

The Slawson Award

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Advancing geography
and geographical learning

Yara Evans

Education

- BSc (Hons) Geography at University of North London, London.
- MA Geography of Third World Development, Royal Holloway, University of London (1996).
- PhD Human Geography, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Wales Aberystwyth (2000-2003)

Current position

Research Fellow in the Department of Geography at Queen Mary, University of London since 2004



Slawson Award

Yara received the Slawson Award in 2001 for her project entitled ***Efforts Towards Sustainable Tourism: The case of the Serra do Mar State Park, São Paulo, Brazil***. The advent of *sustainable development* and *sustainable tourism* and the requirement that local communities are involved in decision-making of local processes have led to calls for protected areas to accommodate biodiversity conservation goals with community development goals. Yara thus investigated the scope of local community participation in planning and management of protected areas in helping promote sustainability. Focussing on political and economic participation, she used a political ecology approach to analyse the role of social power in conditioning participation.

The research was based on the Serra do Mar State Park (SMS), which was created in the mid-1970s to protect the Atlantic Forest. The creation of the SMPS has entailed a ban on the use of natural resources within the park. As the park was superimposed on traditional communities whose livelihoods depend on fishing, subsistence farm and resource extraction, the ban has engendered conflicts between protected area authorities and local communities. However, since the late 1990s, the former have sought to involve the latter in park affairs with a view to resolving environmental conflicts and promoting sustainable development through park tourism. Yara's fieldwork involved a questionnaire survey of park residents in three selected areas to gauge the extent and experience of local participation in park affairs and in-depth interviews with a range of stakeholders such as park authorities, the representatives of community groups, and private and public interests (e.g. residents' association, tourism business, local government, NGOs).

The research revealed that park authorities had largely failed to involve local communities in park planning and management. This was due to the participatory methodology they employed, which ultimately operated to circumscribe participation and prioritise biodiversity goals. An example is the management committee, which operates on the principle of representation; this requires local socio-political organisation which was virtually non-existing at the time of fieldwork, whilst the committee is consultative only. Park authorities had also largely failed to involve local residents in park tourism development, as they seek to perpetuate the ideal of nature for conservation rather for use. Participation in the context of the SMSP has thus failed to achieve its stated aims. Future attempts may follow the same course, unless there is a serious re-thinking of the suitability of the conservationist model of protected areas to the socio-economic-environmental reality in the region.

Since the Slawson Award

The Slawson Award enabled Yara to conduct her PhD research in Brazil, which she considers her richest fieldwork experience yet, and also played an important role in her subsequent academic appointments. Since February 2004, Yara has been in the Geography Department at Queen Mary, University of London. Her first appointment was on a one-year project on the restructuring of clothing industry in London examining changing practices on the sector, such as the increased outsourcing of manufacturing to firms based in Eastern Europe, which is leading to the shrinking of the production base in London. In her second position as a Research Fellow, she is working on a project about migrant workers in low-paid jobs in London, to examine their migratory experience, as well as their experiences of living and working in a global city such as London.