

MEDIAÇÃO INSTITUCIONAL E DESENVOLVIMENTO URBANO PERIFÉRICO: O PAPEL DA UNIVERSIDADE NA AMAZÔNIA

INSTITUTIONAL MEDIATION AND PERIPHERAL URBAN DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE
OF UNIVERSITY IN THE AMAZON

MEDIACIÓN INSTITUCIONAL Y DESARROLLO URBANO PERIFÉRICO: EL PAPEL DE
LA UNIVERSIDAD EN LA AMAZONÍA

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RESUMO: As cidades periféricas costumam abrigar universidades públicas das quais se espera que promovam o desenvolvimento urbano; no entanto, os mecanismos que ligam as instituições âncora à transformação territorial ainda são pouco compreendidos. Este estudo examina como a mediação institucional molda o desenvolvimento urbano em contextos de capacidade estatal limitada, utilizando a implantação de uma universidade federal na Amazônia brasileira como um caso interpretativo com metodologia mista. Pesquisas domiciliares (n = 53), entrevistas semiestruturadas, estatísticas descritivas e análise de conteúdo revelam falhas persistentes de governança, déficits de infraestrutura e fraca coordenação institucional. Em vez de atuar exclusivamente por meio de sua presença econômica, a universidade surge como uma instituição âncora capaz de mediar as relações entre as comunidades e os governos locais. Os resultados apresentam uma explicação institucional para o desenvolvimento urbano periférico, destacando a capacidade de coordenação como um mecanismo fundamental que conecta as instituições âncora à transformação territorial.

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Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento Urbano. Percepção da Comunidade. Universidade Pública. Coordenação Institucional. Amazônia Periférica.

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ABSTRACT: Peripheral cities often host public universities expected to promote urban development, yet the mechanisms linking anchor institutions to territorial transformation remain poorly understood. This study examines how institutional mediation shapes urban development in contexts of limited state capacity, using the implementation of a federal university in the Brazilian Amazon as an interpretive mixed-methods case. Household surveys ($n = 53$), semi-structured interviews, descriptive statistics, and content analysis reveal persistent governance failures, infrastructure deficits, and weak institutional coordination. Rather than acting solely through economic presence, the university emerges as an anchor institution capable of mediating relations between communities and local governments. The findings advance an institutional explanation of peripheral urban development, highlighting coordination capacity as a critical mechanism connecting anchor institutions to territorial change.

Keywords: Urban Development. Community Perception. Public University. Institutional Coordination. Peripheral Amazon.

RESUMEN: Las ciudades periféricas suelen albergar universidades públicas de las que se espera que impulsen el desarrollo urbano; sin embargo, los mecanismos que vinculan a las instituciones de referencia con la transformación territorial siguen sin conocerse bien. Este estudio examina cómo la mediación institucional configura el desarrollo urbano en contextos de capacidad estatal limitada, utilizando la puesta en marcha de una universidad federal en la Amazonia brasileña como un caso interpretativo con métodos mixtos. Las encuestas a hogares ($n = 53$), las entrevistas semiestructuradas, las estadísticas descriptivas y el análisis de contenido revelan fallos persistentes en la gobernanza, déficits de infraestructura y una coordinación institucional débil. En lugar de actuar únicamente a través de su presencia económica, la universidad se perfila como una institución de referencia capaz de mediar en las relaciones entre las comunidades y los gobiernos locales. Los resultados aportan una explicación institucional del desarrollo urbano periférico, destacando la capacidad de coordinación como un mecanismo fundamental que conecta a las instituciones de referencia con el cambio territorial.

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Palabras clave: Desarrollo Urbano. Percepción Comunitaria. Universidad Pública. Coordinación Institucional. Amazonía Periférica.

INTRODUÇÃO

Urban development is significantly shaped by the presence of higher education institutions, which reshape city structures by attracting skilled labor, intensifying housing demand, and increasing the need for public services. The literature frequently links these dynamics to an integrated model of urban development that aligns economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

Recent scholarship, however, often assumes a straightforward, positive correlation between university presence and urban outcomes, treating higher education institutions as inherently transformative agents (Costa e Silva et al., 2024; Pinsky; Gomes; Kruglianskas, 2019). In peripheral contexts, universities more commonly function as “anchor institutions”,

organizations whose capacity to drive urban change depends less on their physical footprint and more on their ability to weave institutional networks, generate territorial legitimacy, and engage with local state capacities that are frequently constrained (Fongwa, 2021; Harris; Holley, 2016; Macedo; Monteiro Neto; Vieira, 2022; Queiroz; Garcia, 2018).

In the Amazon, infrastructural deficits, dispersed settlement patterns, and socio-environmental conflicts constrain the applicability of generalized theoretical frameworks (Costa; Silva, 2019; Santos, 2017; Sousa; Santos; Almeida, 2021b; Viana; Freitas; Giatti, 2016). Within such settings, universities do not automatically catalyze urban development. In peripheral territories marked by limited state capacity, infrastructural shortfalls, and institutional fragmentation, their impact depends on the presence of territorial mediation mechanisms that can connect communities, public authorities, and academic institutions. Consequently, the urban footprint of universities emerges from relational processes, institutional coordination, social legitimacy, and community engagement, rather than from mere physical proximity.

To test this premise, the present study examines the establishment of the Federal University of Western Pará (UFOPA) campus in Alenquer, Pará, a municipality grappling with structural deficits in sanitation, transportation, and urban infrastructure. Under these conditions, the university operates as a potential catalyst for socio-spatial transformation (Araújo et al., 2023; Da Silva et al., 2023; Sousa; Santos; Almeida, 2021b). Understanding how local residents perceive the institution's role makes it possible to assess whether its activities contribute to a more inclusive urban identity and foster civic engagement in territorial transformation initiatives (Cullen, 2009; Ikeda, 2020; Jacobs, 1969, 1970; Lynch; Camargo, 1997).

This study investigates how anchor institutions interact with local governance structures in peripheral settings, specifically analyzing the ways in which UFOPA acts, or encounters limits in acting, as an institutional mediator of urban development in Alenquer. By adopting this lens, the research advances our understanding of the mechanisms that connect higher education institutions to their surrounding territories in peripheral contexts, while offering practical insights for designing urban development strategies in regions of high socio-environmental complexity.

Beyond this empirical investigation, the research seeks to deepen the understanding of campus-territory mediation mechanisms in peripheral areas, contributing to the operationalization of perception-based indicators in urban planning and informing the design

of institutional integration policies for regions facing profound socio-environmental challenges.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Urbanization, Urban Landscape, and Community Participation

Rapid urban expansion, coupled with deficits in territorial planning, creates asymmetries in public service provision and local governance. This reality demands analytical tools that bridge spatial configuration and institutional capacity. Drawing on the work of (Cullen, 2009; Jacobs, 1970; Lynch; Camargo, 1997), this study operationalizes the relationship between territorial perception, urban experience, and community mediation.

Lynch (1997) argues that citizens' cognitive mapping of urban space rests on the environment's legibility and imageability, which are structured by paths, landmarks, boundaries, and nodes. This study treats legibility as an analytical premise: when residents struggle to read their territory spatially, it tends to correlate with perceptions of public disinvestment and a weakening of place-based identity. Thus, residents' descriptions of street networks and the distribution of public facilities are treated as indicators of their cognitive capacity to appropriate the neighborhood.

Complementing this, (Cullen, 2009) shifts the focus to sequential perceptual experience, emphasizing how movement rhythms and visual continuity shape how space is lived. Narratives about commuting, accessibility, and the experience of the campus surroundings are therefore analyzed as indicators of experiential coherence and sociospatial integration. This approach moves beyond mere physical description to capture how the formal quality of the environment enables or constrains perceived inclusion.

(Jacobs, 1970) introduces the idea that effective urban planning depends on bottom-up processes, and that the success of such processes requires shared responsibility among local actors. From this perspective, community participation functions as institutional mediation: when channeled through formal mechanisms, it translates diffuse demands into public agenda priorities, thereby reducing information asymmetries between officials and residents (Almeida; Carlos; Silva, 2016; Avritzer, 2011; Ikeda, 2020; Milani, 2008). Within this study, residents' knowledge of and engagement with participatory institutions serve as a central mediating variable. Without community organization, the university's potential to act as a catalyst rarely translates into effective urban policy.

2.2 The Role of Universities in Urban Development

Embedding university campuses within urban territories produces ambiguous spatial externalities. On one hand, an academic presence stimulates local markets, intensifies knowledge circulation, and attracts infrastructure investment (Costa e Silva et al., 2024; Macedo; Monteiro Neto; Vieira, 2022; Queiroz; Garcia, 2018). On the other, it can drive up real estate markets and accelerate gentrification, necessitating compensatory governance mechanisms (Costa E Silva et al., 2024). Since the 1960s, governments across various institutional models have recognized universities as anchors of regional development, particularly in historically underinvested areas (Silva, 2019). Over time, these institutions have progressively taken on the role of territorial coordinators, aligning government, industry, and communities around shared agendas (Peters, 2015; Souza, 2018a).

Scholarship on “anchor institutions” argues that universities play a strategic territorial role, particularly in peripheral cities, where they frequently assume institutional coordination functions that partially substitute for weak local state capacity (Fongwa, 2021; Harris; Holley, 2016). Under these conditions, their effectiveness hinges on their ability to generate social legitimacy, coordinate local actors, and establish permanent channels of interaction between communities and public authorities.

Yet this coordination is conditional. It depends on municipal institutional capacities that are often deficient in peripheral contexts: strategic leadership, technical expertise within municipal departments, integrated management instruments, and meaningful social participation (Peters, 2015; Souza, 2018a). Without these mechanisms, universities tend to operate as territorially disconnected entities, unable to convert academic capital into tangible urban transformation. This risk is magnified in the Amazon, where territorial dispersion, limited municipal technical capacity, and overlapping governmental jurisdictions hinder the internalization of academic externalities.

In Alenquer, Pará, weak institutional capacity is well-documented in studies on intersectoral health coordination (Da Silva et al., 2023), education (Silva et al., 2021), and waste management and public sanitation (Garcia et al., 2021; Sousa; Santos; Almeida, 2021b). This structural deficit limits the municipality’s ability to absorb the impacts of the university’s presence. In this context, UFOPA is gradually redefining its third mission, taking on interinstitutional coordination roles that fill local governance gaps and mediate between the

community and decision-makers (Almeida; Carlos; Silva, 2016; Avritzer, 2011; Pinsky; Gomes; Kruglianskas, 2019; Queiroz; Garcia, 2018).

This investigation is situated precisely within that framework. UFOPA is examined not merely as a higher education provider, but as a potential institutional coordinator in a municipality marked by structural vulnerabilities. Residents' perceptions of this role, their recognition of it, the legitimacy they accord it, and the concrete expectations they formulate, form the core empirical object. This allows us to assess whether, and how, an academic presence translates into shared territorial governance.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interpretivist approach, supplemented by auxiliary mixed methods. The primary aim of this research design is to understand the meanings people ascribe to their experiences and actions within a specific social context (Creswell, 2010). To generate these initial insights, we used an interview guide alongside semi-structured questionnaires.

Data collection took place across 53 households in the Independência neighborhood, a developing peripheral area that houses the UFOPA campus in Alenquer, Pará. The inferences drawn are directly valid for this specific context. While empirically bounded to Alenquer, the findings are interpreted analytically as expressions of recurrent institutional mediation mechanisms in peripheral cities characterized by low state capacity and uneven urbanization. It should be noted, however, that these interpretations do not constitute statistical generalizations, but rather situated theoretical approximations.

The municipality covers a total area of 23,645.452 km², with 13.61 km² of urbanized land and approximately 74,836 inhabitants. As of 2022, only 5.49% of the population was formally employed. Additionally, 18,355 families are registered in the Brazil's Unified Social Registry, of whom 13,809 live in poverty, highlighting persistent socioeconomic inequalities (IBGE, 2022).

The UFOPA campus surroundings encompass the Esperança and São Francisco neighborhoods, which, together with Independência, make up Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) census tract 150040405000051. This tract reflects a challenging reality: 353 families are registered in the social assistance system, 258 of whom live in extreme poverty, underscoring the severity of local socioeconomic disparities. Given the high level of social vulnerability, this condition demands strategic interventions (IBGE, 2022).

Because the Independência neighborhood is still expanding, there are relatively few residents in the immediate campus vicinity. Nevertheless, the 53 households interviewed represent more than 15% of all residences in the census tract. Framing residents as producers of territorial knowledge, we selected participants randomly. Most residents were willing to cooperate, which facilitated the administration of the semi-structured questionnaires and the gathering of necessary research data.

To ensure alignment between epistemological assumptions and methodological procedures, data analysis was structured across three complementary levels. First, quantitative data from the questionnaires served a contextualizing function, characterizing residents' socioeconomic profiles and mapping the objective conditions of the territory through descriptive statistics (Hair et al., 2013).

Second, qualitative data from interviews were used interpretively to uncover the meanings participants attached to their experiences of urban space. Finally, at a third level, the Iramuteq software was employed to organize and systematize discursive patterns through lexicometric analysis.

Choosing content analysis supported by Iramuteq goes beyond a technical exercise in lexical counting. Epistemologically, we adopt the premise that language structures social thought. The words residents use to describe their neighborhood and the university reveal the collective cognitive frameworks through which they organize their reality. The software thus aids in identifying discursive patterns, though their interpretation ultimately rests on theoretical analysis.

We applied Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) and similarity analysis to identify not only recurring themes but also fields of semantic association (Camargo; Justo, 2013; Sousa, 2021, p. 202). When residents link “University” with “Hope,” but also with “No” (negation/denial), it reveals an epistemological tension between the institution’s official project and lived reality.

The method, therefore, serves to expose the contradictions of urban development, where official narratives of progress collide with everyday experiences of neglect. We employed a Descending Hierarchical Classification test, which groups words according to their degree of correlation. Through this method, we identified the core discussion themes, mapping the data into a topical structure.

It is important to note that these procedures do not replace theoretical interpretation; rather, they function as analytical tools to uncover structures of meaning, whose analysis depends on integration with the study's theoretical framework. In this way, the methodology establishes a bridge that coherently articulates different types of data, consistent with the study's epistemological perspective, one that understands urban development as a phenomenon that is simultaneously material and experiential.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Institutional Context: The Creation of UFOPA and the Alenquer Campus

The UFOPA was established in 2009 under Federal Law No. 12,085/2009, as part of a national policy to expand and decentralize higher education across the Amazon region (BRASIL, 2009). The new institution absorbed infrastructure, academic programs, and personnel from the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) and the Federal Rural University of the Amazon (UFRA), consolidating its main campus in Santarém while opening satellite campuses in six strategic municipalities across western Pará: Alenquer, Itaituba, Juruti, Monte Alegre, Óbidos, and Oriximiná. By 2024, the university served 5,497 enrolled students and 630 scholarship recipients through the Forma Pará program (UFOPA, 2024) (Figure 1).

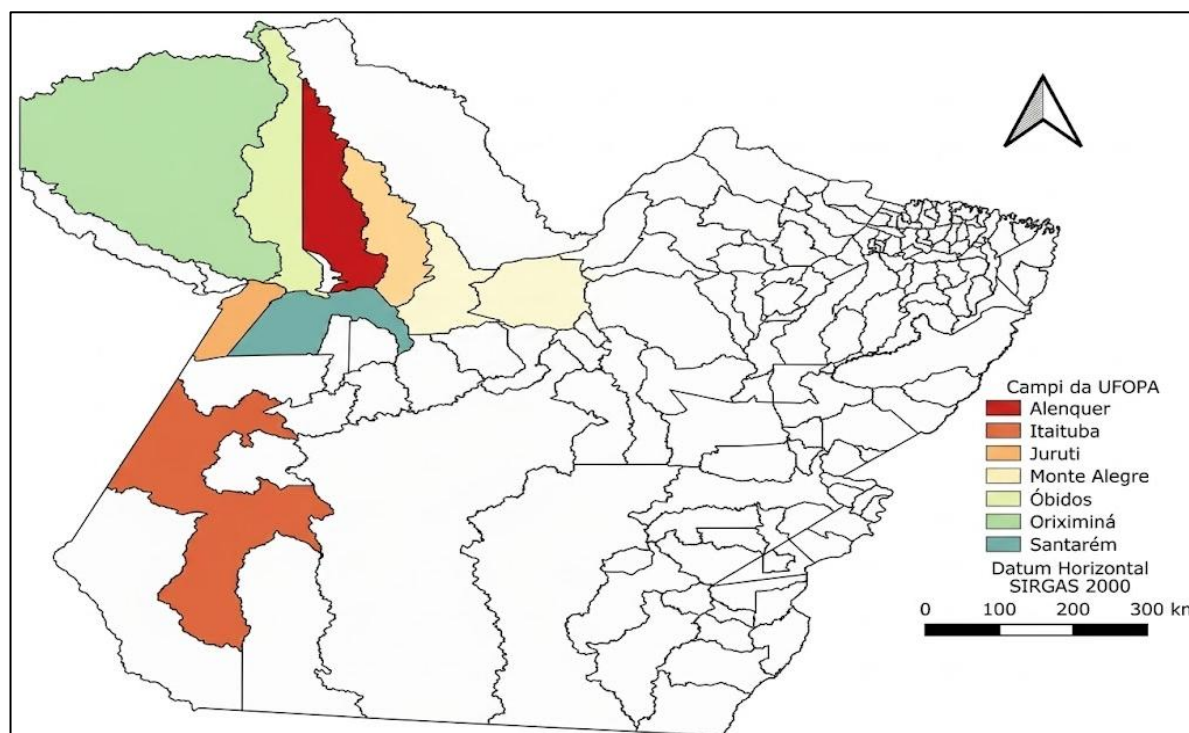


Figure 1: UFOPA in the context of western Pará

Source: Research results.

In Alenquer, the university's institutional presence began in 2010 with five Parfor (National Teacher Training Program) cohorts operating in municipal buildings. It later evolved into an autonomous campus offering a bachelor's degree in Administration, supported by a technical-administrative staff of 18 and an enrollment of 130 undergraduates. In 2019, construction began on a four-story building in the Independência neighborhood, designed to house six classrooms, a computer lab, a library, an auditorium, and administrative offices (Figure 2).



Figure 2: The campus within the context of the Independência neighborhood

Source: UFOPA (2024a).

UFOPA's physical and academic expansion into this territory has introduced new urban dynamics, underscoring how the territorial impact of anchor institutions hinges on the interplay between local state capacity, urban infrastructure, and institutional coordination.

4.2 Infrastructure Conditions in the Campus Vicinity

The campus was established in an area marked by structural deficiencies in basic urban infrastructure. Unpaved access roads severely restrict mobility, a problem that intensifies during the rainy season when flooding and soil erosion become frequent.

Rua João Ferreira, the main access route, features a compacted dirt surface and inadequate or nonexistent storm drainage, which accelerates soil degradation and heightens flood risks (Figure 3). The lack of sidewalks and traffic signage further compromises pedestrian safety, disproportionately affecting children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.



Figure 3: Access road to the campus
Source: Research findings.

Similar conditions prevail on Rua Beatriz do Vale, where the campus is located (Figure 4). The poor state of the roads not only hinders circulation but also deteriorates sanitary conditions, fostering dust accumulation, stagnant water, and debris, with direct consequences for public health. Public lighting is unevenly distributed, particularly along campus access routes after dark. This deficit restricts nighttime movement for students and residents, undermines personal and property security, and discourages economic activity and the use of communal spaces after sunset.

From an urban morphology perspective, these material deficits reduce spatial legibility (Lynch; Camargo, 1997) and weaken affective community ties (Cullen, 2009). The absence of positive visual landmarks, irregular street layouts, and a lack of basic urban services combine to create a territory with low intelligibility, complicating navigation, spatial appropriation, and the formation of a shared territorial identity.

These material conditions establish the objective backdrop that shapes both the campus's academic operations and local perceptions of development and the university's institutional role, a theme that directly intersects with the sociodemographic profile and community participation capacity examined below.

4.3 Socioeconomic Profile of Residents

The sociodemographic profile of the Independência neighborhood reveals structural vulnerabilities that frame local urban dynamics and collective perceptions. The sample consists predominantly of middle-aged and older adults: 43% of respondents are between 45 and 60 years old, and 36% are over 60, while those under 30 account for only 19%. This age distribution points

to a need for public policies focused on accessibility, safe mobility, and primary healthcare, while also suggesting a long-term pattern of residential stability.

Regarding marital status, 64% of respondents live in stable partnerships (marriage or civil union), 31% are single, and 5% are widowed. Although inferences about residential rootedness are indirect, the predominance of established family arrangements among older age groups supports the hypothesis of long-standing ties to the territory, making local infrastructure quality a direct determinant of quality of life.

Educational attainment remains historically low: 7% of respondents are illiterate; 31% have incomplete primary education; 50% completed only primary school; 10% reached secondary education; and just 2% hold a college degree. Coupled with a low formal employment rate (only 5.49% of local jobs are formally registered), this educational profile paints a picture of economic vulnerability and limited integration into the formal labor market, which in turn restricts access to urban rights and basic services.

Household composition further strains residential space: 43% of homes house up to three residents; 24% have three to five; 24% house five to eight; and 9% accommodate more than eight. The concentration of households with over five occupants (33%) in a low-income, low-education context signals housing infrastructure overload, with direct implications for privacy, sanitation, and family well-being (Gomes; Pereira, 2005).

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The disconnect between residents and public planning institutions is stark: 61% are unaware of the municipal transportation plan; 74% rate healthcare services as inadequate; 62% consider police presence insufficient or absent; and 63% view anti-drug trafficking efforts as ineffective. This convergence of unfamiliarity with management instruments and dissatisfaction with essential services highlights a local governance gap, marked by a misalignment between municipal technical agendas and territorial demands.

This scenario aligns with documented weaknesses in coordination and institutional capacity among Alenquer's municipal departments (Costa et al., 2020; Marques et al., 2021; Santos, 2017; Sousa; Santos; Almeida, 2021b). Fragmented municipal operations, coupled with the absence of a neighborhood council or established representative structures in Independência, limit collective advocacy and deliberative resident participation. As noted by (Ikeda, 2020; Jacobs, 1970), the lack of community organization weakens social oversight mechanisms and demands for urban improvements, perpetuating a cycle of low state responsiveness and territorial vulnerability. This context frames the perceptions analyzed in

subsequent sections and demonstrates how urban materiality, sociodemographic characteristics, and institutional deficiencies intersect to shape the relationship between the university and its surrounding community.

4.4 Perceptions of Urban Development and the Role of UFOPA: A Lexicometric Analysis

Residents' expectations regarding UFOPA were processed using Iramuteq software, yielding a corpus of 152 text segments and 669 words. Of these, 79.88% were distributed across nine thematic clusters in the Descending Hierarchical Classification (Figure 4).

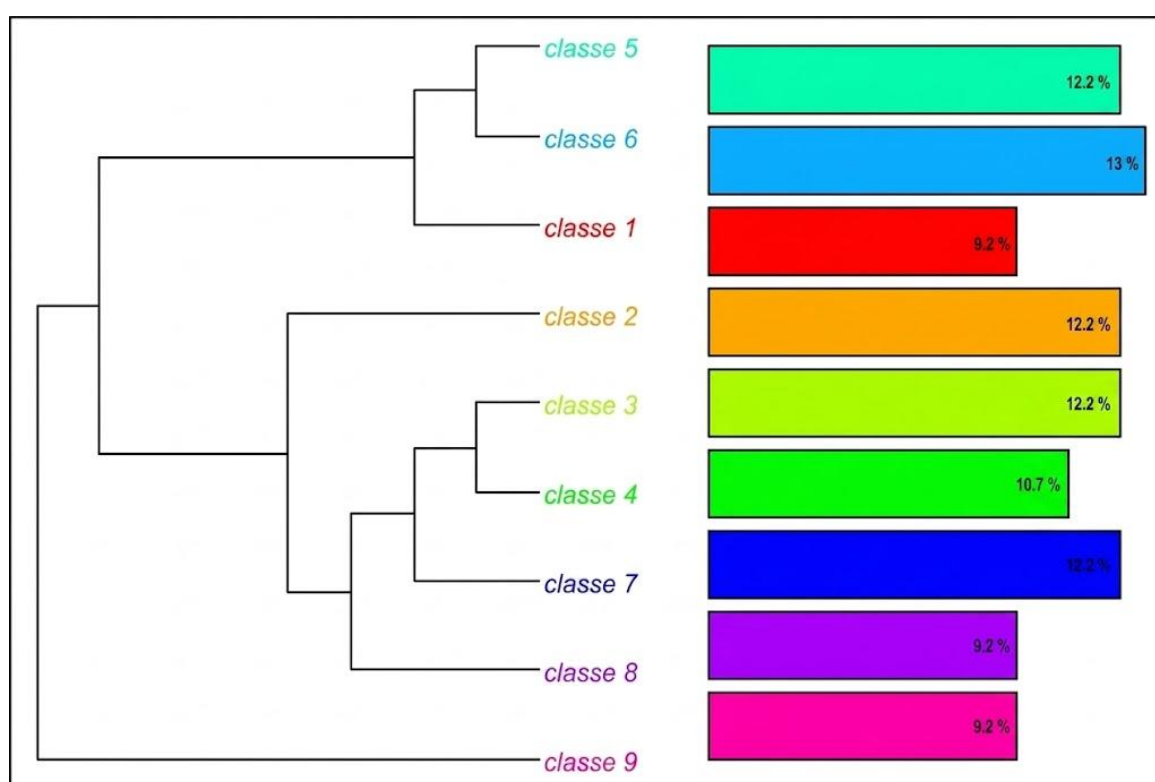


Figure 4: Perceptions of urban development and the role of UFOPA Source: Research results.

Analysis of clusters 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9 reveals a consensus among interviewees regarding the slow pace and inadequacy of urban development in the Independência neighborhood. Residents' accounts point to a structured infrastructure deficit characterized by poorly paved roads, inadequate street lighting, deficient basic sanitation, and irregular waste collection. In the local view, these shortcomings operate systemically, restricting mobility, heightening insecurity, and weakening neighborhood ties. Residents attribute these dynamics to municipal government neglect, frequently describing the area as “abandoned.”

This perception aligns with studies linking the deterioration of urban space to weak intersectoral coordination and the absence of integrated public policies (Marques et al., 2021; Santos, 2017; Sousa et al., 2021b). Siloed sectoral approaches tend to fragment policy implementation, resulting in duplicated efforts, underutilized resources, and the inefficient delivery of essential services (Peters, 2015; Souza, 2018b).

In Alenquer, this fragmentation is compounded by organizational conflicts and limited technical capacity, directly impacting municipal departments such as public sanitation (Garcia et al., 2019; Sousa et al., 2021a), health (Costa et al., 2020; Da Silva et al., 2023), and education (Silva et al., 2021). Budget constraints further undermine investments in school infrastructure and the implementation of pedagogical initiatives, exacerbating the negative impact on local quality of life (Araújo et al., 2023).

Clusters 3, 4, 5, and 6 center on narratives that position UFOPA as a potential catalyst for local public policy. The analyzed discourse reveals that residents view the university as a prospective anchor institution capable of driving territorial coordination in a context marked by institutional fragility and persistent urban infrastructure deficits. Interviewees directly associate its establishment with improvements in road paving, street lighting, and sanitation regularization, suggesting that the university's physical presence would elevate the neighborhood's visibility among public officials.

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Furthermore, the availability of local higher education, eliminating the need to relocate, is viewed as a mechanism for social mobility, expanding access to professional qualifications and the formal labor market. This perception aligns with literature that frames the university as a vital bridge between local communities and policymakers, one capable of mediating dialogue, fostering strategic partnerships, and informing the development of policies tailored to regional realities (Lynch; Camargo, 1997; Macedo; Monteiro Neto; Vieira, 2022; Pinsky; Gomes; Kruglianskas, 2019).

Despite this optimism, the data reveal a tension between residents' expectations and a deep-seated historical distrust. The similarity structure (Figure 5) highlights the centrality of the negation operator no (no/not), which simultaneously links university-related terms (university, UFOPA, campus) with public service terms (city hall, health, security, street). This dual linkage suggests that negation functions on two discursive levels: an acknowledgment of preexisting infrastructure deficits and a frustration over the lack of immediate, institution-driven transformation.

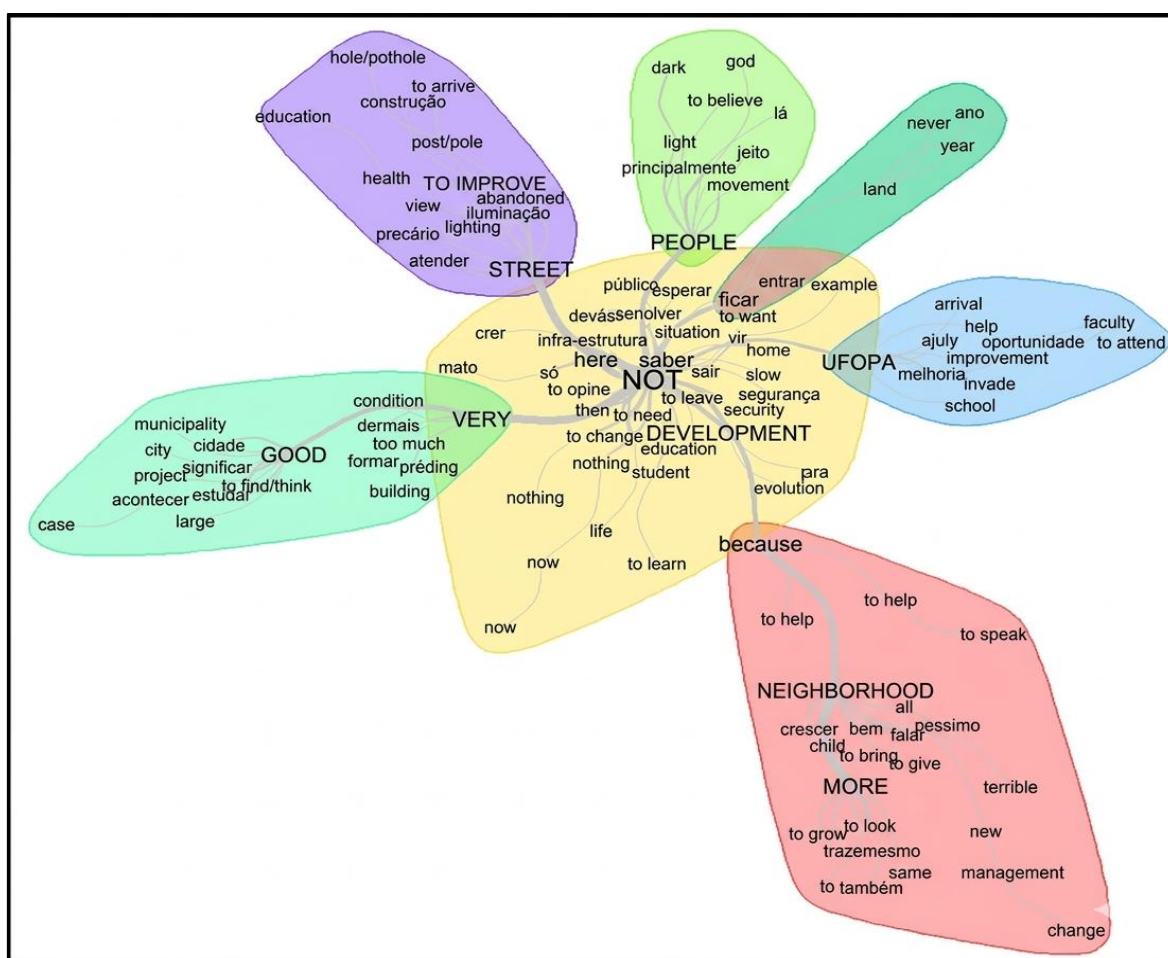


Figure 5: Perceptions of UFOPA's role in urban development

Source: Research results.

Far from signaling indifference or outright rejection, this pattern reflects a tension between the institutional project and everyday lived experience. The data suggest that the university's territorial legitimacy is both conditional and relational. Community recognition of UFOPA does not stem automatically from its physical presence, but rather from its ability to deliver verifiable outcomes, articulate local demands, and sustain ongoing mechanisms of territorial engagement. Viewed through the lens of urban sociology and participatory governance, this phenomenon aligns with the concept of "conditional expectation" (Avritzer, 2011): institutional recognition remains provisional and contingent upon the empirical demonstration of tangible results.

The co-occurrence of terms such as hope and future alongside the negation marker demonstrates that the observed skepticism reflects a posture of rational vigilance rather than irreversible pessimism. Consequently, UFOPA possesses a reservoir of latent symbolic capital;

converting this into sustained community engagement requires active mediation and demonstrable results.

4.5 Integrated Discussion: Mechanisms of Mediation Between the University and Urban Development

The findings indicate that the territorial impact of anchor institutions in peripheral cities emerges from institutional mediation mechanisms rather than automatic urban causality. In the case studied, the interaction among the university, the community, and public authorities proved contingent upon low local state capacity, fragile participatory structures, and the ongoing need to build territorial legitimacy.

The first vector concerns institutional coordination. The results demonstrate that perceptions of urban inadequacy stem primarily from weak intersectoral articulation within municipal management. In this context of constrained state capacity, the university is envisioned as a potential integrator bridging community demands and governmental responses, corroborating studies on the role of higher education institutions in settings of institutional fragility (Costa e Silva et al., 2024; Macedo; Monteiro Neto; Vieira, 2022; Pinsky; Gomes; Kruglianskas, 2019).

The second vector encompasses conditional community legitimacy. The similarity analysis shows that recognition of UFOPA as a driver of transformation (in education, employment, and political mediation) is not automatically consolidated. Social acceptance depends on tangible deliverables and transparency in decision-making processes. The physical presence of the campus, therefore, does not guarantee credibility per se; credibility must be continuously built through coordinated extension programs and meaningful participation in local governance forums.

The third vector addresses local civil organization. The absence of established participatory structures in the Independência neighborhood (e.g., resident associations, councils) undermines the university's capacity to function as a mediator. Without organized interlocutors, the systematization of community demands becomes fragmented and episodic. Establishing robust channels for community participation thus emerges as a prerequisite for realizing UFOPA's coordinating potential, a finding that aligns with literature on social capital and urban development (Jacobs, 1970).

These findings suggest that urban development in peripheral contexts depends on the ability of anchor institutions to generate effective territorial coordination within urban

ecosystems marked by institutional fragility. The efficacy of institutional mediation, in turn, hinges on the convergence of municipal responsiveness, results-driven social legitimacy, and local organizational infrastructure.

5 CONCLUSION

This study examined how anchor institutions interact with local governance structures in peripheral contexts of uneven urbanization, using the case of UFOPA in Alenquer, Pará, as an empirical expression of the institutional mediation mechanisms at work in the Brazilian Amazon. Empirically, the study documents that urban development is perceived as constrained by structural deficits in basic services, which residents attribute to the municipal government's limited coordinating capacity. This finding reinforces the literature on institutional fragility in Amazonian municipalities and demonstrates that perceived quality of life is directly tied to the effectiveness of local public administration.

Theoretically and analytically, the research demonstrates that expectations placed on the university are structurally conditional. While residents acknowledge UFOPA's potential to expand opportunities and mediate political dialogue, this recognition coexists with a skepticism grounded in a history of administrative sluggishness and a lack of measurable outcomes. Institutional legitimacy, therefore, is not a given but an ongoing process that depends on transparency, territorially grounded extension initiatives, and integration with municipal governance.

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As a conceptual contribution, the findings indicate that the presence of a university campus in peripheral contexts does not operate as an automatic catalyst for development. Its impact is mediated by an institutional triangulation: (i) the university's own capacity for articulation; (ii) the municipal administration's willingness to incorporate it as a strategic partner; and (iii) the existence of a local associative fabric capable of systematizing demands and holding stakeholders accountable. A breakdown in any of these links compromises the realization of the institution's transformative potential, regardless of its academic excellence.

The study's limitations lie in its geographical and temporal scope, which restrict the generalizability of the findings to the Independência neighborhood and the campus's early implementation phase. The institution's future consolidation may shift perception dynamics, warranting longitudinal investigations.

For subsequent research, this study proposes: (a) expanding the scope to other neighborhoods in Alenquer and to other host cities of UFOPA campuses, enabling comparative analyses; (b) tracking institutional credibility over time and its correlation with concrete deliverables; (c) evaluating the impact of already implemented extension strategies; and (d) mapping the barriers to intersectoral coordination within municipal departments alongside potential avenues for university cooperation.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that anchor institutions do not automatically generate urban development in peripheral territories. Their effectiveness depends on the capacity to build territorial legitimacy, forge interinstitutional coordination mechanisms, and operate within environments marked by persistent constraints on state capacity.

Declaration of Generative Artificial Intelligence Use

We declare that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were utilized strictly for instrumental support, and the authors maintain full authorship and intellectual responsibility for the final content. In the literature review, Consensus (web version, 2026), Elicit (web version, 2026), and NotebookLM (2026 version) were applied to map, synthesize, and organize references. Claude (version 3.5 Sonnet) was employed throughout the text for grammatical revision, stylistic alignment, elimination of redundancies, and to enhance conceptual clarity. No part of the theoretical argument, data analysis, or conclusion was generated through automated means.

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