Flora Werneck** graduated in International Relations at the University Estácio de Sá in Rio de Janeiro in 2001 and obtained her MA degree at the International School for Humanities and Social Studies (ISHSS) in Amsterdam based on her thesis titled ‘Local Participation in Tourism Development. A Case Study of Tourism Development in Alter do Chão’ (2006). She presently lives in São Paulo, Brazil, where she works as Programme Coordinator for the World Childhood Foundation on projects against sexual violence against children and adolescents. <annaflora22@yahoo.com>

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## Notes

1. According to Hobsbawm (1992, 1), ‘invented traditions’ are ‘both “traditions” actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner with a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity’.
2. Storage should be excluded, but we assume that this is compensated by the tourism-related part of the trade and commerce that was not included in this proxy.
3. URL: <http://www.funai.gov.br/indios/conteudo.htm#> (accessed December 2008).
4. URL: <http://www.cimi.org.br/?system=news&eid=292> (accessed December 2008).
5. URL: <http://www.sebrae.com.br/customizado/sebrae/institucional/quem-somos/> (accessed December 2008).
6. In Juruti the festivity was created in 1995 and is called Festival das Tribos Indígenas de Juruti. In this case it is the enactment of a dispute between indigenous tribes, the Mundurucus and Murapinima, the latter being an invented ethnicity. The festival bears many similarities with the Boi Bumbá and Sairé festivals. For more information see URL: <http://www.juruti.pa.gov.br/conteudo/?mode=pa&item=46&fa=7&cd=110&siglamun=juruti> and <http://www.ecoamazonia.com.br/site/print.asp?cod=6302> (accessed December 2008).

7. URL: [http://pib.socioambiental.org/caracterizacao.php?uf=15&id\\_arp=4981](http://pib.socioambiental.org/caracterizacao.php?uf=15&id_arp=4981) (accessed December 2008).
8. Not all the investments in social spaces are perceived negatively, however. Positively valued investments include the Sairé arena (which is also used for local festivities and school activities), the improved bus station and the river port (constructed to receive cruise tourists but benefiting local people as well).

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