

Abstract

This research inquires the relationship between social self-organization and property rights in the Maya Biosphere Reserve in the Petén region, northern Guatemala. The allocation of over 0.5 million ha of tropical rain forest to local communities represents the state's effort to reconcile conservation goals with rural development, in the frame of decentralization and local empowerment. The rich biodiversity of the region is accompanied by a great amount of archaeological sites of the Maya civilization, oil dwells, high migration, and an arrow of illegal activities. The process of self-organization will be therefore analyzed in a context of competing use claims over natural and cultural resources, where property rights and access often do not have the same meaning.