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# Peripheral or strategic? The border condition of the amazon frontier in Brazil

## ¿Periférico o estratégico? La condición fronteriza del borde amazónico en Brasil

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### Abstract

The objective of this article was to discuss the border condition of the Brazilian Amazon between the 20th and 21st centuries from its peripheral and strategic behavior. The guiding question was: how is the border condition configured through the peripheral/strategic behavior of frontier spaces in the Amazon region of Brazil? The methodological approach was the hypothetical-deductive based on three investigation strategies; qualitative analysis of documents, review of specialized literature and fieldwork observations. The results indicate that the Amazon frontier cannot be considered peripheral or strategic in isolation. These two adjectives qualify specific historical, political and economic uses that need to be considered together to understand the border condition of the Brazilian Amazon. We conclude that the peripheral/strategic behavior reveals not only the historical-economic construction of the border, but also the choice of national decision-making centers, reflected in the public policies implemented in the region.

Keywords: border condition, Brazilian amazon, strategic/peripheral behavior, public policies.

### Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo fue discutir la condición fronteriza de la Amazonia brasileña entre los siglos XX y XXI a partir de su comportamiento periférico y estratégico. La pregunta orientadora fue: ¿cómo se configura la condición de frontera a través del comportamiento periférico/estratégico de los espacios fronterizos en la región amazónica de Brasil? El enfoque metodológico fue el hipotético-deductivo basado en tres estrategias de investigación; análisis cualitativo de documentos, revisión de literatura especializada y observaciones de campo. Los resultados indican que la frontera amazónica no puede considerarse periférica o estratégica en forma aislada. Estos dos adjetivos califican

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usos históricos, políticos y económicos específicos que necesitan ser considerados juntos para comprender la condición fronteriza de la Amazonia brasileña. Se concluye que el comportamiento periférico/estratégico revela no solo la construcción histórico-económica de la frontera, sino también la elección de los centros de decisión nacionales, reflejada en las políticas públicas implementadas en la región.

Palabras clave: condición fronteriza, Amazonia brasileña, comportamiento estratégico/periférico, políticas públicas.

## Introduction

The polysemy of border meanings, which permeate the separation of “mine” and “yours”, the area of action of sovereignty, and its articulation in a globalized world in a network, has been the object of reflection in geographic research, international relations, economics, and political science. For reflections outlined here, the border is the locus of encounters, disagreements, and new encounters. It is where “mine” and “yours” interact and relate to each other, but they do not always manage to reach “ours”.

These many interactions underlie the border condition, established under a sociocultural emphasis and understood as a historically, economically, and politically constructed system. The external relations that characterize it, in most cases, are adaptations of national contexts, but also the result of local interests and external capital. As it is a product that is historically constructed, restructured, re-signified, this condition is constantly (re)invented. The articulations conducted abroad expand its strategic condition by establishing new opportunities, tolerances, and flexibilities in the use of the territory, which streamline its articulations at different spatial scales, but without overcoming, in the case of the Brazilian Amazon, its peripheral condition, translated into living conditions of the population and in the policies aimed at these spaces.

The notion of territory used here is multidimensional. The material dimension, that is, the physical-geographical space is one of them, but not the only one. It is in the territory that social relations that manifest as power relations are present, but also in the construction of identities and diversity, based on feelings, belonging, and recognition of differences (Superti, Porto & Oliveira, 2020). The border condition is, therefore, one of the configuration facets of the territory, considering what Foucher (1988) indicated, borders are the product of the relationship of political forces as history shaped them in space.

At the time of the writing of this text, during the period of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which began in December 2019 in China, the border condition took on one of its many recompositions; the epidemiological control one. The Pandemic affected the system of health activities in the world,<sup>1</sup> also affecting the global systems and activities thus exposed: the economy, causing investment insecurities; production and consumption at all scales of the economy; logistical flow and fluidity; and social, which imposed a period of quarantine preventing the movement of people

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<sup>1</sup> In 2020, when we started the research that led to the production of this study, there was no case of COVID-19 infection in Brazil. When we completed the review of this study, in July 2022, we had surpassed 677 000 deaths registered in the country.

between and within urban areas, as well as between and within regions. Regarding this last aspect, the border recovers one of its typical behaviors: the barrier effect.

The many uses of the border indicate that these territories are susceptible to multiple behaviors. Analyzing one of them in the outskirts of the Brazilian Amazon is the focus of this article. The objective is to discuss the territory's border condition through its peripheral and, simultaneously, strategic behavior. The guiding question here is: how is the border condition configured through the peripheral/strategic behavior of spaces along the Amazon frontier in Brazil?

To expose the ideas, this text shows three topics, in addition to this introduction and final considerations. The first one summarizes the methodology used in the research. The second discusses the territorial aspects of the border condition from a perspective of peripheral-strategic inseparability and the historical-political dynamics that allow the order of these adjectives to be inverted (what we call the *vice versa* effect<sup>2</sup>). The third seeks to understand this movement considering Brazilian public policies at the end of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st aimed at the border regions of the Amazon.

## Methodological approach

The reflections we present in this study were developed in long-term research in the context of three projects.<sup>3</sup> In this article, written as an essay, we have endeavored to produce a synthesis of the main ideas. We adopted the hypothetical-deductive approach as our methodological perspective to produce the analysis.

We start from the hypothesis that the border condition in the Brazilian Amazon is configured as simultaneously peripheral and strategic as a result of the historical and economic use of the territory and the choices of public policies directed to the region. The order of these adjectives can be inverted depending on the context and perspective of analysis, however, disassociating them is impossible.

To test this hypothesis and its potential to explain the border condition, we used three investigation strategies. The first was a qualitative analysis of documents (laws, projects, proposals, Pluri-annual Plans, studies on the implementation of public policies) of the Brazilian government concerning the Amazonian frontier.

Another strategy was to review the specialized literature. Therein, we seek to identify how the authors explain the different uses of the border territory in the Amazon and relate this use to the configuration that the border assumes. The last strategy was the empirical observation of the execution of public policies and the conditions of basic sanitation (piped water, sewage treatment, and garbage collection), urbanization,

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the expression *vice versa* in this study intends to show that in both word orders (peripheral-strategic or strategic-peripheral) the adjectives refer to the same Amazonian frontier condition and indicate the dialectical character of the historical-political use of this region.

<sup>3</sup> The results from this article are based on three projects: Ajustes espaciais na faixa de fronteira da Amazônia setentrional brasileira: dos dilemas espaciais à defesa do território, projeto aprovado no Edital CAPES Pró-Defesa 2008 (2009-2012); Transfronteirização na América do Sul: dinâmicas territoriais. Desenvolvimento regional integração e defesa nas fronteiras meridional e setentrional do Brasil, projeto aprovado no Edital CAPES Pró-Defesa 2013 (2014-2018); e, Fronteiras, regionalização e globalização, projeto, aprovado pelo Conselho Latino-Americano de Ciências Sociais (Clacso), do Grupo de Trabalho intitulado "Fronteiras, regionalização e globalização" do Clacso (2018-2022).

health and education, conducted during the execution of the three research projects mentioned, in the municipalities that are located on the border line. We systematized the observations in field notebooks.

Through these research strategies, we obtained the analyses crossing and systematization and information that resulted in the arguments presented in this article.

### Territorial aspects of the border condition: peripheral-strategic inseparability and vice versa effect

Of the many polysemic debates on the border, two have emphasized the reflection on what we call the Amazon border condition.<sup>4</sup> The debate on the border as peripheral (which needs to be occupied, protected, and developed); and as strategic (in recognition that there are natural resources and potentials of great interest to international capital there).

According to Dorfman (2013, p. 33), the border condition is “a *savoir passer* [knowing how to pass] acquired by border inhabitants, who are used to activate national, linguistic, legal, ethnic, economic, religious differences and similarities that now represent advantages, sometimes the restriction of traffic or rights (...)”. Evidently, one must doubt a universal border condition, given the variety of relationships that can exist between the border inhabitants and the state territory in front of them and behind them. For the author, “what we have idealized here concerns the living and lived border” (Dorfman, 2013, p. 35, *free translation*). Deepening Dorfman’s analysis, we understand that the border condition is characterized by territorial contexts that allow the construction of a profile of social, cultural, economic and political behavior capable of (de)(re)constructing the uses of the border territory, such as: enable conflicts between the traditional and the modern; ensure actions for the spatial organization and new modalities of use, streamline their articulations at different spatial scales.

Another fundamental factor about the construction of the border condition concerns the spatial recompositions in temporality, which makes it constantly (re)invented in its territoriality. That is, at each historical moment, it is remade, recomposed, as it is socially and politically established, as a space for dialogue and/or conflicts. Thus, as the border is occupied and used, new dynamics are performed; demanding new normative, infrastructural, political and geopolitical adjustments capable of guaranteeing mobilization and dynamism in that space.

In the formation of the current Brazilian Amazon border, the main manifestations between the last decade of the 19th century and the first of the 20th century concern the definitions of the borders with Bolivia (resolved with the purchase, in 1902, of the Acre territory and transforming it into Federal Territory, in 1904), with the former English Guiana (known as the Question of Pirara, resolved in 1904) and with French Guiana (resolved with the *Laudo Suíço*, in 1900, identifying the Oiapoque River as the border between Brazil and French Guiana).

Between the 20th and 21st centuries, four main moments of spatial recomposition are noticeable: The definition of the border strip; the installation of federal territories

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<sup>4</sup> This category was first shown at a round table at the XII Encuentro de Geógrafos de América Latina, in Montevideo 2009 by Adriana Dorfman.

in Brazil; the expansion of access, use, and occupation of the Amazon during the military regime (1964-1985); and the elaboration of the Brazilian Border Strip Development Proposal (Proposta de Desenvolvimento da Faixa de Fronteira [PDF]) (Ministério da Integração Nacional, 2005).

The first was the Constitutional Charter of 1934, in its Art. 166, defined the Brazilian border strip as 100 km wide. In the 1937 Charter, this strip was expanded to 150 km along the Brazilian border.<sup>5</sup> The second, the installation of new federal territories in the 1940s, was related to the guarantee of national sovereignty and the defense of border regions. The proposal was to allow the Federal Government to occupy border regions with low population density, small urban networks, and reduced presence of public authorities more directly.

Of the six Brazilian federal territories, four were Amazonian<sup>6</sup> and had an important impact on social and political formation. The Amazon border, from the federal territories, came to be seen as a space to be occupied and used independently of the populations existing there. Political-administrative and institutional structures capable of guaranteeing the construction of new structures of power, activities, and economic dynamics were invented. These were experiences that cannot be taken only as a political action, but other aspects must also be considered, such as the geopolitical, legal, economic, geographic, and the connection with federalism. Nunes (1951) identified the creation of the federal territories as the initial stage and the first implementation of economic valuation of the Amazon, because from this type of strategy, a pilot policy was developed for valuing the Amazon using measures that would serve as the basis for a Brazilian territorial policy. For Porto and Superti (2018), the spatial configuration of the federal territories occurred through the installation of *prostheses*—economic, political-administrative and institutional infrastructures developed externally—implanted in the territory to guarantee the construction of power structures, activities, and economic dynamics.

In territorial policy and in the investments made in the federal territories, political, social, economic and geographic uses of these federative entities are identified for the configuration of the national border and the construction of their (cross)border relations. The federal territories were configured as areas under the tutelage of the central government. With the installation of political-administrative prostheses, spatial adjustments would be made for its better functioning and performance, inserting this space in a system of internationally articulated networks. The dynamization of both fixed capital and its flows recreated the territorial configuration, whether caused by the gain of more technological prostheses or by the new constructions of circulation and communication networks, identified by Raffestin (1993) as territory modelers.

In the third moment, the expansion of access, use, and occupation of the territory of the Amazon during the military regime manifested itself with greater intensity in the implementation of highways in the Amazon territory and their integration with other

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<sup>5</sup> Other legislation followed the attempt to organize territorial policies in the Brazilian Frontier Strip, such as: Decree Law 1611/1939; Law 2,597, of September 12, 1955; Decree-Law No. 1135, of December 3, 1970; and Law 6,634, of May 2, 1979. On the subject, see Ministério da Integração Nacional (2005).

<sup>6</sup> In 2023, the former Amazon Federal Territories of Amapá, Rondônia and Roraima will complete 80 years; in 2024, Acre, will be 120 years. Despite this temporality, the intentions to stimulate development did not fully reach this goal. At most, they inserted these spaces into the world-economy. In 2043, it will be the centenary of the former federal territories of Amapá, Rondônia and Roraima.

Brazilian regions; in the installation of economic development projects encouraged by the Superintendency for the Development of the Amazon (Sudam). The Amazon thus became more integrated, connected, and activated by external and internal capital. Gradually it was no longer just a peripheral area that needs to be occupied to become also strategic. Connections have thickened the flows, fluidity, and fixedness of capital through border regions; once isolated, they become connected; formerly borders, they become transboundary.

The fourth, based on the elaboration of the PDFF, by the Federal Government through the Ministry of Integration, was conceived 71 years after the official installation of the border strip, by the Constitution of 1934. PDFF was the first work with the explicit objective of planning a policy for the configuration and use of the border territory. A first planning and the first that identifies the Brazilian border strip as a regionalized space that does not dialogue with each other, although it already dialogued with the outside world. The PDFF also considered the continental dimension that the Brazilian Amazon territory has and its border area with seven surrounding countries. Figure 1 shows the border strip in the Legal Amazon in Brazil.

As can be seen on the map, PDFF also considered: the large territorial dimensions of Amazonian municipalities; the occurrence of municipal seats that are far from the border line or outside the border strip; and the porosity of this border. The proposal also included: articulations in national and/or international networks; the constant manifestation of a peripheral condition with strong infrastructural precariousness and in the population's living conditions; the need for public policies and investments; and the select manifestation of a strategic condition, in the expectation of accessing the natural potentials found there and of interest to the capital, selecting and indicating spaces to explore them (Ministério da Integração Nacional, 2005).

In the first two moments presented above, the objective of guaranteeing the defense or security of the territory was quite evident, whether in border diplomatic definitions or in the creation of federal entities on the border, such as the federal territories. The second is a transition from the guarantee of national defense to the search for the development of federative entities located along the border. The third connects the Amazon to the Brazilian political-economic center, making articulations for the development of the region neglect the border, until its density and relational intensity increases with transborderization.

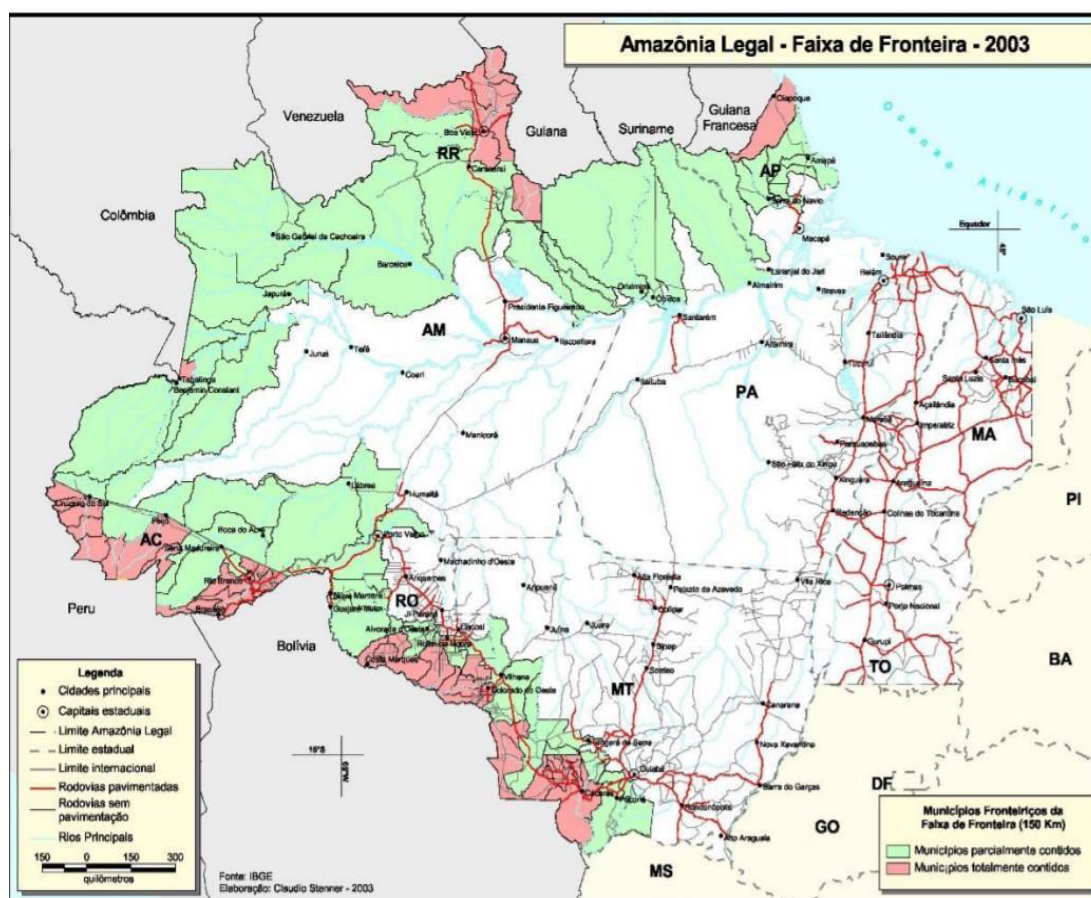
Once the Amazon is connected, articulated, and increasingly integrated into the national market, this periphery, well endowed with resources, was more actively involved (Cano, 2007, p. 313).<sup>7</sup> A new regional condition is being shaped, presenting other formats and territorial uses. What becomes clearer with the fourth moment, when three new views are introduced on the Brazilian border strip: its understanding as a new regionalization; the need for territorial planning for this strip; and intra-regional integration.

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<sup>7</sup> For Porto (2021), this *activation* shows that the Amazon is becoming more and more articulated beyond river connections. In other words, with the insertion of highways *activating* new spaces far from rivers, the physical integration by artificial hubs (roads and railways) helped to create new uses for the Amazonian territory, such as: discoveries and access to new regional potentialities, notably minerals; expansion of logging; expansion of agriculture; construction of urban agglomerations along highways; cities growing with their backs turned to the river, following the direction of the installed highways.



Figure 1. Legal Amazon border strip



Source: portaldemapas.ibge.gov.br

The moments mentioned express that the border condition is characterized by policies, boundaries, and formal agreements of the nation-state. But it is also shaped by the informal relations of the installed population and its interactions. Its constant flows and exchanges on the border build linguistic, cultural, and economic meanings that define specificities and create and recreate strategies to satisfy the subjectivities of these actors. The dynamics of these social relations, defined by the continuous contact between the local and the international, provoke a dynamism of its own on these spaces, allowing their actors to take positions that, at various times, are in conflict with legal determinations, but are still executed.

The complexity of the many movements that form the border condition forces us to adjust the conceptual lens to explore terms that allow us to better interpret it. Thus, we understand that expressions of vivification and vitalization can help us, since they expose the institutionality and spatiality regarding the use of the territory. The first,



vivification, concerns the encouragement of public policies in shaping the territory. The second, vitalization expresses the use of the territory itself, whether in formal or informal actions.

Porto and Superti (2018), when analyzing Brazilian federative entities (federal territories), realized that with the implementation of public policies for the installation and construction of infrastructures in the Amazon federal territories (once distant, peripheral, disorganized, disjointed) new elites were inserted in the border; riches were explored, other spatial modalities were created; new political-administrative relations were installed. Municipalities and their entire network of power relations appeared; new uses of the territory were built, articulating where previously there was no articulation. Breaking barriers to access spatial potentials that were hitherto inaccessible. In other words, the border is no longer occupied, to be vivified. In this direction, the *vivification* was materialized with the vitalization, together and inseparably, but with different execution times and regulations. Social and economic dynamics are faster than institutional. Thus, the border condition is the result of the vivification and vitalization of the border spaces, where the vivifying relates to the public policies that shape the territory, the vitalizing expresses its economic, political, and cultural use; they are continuous, interrelated and with different execution times.

These movements of the border condition formation also delimit the behavior of the border regarding the economy. On the one hand, the Brazilian Amazon border is considered peripheral on a national scale due to fixed capital and its flows and to the indicators of population and living conditions. On the other hand, it is also strategic, due to its connection with South American countries,<sup>8</sup> one of which is a member of the European Union (French Guiana). Because it is part of a circuit that involves the supply of commodities and the installation of special custom regimes. By the recurrent search for internal and external connectivity by engineering systems (highways, bridges and others) with the objective of guaranteeing greater intensity, density, and fluidity at the border—making it cross-border in its relational space.

This discussion can also be based on the interpretation of Santos (2004), who shows that two “circuits of the urban economy of underdeveloped countries” are perceptible and are composed of two subsystems: the upper and the lower. While the first is defined by its modern and capital-intensive form of organization with advances and setbacks that observe market trends, the second is “formed by small-scale activities and mainly interested in poor populations, this one is well rooted and maintains privileged relationships with the region.” The elements that compose this circuit are: non-capital intensive types of manufacturing, non-modern services supplied to retail and by non-modern and small-scale commerce. This last subsystem is very noticeable in the articulations of the local Amazonian economy,

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<sup>8</sup> Through its Amazonian space, Brazil borders French Guiana and countries: Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname.

where riverside people interact using their space and their products with riverside cities (Porto & Theis, 2015). The two subsystems coexist and interact in the use and construction of space.

The Amazon border cannot, therefore, be considered either peripheral or strategic in isolation. These two adjectives qualify specific historical and political usages that together give shape and content to the region. As a whole, these characteristics are inseparable, as they are the result of the same border condition. Depending on the perspective, the Amazonian border condition can be peripheral/strategic or strategic/peripheral, this configures the vice versa effect present in its dialectical historical construction. Such compositions result from the execution of public policies at the border (vivification), stimulated by various justifications (national defense policies; search for integration; reduction of regional inequalities; among others), and by their integration into a world that is globalized and articulated in networks, through constant spatial adjustments,<sup>9</sup> that are executed and strengthened by the government. But, also, arising from the daily and habitual use of the territory (vitalization) that is strongly guided by local economic and political interests, its unfocused exploration of sustainable goals of social development and precariousness in meeting the basic demands of the population (health, education, basic sanitation).

The peripheral/strategic (or vice versa) behavior of the border contains the factors that led to its constitution: as a result of a barrier effect; as a construction of cooperation effect; as a result of public policies; and as formal or informal use of the territory. The first factor exposes its historical and geopolitical construction. The second portrays the gradual interaction relationships, not yet integrated in the full sense of the expression and of the policy of international agreements, but stimulated by the physical integration between these spaces through the construction and paving of roads, the construction of bridges and the institutional construction of cooperative relations between cross-borders, even if it is on a local scale or in its deep connection with foreign capital. The third refers to the national guidelines for the formation and formatting of these territories and the last indicates the use to which this region was destined both by local but also by national and international relations.

The modalities of the use of the border are reflected in the configuration of the local space and dynamize its articulations at different spatial scales. Considering that nothing is fixed in space, territory and, consequently, in the border, the networks built in the world-system and the border functions stimulate the deconstruction of the historical, political or economically installed barrier effects for the construction of the cooperation effect.

Finally, although we have different ways to analyze the border condition and its territorial constructions on pre-existing objects, with territorial recomposition through spatial adjustments, structural changes modify the strategies for using the territory. Consequently, the border condition is transformed.

<sup>9</sup> In the Brazilian version of *The limits to Capital* (2013, p. 22), in the introduction to the 2006 English edition, Harvey indicates that *spatial adjustments* are understood as *expansions of geographic restructuring*. Porto (2021), in turn, interprets that *spatial adjustments* are the adaptations that are affected in space, aiming to guarantee the installation, existence, fluidity, manifestation, and reproduction of capital.

## Public policies of integration and peripheral-strategic behavior in the border of the Brazilian Amazon

When considering the Brazilian public policies aimed at border areas between the end of the 19th century and the first two decades of this century, the cooperation achievement set the tone of the border condition, highlighting its strategic character. Surrounded by the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, which according to Dilla Alfonso and Contreras Vera (2021, p. 5) has as one of its important characteristics “the acquisition by capital of unprecedented mobility resources far beyond the containment capacities of both national states and communities”, as borders were seen as privileged spaces for the fluidity of capital to facilitate differential economic gains in a process of commercial integration. The intensity of implementation of these policies lessened due to the political crisis of 2016 and acquired different shapes with Bolsonaro’s government. Even so, its effects seem to confirm and consolidate the Amazon border as a network border (Groupe Frontière et al, 2004), articulated globally.

The Brazilian economic development policies over the past 25 years placed national borders at the center of Brazil’s competitive reintegration strategy via South American integration. The end of the cold war, the intensification of the global market, the formation of large economic blocs and the need for national repositioning, both in the regional and global context, were decisive for this direction. The public policies activated by the governments of Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003), Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2011) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), traced lines of intervention with the clear intention of integrating Brazil to South America. The proposal was to stimulate regional economic approximation with the opening of markets from the Atlantic to the Pacific through programs, projects and plans based on the National Integration and Development Hubs (Eixos Nacionais de Integração e Desenvolvimento [ENID])<sup>10</sup> at the national level and in the international perspective, with the formation of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur)<sup>11</sup> and the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The Brazilian Integration and Development Hubs (Eixos Nacionais de Integração e Desenvolvimento [ENID]) were part of the Brasil em Ação (Brazil in Action) Program and proposed a portfolio of projects for investments in infrastructure in the multimodal transport, energy and communication sectors. According to a document from the Brazilian Development Bank (Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social [BNDES], 2000), which participated in the study on the formulation of the hubs, the projects should be attractive to private sector investments through partnerships and intended to encompass, not all investments necessary for the country, but those structuring, capable of leveraging other investments and boosting the economy of the regions.

<sup>11</sup> Southern Common Market (Mercosur) is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1991. Its objective is to promote regional integration, initially economic, and common trade policy among member countries. It is composed of five full members: Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela, which has been suspended from the block since December 2016, and five associated countries: Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

<sup>12</sup> IIRSA is a pan-American project of twelve countries in South America, which projects the region’s integration to form a unit. The systemic and logistical structure for this integration is the development of telecommunications, transport, and energy through territorial policies throughout South America (IIRSA, 2004).

The integration of the subcontinent represented the connection between the regionalization and globalization of the South American economies. This, in turn, required the construction of infrastructure systems capable of guaranteeing competitiveness and allowing the exploration of new spaces for capital accumulation. Under this new reference, an attempt was made to strengthen the construction of a transnational political entity with a minimum unity that favored intra-regional relations and with other extra-regional actors.

In this occasion, the proposal to unite the twelve South American States, through the Union of South American Nations (Unasur), redefined the geopolitical weight of the region in the entire American continent, regarding the large blocks and also in opposition to the US Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) project. The borders were the stage for important investments in the infrastructure area, with a special focus on multimodal transport, energy, and communications. The need for integration stimulated the cooperation effect of Brazilian borders and belatedly provoked the construction of connectivity equipment—bridges, roads, telecommunications, and energy structures (Ruckert et al., 2014).

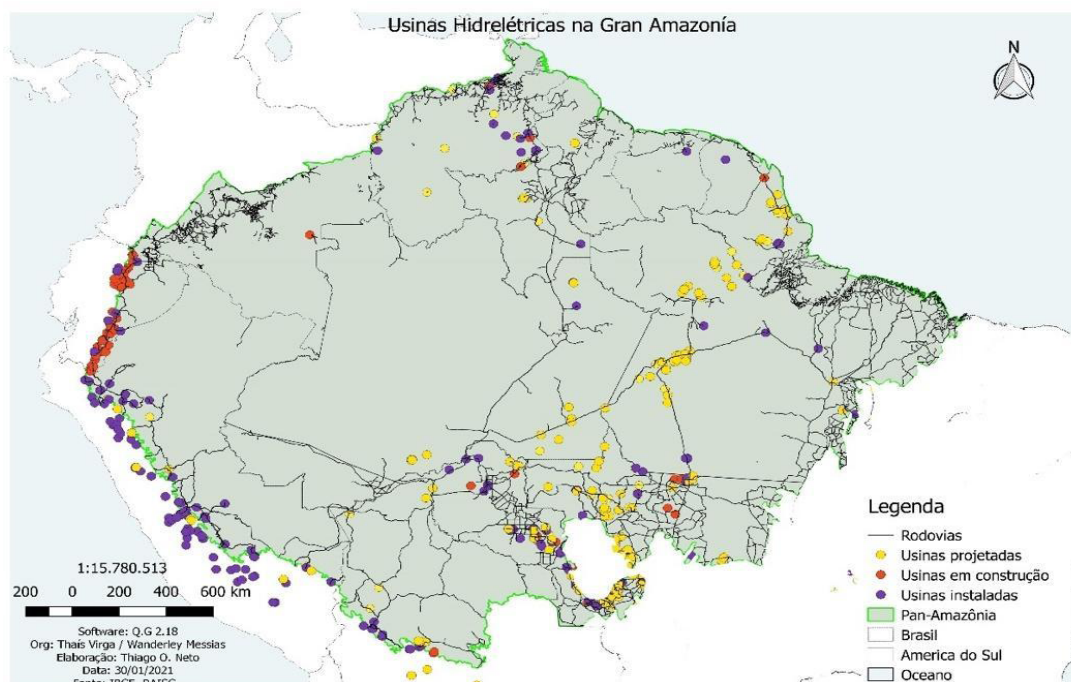
The government's leading role in putting Brazil back in the condition of a politically-economically relevant *global player*—through South American integration and the opening of new spaces for international politics has also defined important perspectives for the internationalization of its public universities, according to Superti, Silva and Novais (2020). And, which were reflected in the creation of the University of Latin American Integration (Unila) in Foz do Iguaçu—Brazil-Argentina-Paraguay tripoint—and the Binational Campus of the Federal University of Amapá in Oiapoque—border between Brazil and French Guiana (France). According to Santos (2017, p. 41), the implementation of these spaces with an international focus combined the strategic interests of Brazilian foreign policy, projecting the country in the South American continent. The perspective was to consolidate the Brazilian leadership in the region and as a regional power in the Southern Hemisphere.

Security and defense policies were also resized in face of the new scenario. The geopolitical posture regarding the international border areas also started to include the economic dimension to the defense and security debate. The process of bringing the South American countries closer also required the establishment of new territorial control mechanisms that considered the process of interaction at the borders. The Council of South American Defense (Conselho de Defesa Sul-Americano [CDS]) was the attempt to produce a response to the demand for new defense mechanisms for the region. CDS included in its guidelines the proposal for the elaboration of joint defense policies for the integration of industrial bases for military material.

The physical integration policies between the South American countries accentuated aspects already present in the use and dynamics of the frontier spaces and in the configuration of the border condition. Once again, its strategic condition for the economic development plan is activated. The international borders of the Brazilian Amazon were raised to a central position in this new context. They represent a clear vice versa effect achievement of the peripheral-strategic condition.

The Brazilian Amazon came to the center of the macro-economic growth strategy given its potential for connection with South American countries and with French Guiana (French territory in the Amazon). In energy production, one of the main focuses of both the IIRSA and the ENID, investments increased. This was reflected in the considerable expansion of hydroelectric plants in the Amazon installed, under construction and in planning, as can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Hydroelectric plants in the Amazon (by design phase)**

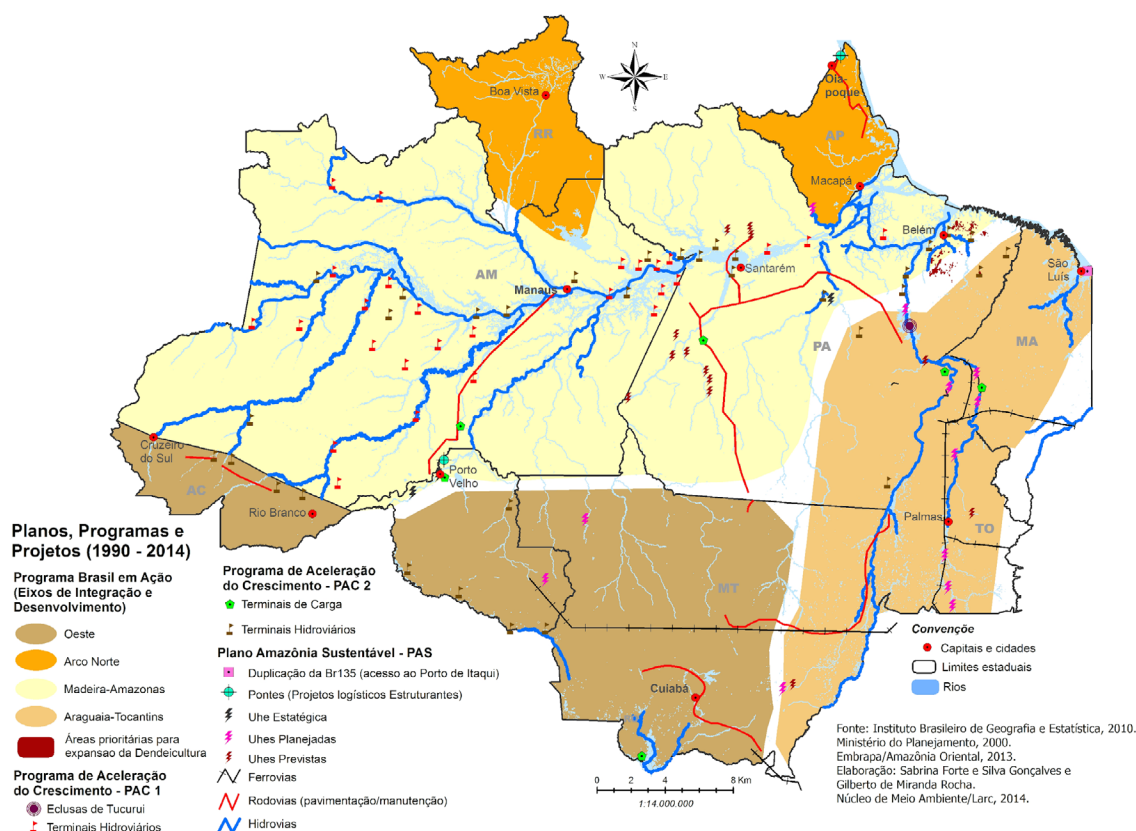


Source: Virga & Costa (2021, p. 25)

In the studies for the elaboration of the ENID, the Brazilian Amazon was understood as an important reservoir of resources with expressive potential for economic exploitation, despite its environmental specificities. The results of these studies point to multiple possibilities for exploring the region due to its incomparable stocks of biodiversity, intangible and cultural material goods, as well as its natural resources as hydroelectric energy and minerals (BNDES, 2000). The ENID studies were at the base of government planning for the Amazon and guided the plans, programs, and projects (shown in Figure 3) for the region between 1990 and 2014.



Figure 3. Plans, programs and projects 1990-2014, Brazil Amazon



Source: Rocha & Gonçalves (2017, p. 13)

The implementation of ENID and the resumption of economic infrastructure projects in the Amazon region emerged in contrast to the struggle of local movements for environmental preservation and for improving the living conditions of extractive communities. This struggle was supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national and international environmentalists and it expanded with the growing trend of local preservationist public policies that marked the immediate post-military regime period (1964-1985) in Brazil.

Heavily pressured by internal issues related to social and environmental conflicts—which led to the death, among others, of Chico Mendes<sup>13</sup> in 1988—by the international and national mobilization that denounced the environmental depredation promoted by space occupation policies through colonization and exploitation of its mineral resources and hydroelectric power, the Brazilian State was forced to answer in the form of public policies for environmental protection and to produce real effects in reducing deforestation. However, if on the one hand the environment gained space on

<sup>13</sup> Chico Mendes (1944-1988), Brazilian rubber tapper, union leader, and environmental activist who fought for the preservation of the Amazon Forest and was murdered because of his fight. Recognized by the United Nations and received the Global Environmental Preservation Award.



the foreign and domestic political agenda thanks to the action of important political forces, including the Amazon, on the other hand, the strength of the macroeconomic imperative as a definition of territorial policies for South American integration became evident from the mid-1990s. And, for this integration, joint strategies for the management and sustainable use of Amazonian biodiversity were not built; the reduction of impacts on the exploration of coastal environments and mechanisms to safeguard protected areas (Conservation Units and Indigenous Reserves) from the expansion of the economic use of the border, with the largest protected areas being on the Brazilian side.

The country's participation in the international system was determined by its ability to reach new markets and increase the external competitiveness of its products. The Brazilian government's planning included the Amazon in the macroeconomic perspective of the country's insertion in the supranational market.

Another key factor to understand the centrality of the Amazon in Brazilian economic policies was the displacement of the agricultural frontier. The latter advanced towards the center-west and north of the country, but the infrastructure for outflowing the surplus was maintained in the south (Port of Paranaguá/PR) and southeast (ports of Santos/SP and Vitória/ES). This made the transport cost very high and the time to the main world ports too long. According to the Brazilian Association of Cereal Exporters (Associação Nacional dos Exportadores de Cereais [ANEC]),<sup>14</sup> the average cost per ton of grain in Brazil in 2010 was four times higher than in Argentina and the United States. The creation of export corridors through the construction and expansion of multimodal means of transport in the Amazon in the following decade allowed the country to approach the costs of its competitors and reduce transport time, increasing the competitiveness of national products, especially agribusiness.

Thus, investments made by the Brazilian government's internal policies and the South American Regional Integration Initiative, until the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, had the same orientation: to promote competitive integration based on massive infrastructure investments organized into integration and development hubs. IIRSA at the level of the subcontinent, as a regional bloc, and government plans at the national level, accelerating the economy and repositioning Brazil regarding the South American market. The internal and external processes of integration of the physical infrastructures of South American countries, mobilized by globalization and by global market strategies, forced the production of redefinitions on the areas of international borders in the Amazon.

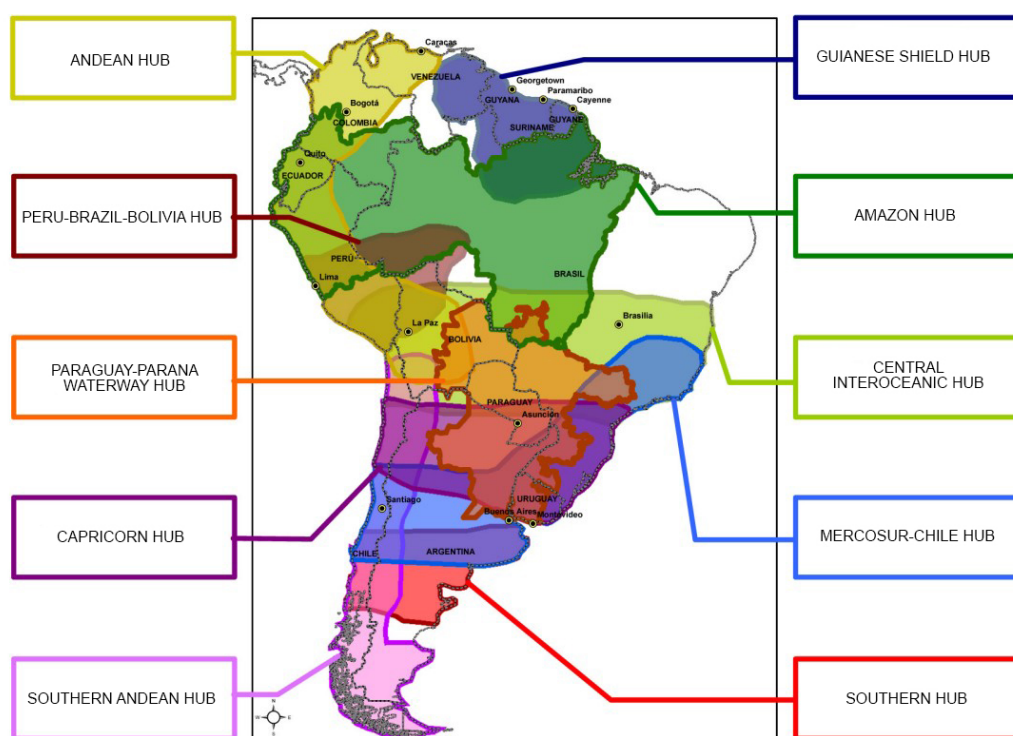
The IIRSA proposal, in addition to the cooperation actions provided for The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO),<sup>15</sup> guided and facilitated massive investments in the Pan-Amazon border region in its three main sectors: multimodal transport, energy, and communication (IIRSA, 2004). It enabled a governance arrangement for its projects that included, in addition to the 12 South American states, important financial agents and business groups. Silva (2013) identified the following actors in

<sup>14</sup> See: Folha de São Paulo. Saída pelo Norte vira nova opção ao porto de Santos. 11/16/2011.

<sup>15</sup> In 1995, the Amazon countries decided to institutionally strengthen the Amazon Cooperation Treaty (Tratado de Cooperação Amazônica [TCA]) with the creation of a Permanent Secretariat endowed with legal personality. The decision was implemented in 1998, with the approval of the Protocol of Amendment to the TCA, which officially instituted the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) as a mechanism responsible for improving and strengthening the cooperation process developed under the Treaty.

this arrangement: Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), Plata Basin Financial Development Fund (Fonplata), BNDES, Odebrecht group, Petrobrás, Andrade Gutiérrez, Queiroz Galvão, Vale, General Electric and América Latina Logística (ALL). Within the group of regional and international institutions were the following: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO). Although not only on the Amazonian borders, IIRSA was also important in the strategic repositioning of the border areas of South America. Figure 4 shows the hubs of IIRSA in the countries of South America.

**Figure 4. Map of Integration and Development Hubs projected by the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America**



IIRSA's development hubs also shed light on the cities on the border, which in the Amazon, as a rule, share serious problems in urban infrastructure such as non-existent basic sanitation, precarious living conditions, high density of solid waste without proper collection, open sewer, and lack of urban mobility (Superti & Silva, 2015). Many of these problems are connected to the application of planning policies on land use in the state without considering the needs of urban areas or the execution of previous planning. Even under these conditions, the municipalities are important in the integration with internal and external markets. Because they promote the occupation of the border and are responsible for the maintenance of economic and social relations that vitalize

and guarantee national sovereignty in the frontier area, therefore performing a role in the security and defense of the national Amazon border.

The deepening of the strategic dimension of the Amazonian borders also highlighted the need to revitalize and promote the regional development of cities in the frontier areas. Despite the timid implementation of public policies aimed at these cities, their importance was defined, pointing them as key parts of the integration process, being also an important connection in the chain of illicit routes and in the map of crimes that spread across the Amazon.

The vivification proposal, that is present mainly in defense and security policies, dealt with the expansion of the force, reorganization of military units in the region and creation of new border platoons, according to Nascimento et al. (2013). But also dealt with the institutionalization of political, economic, and social structures governed by formal mechanisms of organization and control, expanding the presence of the State and strengthening the licit national and international relational webs that make the territory safer and more attractive to capital.

Increasing the State's presence in this space also implied the issue of defense and national security, which began to be dealt with in plans and policies very closely to public security (Nascimento et al., 2013). The military began to give greater importance to drug trafficking, despite having previously been a matter for the Federal Police. Its relevance, from a national and transnational point of view, aroused in the Brazilian Ministry of Defense (MD) the interest in seeking alliances with the Legislative to change the rules of the game and insert the Armed Forces in the fight against illegal activities in their strategies at the border. Which, in theory, would be easier for them, since they were already physically present at the borders, through border platoons.

With Complementary Law No. 136, of August 25, 2010, the Army, Navy and Air Force acquired police power to combat cross-border crimes. Considering that, we can see the expansion of the concept in the Ministry of Defense and in the Ministry of Justice, on public security that was until recently thought of in a regionalized manner and not on the national border aggregate. State public policies, therefore, pointed to an attempt to establish a joint execution between different ministries in the fight against cross-border crimes. This set of institutional actions for the Amazon revealed a new context for managing the cross-border territory and a normative production to offer solutions to informal problems, which allow the functioning of illegal networks that operate in this circuit. The connection in geographic networks of the Amazon space did not advance, therefore, in the absence of geopolitical issues.

However, policies aimed at borders were not focused on overcoming the peripheral condition of these regions. Despite being the stage for international integration processes, border municipalities present themselves as weak links in the development chain. The South American integration process through the increase of economic infrastructure had its limits defined by market relations. The proposed development was commercial, via the increase in the flow of riches produced and consumed in South America. Integration in the social, environmental, or action on living conditions at the border were not planned.

According to Superti and Silva (2015), the consolidation of the uses of the border evidenced the focus on national interests and the investment of capital without meeting the basic demands of local development, while the vivification, despite being comprehensive in social and economic meaning, in an effective way has proved to be a strategy of making the territory safe for the legal connections and fluidity of capital.

The vice versa effect of the strategic-peripheral condition of borders allows us to explain the *modus operandi* by which the territory is historically-politically configured in favor of the inversion, fluidity, and security of capital without qualitatively transforming the living conditions of the local population.

With the 2016 crisis that culminated in the *impeachment* of President Dilma Rousseff, the integration movement lost strength. With Bolsonaro's government, new standards are established in Brazilian international relations. For Silva and Superti (2019), the resumption of the strong alignment with the North Americans, the positions of political confrontation with regional leaders from neighboring countries for ideological reasons, measures against environmental protection and more incisive decisions on the migration agenda, redefine the complex geopolitical scenario of frontier regions.

The progressive physical connections in Brazil's Amazon strategic surrounding tend to go through moments of uncertainty about their direction, without, however, being totally abandoned. On the other hand, unresolved but alleviated issues are once again gaining significant importance as the environmental issue. Bolsonaro's government's strong incentive to advance agribusiness in the region, to mining on indigenous lands and to relaxing environmental inspections formed the backdrop for the significant increase in burning and illegal exploitation in the Amazon (Silva & Superti, 2019). This weakens Brazilian performance in the face of international agreements on climate change and environmental protection, it curbs international investments that strive for environmental diplomacy and puts the great environmental heritage at risk. Therefore, the use of the territory without connection to local demands is emphasized, taking advantage of its peripheral dimension in terms of its ability to influence the formation of the national public policy agenda.

## Final considerations

Recalling the guiding question of this study—how is the border condition configured through the peripheral/strategic behavior of the spaces of the Amazon frontier in Brazil?—we have to remember that the border condition is not watertight, on the contrary, it shows temporalities in its spatial recomposition, producing constant (re) inventions, as it is socially and politically established. Thus, as the border is occupied and used, new dynamics are performed; demanding new normative, infrastructural, political, and geopolitical adjustments that are capable of guaranteeing mobilization and dynamism. The border condition is also marked by the formal policies and agreements of the states and informal agreements by the population who, when organizing life in these spaces, imprint their subjectivity there, sometimes transgressing legal determinations. Its contours are delineated by the continuous contacts between the local and the international, which brings its own movement to this space.

In the Amazon space, this movement must be thought considering some essential elements, such as:

- There are several “Amazons” exposed throughout their periodizations.
- Although there are some embryonic manifestations about regional use and occupation (such as the federal territories), the participation of the

Amazon in the Brazilian government agenda is late, even so this agenda exposes diversified regional exploration policies.

- In order to implement the region's exploration policies, it was necessary to *integrate* this space into the national economy. Once integrated, it started to be constantly *activated*, expanding its manifestations regarding its institutionality, spatiality, and interoperability.
- Subnational entities (states and municipalities) bordering the Brazilian Amazon have their own cross-border relations through paradiplomacy.<sup>16</sup> The most recent is the case of Amapá with French Guiana. Thus, other models of *vivifications* and *vitalizations* with cross-border articulations can be elaborated, expanding their spatial interactions/integrations.

Although these many movements are present, the Amazon border condition is defined in a determinant way by the strategic/peripheral behavior that guides its manifestations:

- The peripheral: reflected in the living conditions of the population; in its poorly diversified economy; in low technological development; in the distance from the decision-making political centers; in the need, always present at the governmental level, of its occupation, protection, and development.
- The strategic: present in its potential to connect with the external; in the recognition of its natural wealth and potential of great interest to national and international capital; in its insertion in a circuit that involves the supply of *commodities* to the world-economy.

Thus, the Amazonian border condition cannot be considered either peripheral or strategic, as, taken together, these border behaviors are complementary. And, its vice versa effect depends on the perspective in which it is faced.

Under the logic of public policies for macroeconomic development of the last 25 years of the Brazilian Federal Government, the strategic dimension of the Amazon was highlighted by the need for connectivity with the subcontinental market and the insertion of the country in the world-economy. However, these policies did not have among their objectives the overcoming of the peripheral condition, with the inclusion of guidelines that would meet the local productive arrangements and the basic needs for improving the quality of life of the populations that occupy the frontier strip. Although borders have gained centrality in the country's competitive reintegration strategy, local political forces continue to be of secondary importance in the design of public policies.

The peripheral condition in which the borders of the Brazilian Amazon are maintained facilitate the exploration of the strategic potential of these areas, with deaf resistance to the ears of *police makers*. The vice versa effect of condition explains the historical-economic construction of the border and reveals a political choice of decision-making centers.

<sup>16</sup> Paradiplomacy is the action of subnational (state or municipal) governments in international relations, through the establishment of formal and informal contacts, permanent or temporary, with foreign entities to promote their interests (Soldatos, 1993).

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