**Partnership between University, Local Government and Civil Society for Territory
Development: a learning experience with paradox issues**

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Partnership between University, Local Government and Civil Society for Territory Development: a learning experience with paradox issues

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to show how partnership between University, Local Government and Civil Society may contribute for territory development. The paper central issue is to debate to what extent partnership between University, Local Government and Civil Society is an effective strategy for development in areas that are changing from rural to urban structure. It shows a learning experience that has been carried out in the *município* of Benevides in Pará state, Amazonia region, Brazil. This experience aims to link university research, local government demands and civil society needs in a large development project that involves (a) local government, local organisations and communities capacity building, (b) *município* participatory planning and (c) university services delivering as a form to effectively contribute to the area where the university is involved with. The paper shows that a great challenge for the construction of partnership between university, local government and civil society has been its capacity to change the partners thinking and structure to carry out an integrated, interdisciplinary, multi-actor and multi-year territory development project.

Key-Words: Partnership. Local Development. Territory Development. Learning Experience.

Introduction

This paper attempts to show how partnership between University, Local Government and Civil Society may contribute for territory development. Particularly, it explores to what extent partnership between University (Uni), Local Government (LG) and Civil Society (CS)[i] may be an effective strategy for territory development in areas where an accelerated process of changes from rural to urban structure exists. The paper attempts to show a partnership process that has emerged between University, Local Government and Civil Society for implementation of a large development project at municipal level in Brazil. It focuses specifically on the *município* of Benevides on the north-east of Pará State in the Brazilian Amazonia region. The paper tries to show the challenges that an integrated, interdisciplinary, multi-actor and multi-year project faces during its implementation in function of some paradox issues that it brings about to traditional organisations thinking and structures.

In Brazil, the 1988 Constitution created the mechanisms for planning and the decentralisation of resources that gave *municípios*[ii] a certain kind of autonomy. Before this, local development planning was developed by central Government and both LG and CS worked separately with limited dialogue and high level of conflict. The historical lack of cooperation between these two main institutions may have led to further mistrust and misunderstandings, therefore impairing territory development actions even more.

To promote favourable conditions for planning and social accountability, new forms of organisation involving social participation were introduced as part of the political space. In the Pará state context, the most important of these organisations was the *Conselhos de Desenvolvimento* (Development Committee). However, the lack of dialogue between LG and CS has made hard this political space work.

The presence of universities to approximate LG and CS may be innovative mechanisms to make Development Committee work and then to offer a deal of possibility for strengthening citizen participation as right in the governance process for territory development. In fact, there is a belief that citizen participation in local planning and implementation leads to a greater level of efficiency and

effectiveness of investment and helps to promote greater democracy in *município* planning (Florisbelo and Guijt, 2004: 202).

Civil society participation in local planning and implementation with university support may be translated as a 'partnership' between university, state and civil society. Partnership is assumed to lead to efficiency and effectiveness (*ibid*) and citizen participation in the governance process, although there has been some difficulty in ensuring that it is easy to put into practice.

There are various critical issues for partnership practice in Pará state areas where an accelerated process of changes from rural to urban structure exists. Among others, high level of migration, land property conflicts, established practices of top-down planning and political competitiveness based on traditional rural pattern of *clientelismo*[iii] are the most relevant. Additionally, historical dependence on government and market constraints are some examples from the Brazilian Amazonia.

Taking the broad spectrum that involves the debate on partnership and the many issues that partnership entails in Brazilian Amazonia, this paper will concentrate particularly on explaining a development project created by the University of Amazonia (UNAMA) and embraced by *município* of Benevides LG (from this time onward it will be called *Prefeitura* of Benevides) and local organisations from civil society. The central project idea is to take partnership as a mechanism of power sharing for territory development. The project calls 'Sustainable *Município*' and its details will be explained further.

This paper is organised into six sections including this initial one. The following section deals with definitions of partnership and empowerment. It examines the concepts of partnership and empowerment within the context of literature and point out the definitions that have been adopted into the Sustainable *Município* Project. The third section deals with the project itself and shows its aims, structure and organisation. The fourth section demonstrates the reasons why the *município* of Benevides was chosen for project implementation and draws the context of the *município*. The fifth section deals with the first project actions and the first difficulties that the leaders of the project are facing on. The aim of fifth section is to explain the learning process that both UNAMA and *Prefeitura* of Benevides are facing on. Some paradoxes of this process will be pointed to. The last section stresses the challenges that the project will face on and the paper's main conclusion about this initial partnership between UNAMA, *Prefeitura* of Benevides and local organisations from civil society for territory development.

Partnership and Empowerment: Meanings and Challenges

The term partnership has a diversity of meanings that ranges along an infinite spectrum (McQuaid, 2000:10). Partnership holds a sense of cooperation, mutual trust and synergy between individuals and organisations to reach a common aim. On this basis, partnership is concerned with the relationships between two or more stakeholders that join different resources to follow a joint approach to reach common aims (McQuaid, 2000; Lewis 2000).

On the one hand, partnership is a form of organisation in which the compliance of the enrolled partners depends on the existence of trust (Fowler, 1997; Harriss, 2000) and self-organisation (Harriss, 2000: 231). In this context, partnership reasons are shaped by a sense of common purpose supported by trust between its actors. Thus, it is not created by ideas of material gain or coercion of the enrolled partner.

Partnership based on trust evokes the notion of partnership as a prolonged process and as the result of a long-term relationship between the actors (Lewis, 1998). Harriss (2000: 236) suggests that this type of partnership is an 'ideal type of cooperation' and Fowler (1997; 1998) points out to an 'authentic partnership'. Then, partnerships based on trust are understood to be a result of the networking skills and motivation of actors (Fowler, 1997; Harriss, 2000). Such partnerships are characterised by a focus on its actors, their independence and enthusiasm in sharing values and visions to achieve a common aim. Partnership based on trust is associated with the idea of stakeholders working together for mutual benefit, voluntarily sharing values and goals in embedded relations (Ostrom, 1997). In this spectrum, the intention of the partners depends on commitment rather than on external factors, since

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partnership only can exist if there is what Thompson (2005: 31) considers as basic trust between partners.

Although partnership based on trust possibly represents an 'authentic type' of cooperation as pointed out by Fowler (1997; 1998), and is "understood as mutually enabling, interdependent interaction with shared intentions" (Fowler, 1997:107), many partnerships are very different from this primary concept of trust. As Tendler (1997) and Evans (1997) demonstrate, cooperation, levels of trust and self-organisation are influenced by the incentives and opportunities created by the prevailing institutional frameworks.

On the other hand, partnership is most commonly found in formal and political institutions (DFID, 2006; Tendler, 1997; Evans, 1997). Partnership is centred on institutional frameworks and governments (Tendler, 1997; Evans, 1997; DFID, 2006). This perspective emphasises partnership as shaped by the rules, regulations and governmental actions where it emerges (*ibid.*). From this perspective, the nature of regulatory frameworks, of incentives and sanctions of supportive institutions promoting and valuing innovation influence the level and type of cooperation which prevails. Partnerships centred on institutions are related to the notion of complementarity (Lan, 1997; Evans, 1997) between organisations under the guidance of a formal structure of authority. Actors' complementarity, which is specially built in a formal and political environment, focuses on 'problem solving', to present a solution of a particular societal problem. Evidences of 'successful' problem solving (Lewis, 1998, 2000; Ferreira, 2003) induces the idea that partnerships can be built up in a short time.

However, as argued by Giddens (1991: 92), relationships depend on the mutual commitment of the partners involved, who remain in the relationship only for as long as they choose to. The intentions of the partners depend on commitment rather than on external anchors and partnership can only exist if there is mutual trust between partners (Giddens, 1991; Thompson, 2005). It implies that trust is one coping mechanism by which actors can respond to risk and uncertainty in communities. This is especially prevalent at a time when a new climate of risk increases public sensitivity to the levels of risk which they may face.

A common feature of all partnerships is that they represent a relationship that involves power sharing (Hodgett and Johnson, 2001: 324). However, addressing unequal power relations between partners is still a great challenge to the discourse and practice of partnership in general (Johnson and Wilson, 2006) and particularly for partnerships based on formal and political institutions. In any relationship (even relationships based on trust) partners always have differences that reflect at least on their assumptions, perspectives, expectations or agendas (Johnson and Wilson, 2006: 71). Also, partnership actors bring their own specific sets of power positions, roles and responsibilities as determined by values, skills and organisational resources into the network arena (Lovan, 2004: 3). A sceptical view of the power relations debate is that mutual partnerships are not possible because of the existence of permanent power inequality between partners (Ahmad, 2006).

In any case, partnerships are relationships of self-interest between those who see an advantage in them (McQuaid, 2000: 15). Partnerships have been built even when the partners do not share the same values, goals and ways of working together. As argued by Johnson and Wilson (2006: 71) difference is a driver for mutuality inside partnership arenas. This point to the idea that partnership stands on mutuality (Giddens, 1991; Penrose, 2000) and is not based solely on sharing. Additionally, partnership is also based on difference, which is an opposite point of view stating that mutuality in partnership is not possible because of inequality, especially unequal power relations (Lister, 2000; Ahmad, 2006). New mechanisms of trust need to be created, mainly where there is a range of organisations and development agencies that bring their own specific set of power positions to partnership relations.

Although difficult to define precisely because of its complexity, the interpretation of empowerment deals with issues of power imbalances in social systems (Chambers, 1983; Friedmann, 1992; World Bank, 2004). Similarly, access to resources, control of elements and processes of production, and rights to dispose of products are experiences in wider and systematic social relations.

How people stand in relation to each other in these system has been described as power (Chambers, 1983, 1997, 2005; Nelson and Wright, 1995).

An argument made for building partnership is that partnership is a new attempt to diminish power imbalances in the social system (Fowler, 1997; World Bank, 2004). Partnership is understood as a mechanism that promotes the empowerment of the powerless, since it enables the powerless to contribute their information, knowledge and skills to the elaboration and implementation of programmes, projects or actions that affect them (Farrington and Bebbington, 1993; World Bank 2004). However, the models of empowerment currently used to analyse different aspects of power express different perspectives of where power stands and how it works (Friedmann, 1992; Clarck, 1991).

On the one hand, power is the capacity of individuals to make choices and to transform those choices into development outcomes (Chambers, 1983, 1997; 2005; World Bank, 2004). Empowerment, in this sense, is the process of increasing this capacity through people learning and 'capacity building' (Lister, 2000) to allow people to have freedom of choice and action (Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2004). Power is understood as 'power to', it is enhanced through gaining new skills by active practice or by gaining access to externally generated scientific information relevant to people's aims (Farrington and Bebbington, 1993). Empowerment based on 'power to' offers possibilities for social changes from an 'evolutionary' process of people learning (Tembo, 2003: 25) once people become aware of power dynamics.

On the other hand, power is the capacity of individuals or groups to access and control the process by which decisions, particularly those that affect their own lives, are made (Friedmann, 1992). Empowerment, from this perspective, is made from powerless people's access to political space (Friedmann, 1992; Clarck, 1991). Powerless people assume an active part in reconstructing the public domain, helping to create a political space suitable for working out the policies that will sustain a development that involves them. Empowerment in this view focuses on social changes by structural transformation (Tembo, 2003: 26, 30).

'Power to' is seen in terms of people's ability to challenge and change 'power over' relationships and, hence, give the powerless the chance to pursue their interests in long-term access to resources and decision making (Mayoux, 2001). In this case, the framework of capacity building becomes the way of enhancing not just learning but the agency located in an asymmetric power relationship. The expansion of 'power to' to the point where people gain 'power over' is also described as a second stage of empowerment (Nelson and Wright, 1995).

Proposals that promote partnership between local people and Government for people's contribution to development programmes with their resources, skills and knowledge means that governments work more suitably and the partnership leads to the empowerment of the community (Hildyard *et al*., 2001; Bowyer, 2003). Partnership enables people's participation in Government programmes and may be used as a basis for people to empower themselves (Cornwall, 2001; Cleaver, 2001). The use of partnership to achieve political space to influence social transformation based on political empowerment of the poor has been recast as an essential element for urban programme development (World Bank, 2004). Partnership is a cost-efficiency and effective mechanisms to achieve project objectives (Lewis, 2000; Cleaver, 2001).

Increasing concern in social exclusion has extended the understanding of partnership beyond the implementation of particular projects to comprise much wider issues connected with the relationship between Government and civil society (Edwards and Sen, 2002). Such an extension in the use of the participation approach means that it is no longer simply concerned with single issues. Instead, partnership has been linked with good governance (Tendler, 1997; World Bank, 2004). This means that partnership has been brought into direct contact with equitable treatment and empowerment. This new form of interaction between Government and civil society means that innovative entry points have been launched for direct public involvement in the process of Government (Tendler, 1997). Therefore, the debate about the direct involvement of ordinary people in the political structure has changed from 'scaling up', 'institutionalisation of participation' (Cleaver, 2001) and participatory techniques that can

influence the policy process (World Bank, 2004) to a better understanding of the complex nature of the interaction between individuals and the social structure (Tembo, 2003)

As an aim, partnership improves the chances of direct democratic involvement in governance and public transparency and makes the relationship between local people and local governance more direct (Florisbelo and Guijt, 2004; World Bank, 2004; Cornwall and Gaventa, 2006). Partnership is able to work as a policy for other local development strategies that bring together different groups to conciliate their diverse interests (Cleaver, 2001; Cornwall, 2004) within the process of territory development.

Sustainable *Município* Project for Territory Development

The Sustainable *Município* Project was conceived by the University of Amazonia (UNAMA), a private university located in Belém, capital of Pará state. UNAMA is a 17 years old university that offer 33 undergraduate courses and five postgraduate programmes distributed into four studies centres and one institute: (a) Biological and Health Centre, (b) Education and Human Science Centre; (c) Exacts Studies and Technological Centre; (d) Applied Social Studies Centre and (e) Institute of Law.

The history of the project started by the idea of the new UNAMA's managers to offer to society all the university services as a form to contribute to the areas where it is involved with. Then, UNAMA's managers asked for a group of researchers to design the project. The researchers enlarged the UNAMA's managers' idea and formatted a more comprehensive development project. The new project design does not only involve offering of university services, but it entails support to *municípios* to plan a new city and society structure in a joint approach to civil society. The researchers showed to UNAMA managers that is more important to *município* to have power to find out its own way for development rather than to have isolated services from the university. Therefore, all the services that UNAMA will offer must be linked to *município* people and government demands.

Under the general goal of endogenous development, the Sustainable *Município* Project's aim is to establish a multifunctional and integrated model of development that links university research, local government demands and civil society needs in a large development project that involves (a) local government, local organisations and communities capacity building, (b) *município* participatory planning and (c) university services delivering as a form to effectively contribute to the area where the University is involved with. The core aim of the Sustainable *Município* Project's is to support *municípios* that are changing from rural to urban structure to organise themselves for the changes that are usual in urban areas in Pará state such as intensive immigration, poverty growth, increasing of public service demands and impacts on environment.

The Sustainable *Município* Project has five basic principles: first, municipal sustainable development is an endogenous process of changes that involves economic growth necessarily linked to improvement of people's quality of life; second, municipal sustainable development is a multi-functional concept that involves economics, social, environmental, territorial, cultural and institutional issues; third, *município* is only a part of a broad context that is connected to region, country and the entire world; fourth, municipal development is a result of a dynamic relation of social actors represented by local government (*Prefeitura*), local organisations, communities people and private sector (commerce, industry and service business) under approach of governance; fifth, university as a entity of knowledge is an significant social actor for supporting a new social structure. Nevertheless, a new social structure must be carried out by the social actors from the state and civil society themselves.

There are five specific objectives that the Sustainable *Município* Project follows: (1) to build an integrated territory analysis taking into account economic, social, cultural, environmental, political-institutional and territory issues and their connexions; (2) to identify the *município* potentialities, vulnerabilities, weakness and strengths to respond to local people needs and demands; (3) to build up a municipal development plan from participatory approach; (4) to offer social, cultural and technical services that UNAMA is able to provide; and, (5) to make links with government and non governmental organisations, research institutes and other universities to provide other services that UNAMA has not

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capability to offer because of the inexistence of undergraduate courses and postgraduate programmes in it.

Methodologically, the project design involves three subprojects: Pro-Actions (*ProAções*), Integrated Territorial Analysis (*Análise Territorial Integrada* – ATI) and Sustainable Development Municipal Plan (*Plano Municipal de Desenvolvimento Sustentável* – PMDS). The first subproject will be developed into three phases. Firstly, the subproject will offer UNAMA services according to its own diagnosis about *município* needs; secondly, the subproject will put forward UNAMA services according to LG and CS needs and demands identified into the participatory integrated territory analysis; and thirdly, the subproject will arrange partnership with government and non governmental organisations, research institutes and other universities to offer other services that UNAMA has not capability to provide because of its scope of study areas.

Município of Benevides: the first challengeable experience in Pará state

A Brief Profile of Para State and Its North-East Region

Pará is located in the north of Brazil in the lower Amazon River[iv] basin bordering externally on Guyana, Suriname and the Atlantic Ocean and internally on the Brazilian states of Amapá, Maranhão, Tocantins, Mato Grosso and Roraima. The state's capital is Belém and is roughly 120 km from the Atlantic Ocean. Belém is the largest city in north Brazil, and its port has a history of trading with foreign countries and of defending itself against invaders during Portuguese colonial times. The Amazonas River and its effluents[v] provide important transportation in Pará. The hydrographical composition of the state is 1,253,164.5 km^2. Its land area is 1,248,042 km^2 which corresponds to 16.66% of the country's territory and 26% of Brazilian Amazonia (IBGE, 2005). It is the second largest state in Brazil. The state is divided into 143 *municípios,* has a population of 5,510,849 (*ibid.*) and a population density of 4.43 per km^2. According to the IBGE (2005), the total population was divided into 53.51% in the urban areas and 46.49% in the rural areas.

The north-east of Pará has 49 *municípios* and is one of the oldest areas of agricultural production in the Brazilian Amazonia (IBGE, 2005). It covers 135,000 km^2 and represents 10.6% of the state's area (*ibid.*). The region's ecosystem is varied. It is formed by secondary re-growth scrub (*capoeira*), natural fields, floodplains, estuaries, beaches, sea, rivers and lakes (Watrin and Santos, 1996). The official statistics indicates that the north-east population is estimated at 1,472,775 inhabitants, equivalent to 23% of the population of the state as a whole (IBGE, 2002). It is the second most inhabited region of the state with 17.71 inhabitants per km^2 (*ibid.*).

Although large and mechanised farms are present in the region, the majority of agricultural production comes from small-scale, low-income smallholdings (IBGE, 2005). For decades, the *caboclos*[vi] have lived by gathering forest products such as fruits and vegetables (Barrow, 1990) and by practicing itinerant cultivation based on cassava and beans (IBGE, 2005). Itinerant cultivation is characterised by land clearance with slash and burn techniques for cassava and/or beans production and by people leaving the land after two or three harvests because of deterioration in the fertility of the soil. The smallholders and their families move to a new plot and (re)start a new cycle of production.

Between the 1930s and 1980, the region experienced both spontaneous and officially-sponsored immigration, mainly from the north-east of Brazil. These officially-sponsored immigrants came to the region as part of a settlement policy carried out before, during and after the military government. The construction of the Belém-Brasilia railway in the 1950s enabled the occupation of areas alongside the railway before the military government came to power. The policy of settlement from the 1970s also enlarged the population and led to increased forest clearance, short-lived agricultural production and land degradation. The settlers worked on areas of *terra firme* forest and grew mainly annual crops such as rain-fed rice, maize, corn and beans

(IBGE, 2005). In the areas of *várzea* the production of rice has been the most significant (IBGE, 2005) and cultivation is mainly done by *caboclos* rather than immigrants.

For Brazilian Amazonia as whole, it is possible to identify in the north-east of Pará two categories of small-scale, low-income smallholdings: *posseiros*, squatters without documentary title to their land and *colonos*, those settled on small plots by the government who normally have legal rights (Barrow, 1990). The *posseiros* are in a weak position since they lack satisfactory title to their land and the legal and political support needed to guarantee that their rights are respected by those seeking to force them to leave.

**Map 1**
Brazil, Pará State and its North-East Region
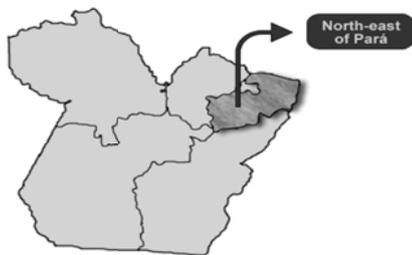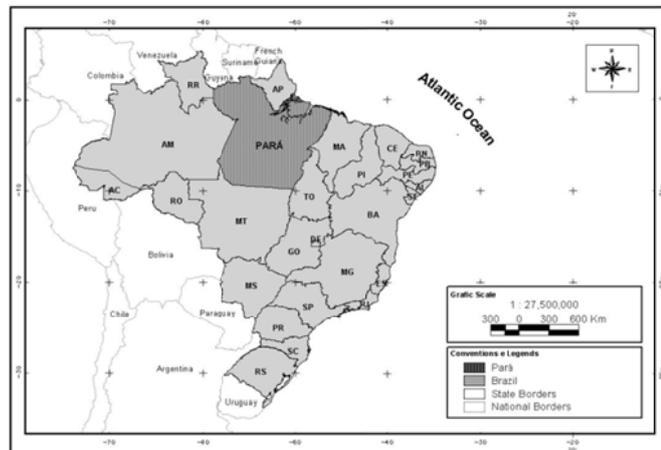
Source: IBGE (2010)

The Município of Benevides

Benevides is part of Great Belém that according to IBGE (2007) is the most inhabited region in Pará state with 2.046.843 people. The great Belém is composed by five *municípios*: Belém, Ananindeua, Marituba, Benevides and Santa Bárbara. According to official statistics, Belém, Ananindeua and Marituba have high urbanisation index which are respectively 99.35%, 99.76% and 87.16%. Benevides and Santa Bárbara are typical rural areas that are changing their territory structure. Benevides, for example, changed its urbanisation index from 10.37% to 53.83% between the years of 1996 and 2007 (IBGE, 2007). Benevides population grew up from 35.546 to 47.318 inhabitants. This growing means a rate around 4.2% per year.

Map 2

Great Belém and Neighbour *Municípios*
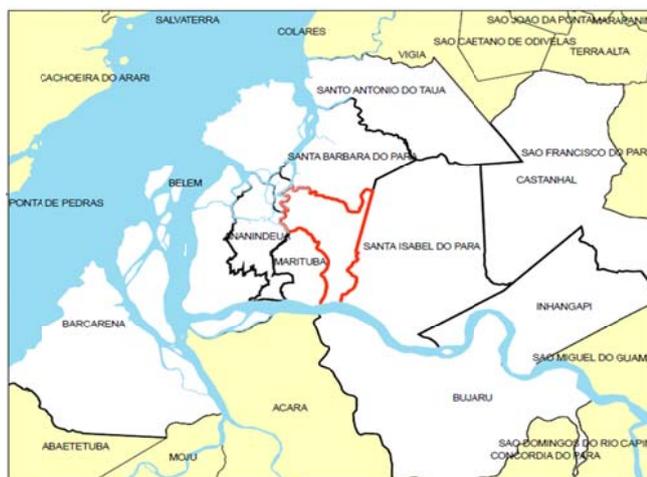
Source: Wikipedia (2010)

Benevides population growth is linked to an accelerated process of population spreading from Belém, Ananindeua and Marituba and also people immigration from Brazilian north-east, particularly from Maranhão state. Maranhão is one of the poorly state of Brazil. People from Maranhão rural areas move to Pará for looking for jobs and better quality of life. The immigration process has reconfigured the municipal territory and made hard local government job.

Table 1 – Great Belém Population (1980 – 2007)

| Município	1980	1991	2000	2007
Belém	341.289	1.244.689	1.280.614	1.450.697
Ananindeua	26.742	88.151	393.569	513.885
Marituba	- - -	- - -	74.429	105.425
Benevides	9.743	68.465	35.546	47.318
Santa Bárbara	- - -	- - -	11.378	13.605
Total	**377.774**	**1.401.305**	**1.795.536**	**2.130.930**

Source: IBGE, 1980, 1992, 2002 and 2007.

P.S. Benevides lost part of its population in 1991 and 1994 for legal creation of *municípios* of Santa Bárbara and Marituba.

Benevides takes an uncomfortable position of periphery and poor area of great Belém. According to IBGE (2000), most of Benevides population takes less than US$325.00 (R$600,00) of income, the lowest income in great Belém. Taking CEF Database (2007), there are 7.176 very poor families that should be linked to Brazilian Federal Government programme called *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) that aims to directly transfer income from government to heads of poor families as a form to attain their basic needs.

There are other data corroborating with the analysis that Benevides is a poor *município* that needs external support. For instance, only 15% of active economic population has job in private sector; 40% of *município* population is composed by children and young people; there is no public hospital (contradictorily, there is one private hospital); there are only 11 health units with a total of 56 bedstead. Official statistics (DATASUS, 2008) show that 30,5% of births are from women between 10 and 19 years old and only 10% of population has public health prevention assistance.

Map 3

Spatial Distribution of Income in Great Belém
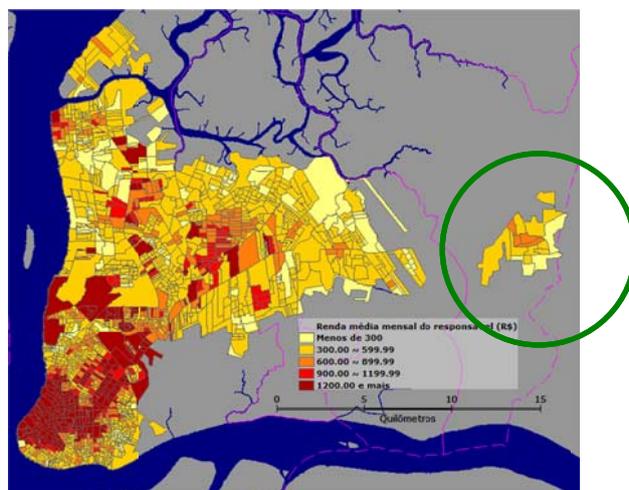
Source: UNAMA, 2010

Benevides is composed by seven districts: Benevides (central area), Murinim, Benfica, Paricatuba, Santa Maria and Taiassuí (Map 4). Pilot field work research identified that the majority of Benfica, Murinim and Santa Maria population work or study in Belém and go to their house only for sleeping. This indicates that part of Benevides population life is not linked to *município* itself. Consequently, there are weak social and economic relations between districts and central area that reveals a fragmented territory.

Map 4

Districts of Benevides
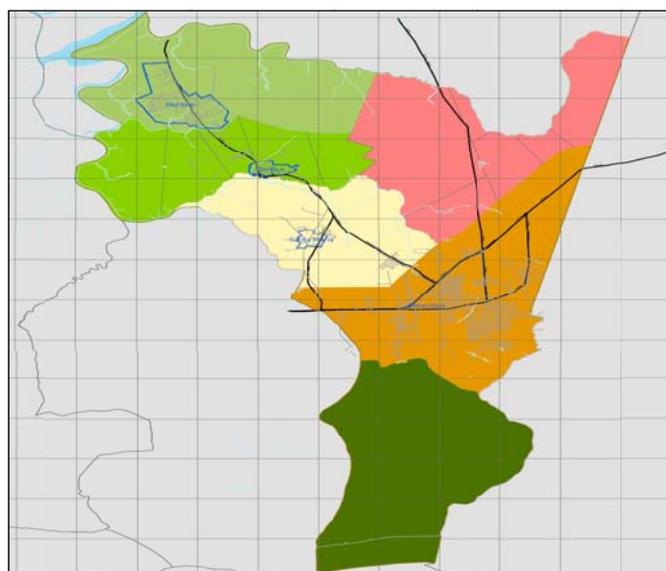
Source: BENEVIDES, 2006

Benevides scenario indicates an accelerated process of urbanisation and growth of poor periphery. The data shows that Benevides needs to plan its own process of transformation in order to face the growing of social and economic demands.

Sustainable *Município* Project Implementation: a learning experience with paradox issues

University is one of the oldest organisations in the world. In contradiction, university is also the most modern institution because it is a renewable organisation from the science, technology and innovation that it produces for society. As university is part of society, it produces knowledge for itself. There is a large body of literature indicating that university should not only produce knowledge for science advancing, but it must apply or transform the generated knowledge for application into society.

The Sustainable *Município* Project is a proposal that tries to apply knowledge generated by university to society where it involved with. However, the project is an innovative proposal that embraces diverse issues that break down traditional university behaviour with society and also with its own organisational structure. In Amazonia, UNAMA is the only private university. Since its creation, UNAMA's scope has been mainly concentrated on undergraduate courses. High level research is a new activity in the organisation because only recently new UNAMA's researchers have returned from their PhD qualifications. UNAMA is a university that built up an organisation culture based on traditional business. However, no one university may be managed as a traditional business, even private university, because it has a specific role into society. University role in Brazil and in any other part of world must involve people graduation, research and public action services.

In the scope of the project, traditional university behaviour with society breaks for three reasons: firstly, because the *município* is conceived as the space where various kinds of knowledge should interact. Researchers and university managers' staff need do adapt themselves for an interactive process of collective learning. Knowledge, viewed from a social construction approach[vii] emphasises that individuals and collective groups of people are continually constructing and reinventing their understanding of themselves and the world around them (Jacobs, 2002). Individuals are socialised into a system of beliefs, norms of behaviour and institutions what means that reality[viii] is constructed through human activity as a product of socialisation (Long, 1992; Jacobs, 2002). However, the understanding of knowledge as a social construction contrasts with the rational, positivist view of knowledge derived from a traditional scientific viewpoint that some of UNAMA managers staff have. In the meetings to debate the project implementation, some of UNAMA manager's staff continually demonstrates their thinking that university has the knowledge and the society should only to absorb it. In Brazilian Amazonia, there is already a large body of literature showing the importance of traditional population (aborigines, *caboclos*, black people and others) to generate knowledge from their point of view, particularly in their relationship with environment.

Secondly, because participatory approach is fundamental to carry out an integrated and interdisciplinary multi-actors project that has a socio-economic development aim. Participatory approach means sharing of power between all actors involved in the project. As the project brings an interdisciplinary perspective, participatory approach means involving of actors from different field of knowledge. In fact, participation as a new form of interaction between UNAMA managers' staff and researchers means that innovative entry points have been launched for direct researcher involvement in the process of university structure and organisation. This is because the Sustainable *Município* project is an institutional actions project that demands multi-actor attitude to achieve its objective. However, the direct involvement of researchers in the university structure and organisation suggests changes its actual form of administration from 'scaling down' decision to a more participatory appraisal. Nevertheless, project management concept has been extended from business environment to

managements of systems. This means that a project like the Sustainable *Município* needs different techniques to deliver results once some of them are not tangible at all. The complex project matrix request changes from the traditional and hierarchical pattern that UNAMA has.

Thirdly, the understanding about the meaning of partnership with *Prefeitura* Municipal so far has been restricting to financial support. However, as described in the second section of this paper, partnerships motives are not only shaped by ideas of material gain of the enrolled partners, but by a sense of common aim supported by trust between its actors. This is because partnerships based on trust evoke the notion of partnership as a prolonged process and as the result of a long-term relationship between the actors. Such partnerships are characterised by a focus on its actors, their independence and enthusiasm in sharing values and visions to achieve a common objective. As previously said in this paper, partnership based on trust is associated with the idea of stakeholders working together for mutual benefit, voluntarily sharing values and goals in embedded relations.

Old structure with new project idea is the greatest paradox that UNAMA faces in carrying out the Sustainable *Município* project. For the first time UNAMA is undertaking an integrated, interdisciplinary and multi-year project in a close relationship with local government and civil society. In fact, the Sustainable *Município* project cut across multiple functional centres, instead of following their old pattern of doing disciplinary project within centres. Within the Sustainable *Município* project several disciplinary and interdisciplinary subprojects will be carried out. Clearly, the actual UNAMA pattern needs changes. As a private and hierarchical university, some of UNAMA staff have had difficulties do understand a more participatory institutional project which *Prefeitura* Municipal and civil society are partners and not project donor and beneficiaries.

At municipal level, the process of learning by experience is linked to access to resources and control of project elements and processes. From their administration body, the *Prefeitura* Municipal tries to control the process and to focus on demands that it defines as priority. The trouble is that the ideas offered by *Prefeitura* Municipal have been restricted to aspects of public services and so far has not proffered possibilities of changes in the socio-economic structure of the communities. There is a great disparity between what is thought by local Government and the needs and priorities of local communities identified in pilot research.

However, one of the meanings of the Sustainable *Município* project is to promote the empowerment of the powerless people, since it enables them to contribute with their information, knowledge and skills to the elaboration and implementation of subprojects or actions that affect them. Powerless people should assume an active part in reconstructing the public domain, helping to create a political space suitable for working out the policies that will sustain a development that involves them. In other words, the Sustainable *Município* project focuses on social changes by structural transformation meaning that resources have to be achieved in order to change priorities and the powerless individuals' interests are pursued. Nevertheless, part of the *Prefeitura* of Benevides staff tries to reinforce its domain of ideas and ideologies what in political terms signifies continuation of certain sets of power imbalances.

The *Prefeitura* of Benevides political culture and institutional management customs related to this culture mean that the type of interaction with the most vulnerable communities is weak and dominated by practice which is ineffective in producing changes in favour of these communities. This suggests that the idea of partnership through synergetic relations between government and civil society will be hard to be achieved and a challenge for the UNAMA project staff. In this case, the UNAMA project staff needs to be aware with all *Prefeitura* proposals and the meaning of these proposals. If not, the Sustainable *Município* project may be only a support to *Prefeitura* to carry out its own ideas and projects and use

Sustainable *Município* project outputs for political gains. Less concerned with the inclusion of economically and socially marginalised groups in process of development; current government leaders try to use the Sustainable *Município* project space to access financial resources and to reinforce or to secure political power. A great risk that Sustainable *Município* project has offered is the 'institutionalisation of exclusion' with the pseudo-agreement of university and civil society representatives.

Sharing-power and loosing-power is the greatest paradox that *Prefeitura* of Benevides faces in being partner of the Sustainable *Município* project. Empowerment means possibility to powerless people access resources, control elements of local government projects and then to make people choices in the context of governance. Although the process of broad-based popular involvement in political structures for good governance improve the effective targeting of resources and Government awareness of local needs, this involvement may address a shift of political power. That is why the *Prefeitura* permanently tries to have control on the activities that the Sustainable *Município* project offers.

Conclusion

The creation of the Sustainable *Município* project and its pattern is a significant institutional innovation for both UNAMA and *Prefeitura* Municipal of Benevides. Although so far this innovation may be criticised for being concentrated by UNAMA and *município* administrative body interests, the project has the potential to join university, state and civil society together for a socioeconomic *municipio* transformation. For areas with no tradition of university-state-civil society cooperation, the implementation of a project like the Sustainable *Município* project is likely to be critically important in order to link local Government and civil society.

The poor scenario of *município* of Benevides shows the significance of partnership between university, local government and civil society for territory development especially in favour of more vulnerable people. With the implementation of the Sustainable *Município* project with the participation of local people, project leaders believe that may have great advances in the inclusion of poor people in the decisions that affect them and consequently a great effect on their economic production and social reproduction. This is one of the aims of the project.

So far, the research leaders have not taken the opportunity to fully implement its innovative proposal for Benevides development. The stimulus for innovation depends on the capacity of the UNAMA staff managers involved in the project and on the ability of these actors to negotiate the plan with the various levels of Sustainable *Município* project. So far, what the Sustainable *Município* project has covered is the amalgamation of various centres disciplinary projects that shows a misunderstanding from the centre staff about the project objectives.

However, the Sustainable *Município* project has been influenced by the political circumstances characterised by high levels of power disputes inside university and an almost total absence of trust on project success. This is because the Sustainable *Município* project presents an integrated, interdisciplinary, multi-actors and multi-year proposal that does not fit with the actual UNAMA structure. The old structure with a new and innovative cause a greatest paradox to UNAMA faces on. At university level, it has not been easy to carry out the project within the present structure.

At local government level, the *Prefeitura* of Benevides staff is constantly trying to preserve its political space and creating an arduous environment for the definition of common aims. This is because *Prefeitura* of Benevides staff make continuously efforts to put its ideas in practice into the Sustainable *Município* project. However, disputes inside the project not only affect those who are disputing the political space, but mainly affect the poor population

who is waiting to have access to university services and actions to contribute for their livelihoods improvement. In fact, sharing-power and loosing-power is the greatest paradox that *Prefeitura* of Benevides faces in being partner of the Sustainable *Município* project. In the context of the Sustainable *Município* project, partnership is mediated by social networks which are determined by changing configurations of power. Since the Sustainable *Município* project brings power in new ways, the *Prefeitura* of Benevides staff is always challenging researchers' proposition in terms of open the project to civil society as whole. However, the researchers believe that only through civil society participation, resources will mobilized and an opportunity will be created for forming shared meanings that will increase the chances for the successful implementation of the intervention

A great challenge for the construction of partnership between university, local government and civil society has been its capacity to change the partners thinking. In fact, they are in a learning process although with paradox issues. It is important to provide incentives for learning from sharing knowledge and experiences. Joint learning starts from the different knowledge that the actors bring to the learning, although these are not necessarily equally valued. The joint perspective implies that the learning is involved in a social process which involves a multiplicity of actors and relations. Joint learning in development projects is always situated in a context of who enact the knowledge. Following the dominant view of knowledge, a partner is learning by participating in, creating and recreating continuously a particular project. It means that the reality can be learned collectively leading to an increased capacity to manage changes.

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[i] The authors recognise that civil society is a broad concept. However, in this paper civil society is understood in oversimplified way. Civil society is represented by local organisations (associations, cooperatives, workers unions and others) that defend interests and demands of local people.

[ii] The lowest political-administrative level of the Brazilian Government structure. It comprises its own local Government and legislative bodies. Geographically, it involves urban and rural areas.

[iii] Political-economic relationship where the powerless becomes the 'client' and the 'dependent' of a powerful political group and commits his/her political support and vote.

[iv] The Amazon River is the largest river in the world, running for roughly 6,200 km.

[v] The effluents are: Tapajos, Xingu, and Tocantins rivers on the right border; Trombetas, Maicuru, Paru and Jari on the left border; Pará by the Amazonas watercourse; and Gurupi on the frontier with the state of Maranhão (IBGE, 2005).

[vi] Rural people of mixed Indigenous-African-Portuguese backgrounds.

[vii] The foundation of constructivism includes the work of Jean Piaget (1955) and Lev Vygotsky (1978). Piaget's idea of constructivism was based on his view of the psychological development of children's thinking using logical reasoning. Constructivism theory developed by Vygotsky states that children learn concepts from their everyday notions and from adult concepts through interaction with teachers and their contextual settings.

[viii] Berger and Luckmann (1966) influenced the analysis of the term social construction when they argued that everything we know is in fact the product of socialisation and the consistent reinforcement of the learned definitions of reality.