



Revista de Ciências da Administração

ISSN: 1516-3865

rca.cse@contato.ufsc.br

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
Brasil

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Revista de Ciências da Administração, vol. 17, 2015, pp. 183-196

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
Santa Catarina, Brasil

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LEARNING BY DOING: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ABOUT PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN UNIVERSITY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Aprendendo pela Prática: uma análise crítica sobre uma parceria entre Universidade, Governo Local e Sociedade Civil

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Abstract

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

Keywords: Partnership. Local Development. Learning Experience.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é mostrar como uma parceria entre Universidade, Governo Local e Sociedade Civil pode contribuir para o desenvolvimento territorial. O ponto central do artigo é debater criticamente em que medida essa parceria é uma estratégia efetiva para o desenvolvimento de áreas em processos de transformação de uma estrutura rural para uma composição urbana. O artigo mostra uma experiência de aprendizado que foi realizada no Município de Benevides, Estado do Pará, região amazônica, Brasil. Essa experiência objetiva relacionar a pesquisa universitária, as demandas de governos locais e as necessidades da sociedade civil dentro de um amplo projeto de desenvolvimento que envolve (a) governo local, organizações locais e capacitação das comunidades; (b) planejamento participativo do município; e (c) a provisão de serviços por parte da universidade como uma forma eficiente de contribuir para a área onde esta se situa.

Palavras-chave: Parceria. Desenvolvimento Local. Experiência de Aprendizado.



1 INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to show a critical analysis about an intellectually and interdisciplinary process of an partnership between University, Local Government and Civil Society as an strategy to develop areas that are changing from rural to urban structure. Particularly, it explores to what extent partnership between University (Uni), Local Government (LG) and Civil Society (CS)² may be an effective strategy for development in areas where an accelerated process of changes from rural to urban structure exists. The paper attempts to show a partnership process that has emerged between University, Local Government and Civil Society for implementation of a large development project at municipal level in Brazil.

The paper's central question is: to what extent partnership between University, Local Government and Civil Society is an effective strategy for development in areas that are changing from rural to urban structure? The main hypothesis is that University may be a key-actor to bring Local Government and Civil Society organisations to work in partnership and then to reduce environmental and social troubles when the territory is quickly changing from rural to urban structure. The University may provide information, training and to help in building up a territory planning for development with local people engagement in the process. The University takes part and is a key-actor for partnership building between LG and CS.

The article focuses specifically on the *município* of Benevides, Pará State, Brazilian Amazonia region. The paper shows the challenges that an integrated, interdisciplinary, multi-actor and multi-year project faces during its implementation. It analyses some paradox issues that partnership brings to traditional organisations thinking and structures.

In Brazil, the 1988 Constitution created the mechanisms for planning and the decentralisation of resources that gave *municípios*³ a certain kind of autonomy. Before this, local development planning was developed by central Government and both LG and CS worked separately with limited dialogue and high level of conflict. The historical lack of cooperation between these two main institutions may have led to further mistrust and misunderstandings, therefore impairing development actions even more.

Development is understood in this paper as the ability to promote favourable conditions for planning and social accountability, through new forms of organisation involving social participation that was introduced as part of the political space. In the Pará state context, one of the most important of these organisations was the *Conselhos de Desenvolvimento* (Development Committee). This political space has also been understood as a public sphere (SAYAGO, 2012) where ordinary people may influence on public policies that affect their lives. However, there are lacks of dialogues between LG and CS in this public sphere that has made hard it works (VASCONCELLOS SOBRINHO, 2009). In this context, the University may be an alternative to mediate dialogues between LG and CS.

For a long time the University was seen only as a locus to produce and spread knowledge. However, University role is much broader and involves commitment to contribute for society development and particularly for territorial development where it is placed.

The presence of universities to approximate LG and CS may be innovative mechanisms to make Development Committee work and then to offer a deal of possibility for strengthening citizen participation as right in the governance process. In fact, there is a belief that citizen participation in local planning and implementation leads to a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness of investment and helps to promote greater democracy in *município* planning (FLORISBELO AND GUIJT, 2004, p. 202). This is because participation in the public sphere is a great mechanism for social management (CANÇADO; PEREIRA and TENÓRIO, 2013) and then to give opportunities for common people to show their interests and demands for public policies.

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

There are various critical issues for partnership practice in Pará state areas where an accelerated process of changes from rural to urban structure exists. Among others, high level of migration, land property conflicts, established practices of top-down planning



and political competitiveness based on traditional rural pattern of *clientelismo*⁴ are the most relevant. Additionally, historical dependence on government and market constraints are some examples from the Brazilian Amazonia.

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

One of the paper's contributions is to conduct a critical analysis of the project and its implementation process taking into account the experiences within a broad context of issues enhancing autonomous thinking from learning by doing (MURRAY, KUJUNDZIC, 2005).

This paper is organised into six sections including this initial one. The following section deals with definitions of partnership. It examines the concepts of partnership within the context of literature and point out some of the definitions that have been adopted into the Sustainable *Município* Project (step 1 – meaning analysis). The third section deals with the project itself and shows its aims, structure and organisation. The fourth section demonstrates the reasons why the *município* of Benevides was chosen for project implementation and draws the context of the *município* (step 2 – contextual awareness). The fifth section deals with the project actions and the difficulties that the leaders of the project are facing on and some of the outcomes that partnership between the university, local government and civil society has brought. The aim of fifth section is to explain the learning process that both UNAMA and *Prefeitura* of Benevides are facing on (Step 3 – reflexive scepticism). Some paradoxes of this process will be pointed to. The last section stresses the challenges that the project will face on and the paper's main conclusion about this initial partnership between UNAMA, *Prefeitura* of Benevides and local organisations from civil society for territory development.

2 PARTNERSHIP

As Vasconcellos and Vasconcellos (2009) state, partnership has a diversity of meanings that ranges along an infinite spectrum. According to these authors, there are at least two large streams. In the first stream, partnership is a form of organisation in which the compliance of the enrolled partners depends on the existence of trust (FOWLER, 1997; HARRISS, 2000) and self-organisation (HARRISS, 2000, p. 231). In this context, partnership reasons are shaped by a sense of common purpose supported by trust between its actors. Thus, it is not created by ideas of material gain or coercion of the enrolled partner. Partnership based on trust evokes the notion of partnership as a prolonged process and as the result of a long-term relationship between the actors (LEWIS, 1998). Harriss (2000, p. 236) suggests that this type of partnership is an 'ideal type of cooperation' and Fowler (1997; 1998) points out to an 'authentic partnership'. Then, partnerships based on trust are understood to be an outcome of the networking skills and motivation of actors (FOWLER, 1997; HARRISS, 2000). Such partnerships are characterised by a focus on its actors, their independence and enthusiasm in sharing values and visions to achieve a common aim. Partnership based on trust is associated with the idea of stakeholders working together for mutual benefit, voluntarily sharing values and goals in embedded relations (OSTROM, 1997). In this spectrum, the intention of the partners depends on commitment rather than on external factors, since partnership only can exist if there is what Thompson (2005, p. 31) considers as basic trust between partners. This kind of partnership is based on substantive rationality (RAMOS, 1981 *apud* CANÇADO; PEREIRA and TENÓRIO, 2013) which the human being is over any other interest. However, substantive rationality is linked to the level of people emancipation to act according to their interests and in favour of the whole collectively as a key issue for social management (CANÇADO; PEREIRA and TENÓRIO, 2013).

On the other stream, partnership is most commonly found in formal and political institutions (DFID, 2006; TENDLER, 1997; EVANS, 1997). Partnership is centred on institutional frameworks and governments (TENDLER, 1997; EVANS, 1997; DFID, 2006). This perspective emphasises partnership as shaped by the

rules, regulations and governmental actions where it emerges (*ibid.*). From this perspective, the nature of regulatory frameworks, of incentives and sanctions of supportive institutions promoting and valuing innovation influence the level and type of cooperation which prevails. Partnerships centred on institutions are related to the notion of complementarity (LAN, 1997; EVANS, 1997) between organisations under the guidance of a formal structure of authority. Actors' complementarity, which is specially built in a formal and political environment, focuses on 'problem solving', to present a solution of a particular societal or economic problem. Evidences of 'successful' problem solving (LEWIS, 1998, 2000; FERREIRA, 2003) induce the idea that partnerships can be built up in a short time and as a strategic mechanism for economic and societal outcomes. Partnership built up as a strategy for development is centred on the approach of strategic management that in its turn is based on instrumental rationality (CANÇADO, SAUSEN; VILLELA, 2013). It means that partnership is built up to achieve particular outcomes and takes power hierarchy between the partners which substantially differs from social management (TENÓRIO, 2008). In this last, decisions-making are taken collectively within power-sharing (CANÇADO; SAUSEN; VILLELA, 2013).

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

A common feature of all partnerships is that in theory they represent a relationship that involves power-sharing (HODGETT and JOHNSON, 2001, p. 324). However, addressing unequal power relations between partners is still a great challenge to the discourse and practice of partnership in general (JOHNSON; WILSON, 2006) and particularly for partnerships based on formal and political institutions. In any relationship (even relationships based on trust) partners

always have differences that reflect at least on their assumptions, perspectives, expectations or agendas (JOHNSON; WILSON, 2006, p. 71). Also, partnership actors bring their own specific sets of power positions, roles and responsibilities as determined by values, skills and organisational resources into the network arena (LOYAN, 2004, p. 3).

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

An argument made for building partnership is that partnership is a new attempt to diminish power imbalances in the social system (FOWLER, 1997; WORLD BANK, 2004). Partnership is understood as a mechanism that promotes the empowerment of the powerless, since it enables the powerless to contribute their information, knowledge and skills to the elaboration and implementation of programmes, projects or actions that affect them (FARRINGTON; BEBBINGTON, 1993; WORLD BANK 2004; VASCONCELLOS; VASCONCELLOS, 2009). This kind of partnership is closer to the approach of social management.

On the one hand, power is the capacity of individuals to make choices and to transform those choices into development outcomes (CHAMBERS, 1983, 1997; 2005; WORLD BANK, 2004). Empowerment, in this sense, is the process of increasing this capacity through people learning and 'capacity building' (LISTER, 2000) to allow people to have freedom of choice and action (SEN, 1999; WORLD BANK, 2004). Power is understood as 'power to', it is enhanced through gaining new skills by active practice or by gaining access to externally generated scientific information relevant to



people's aims (FARRINGTON; BEBBINGTON, 1993). Empowerment based on 'power to' offers possibilities for social changes from an 'evolutionary' process of people learning (TEMBO, 2003, p. 25) once people become aware of power dynamics. It means that empowerment and emancipation as fundamental issues for social management are part of a long term process.

On the other hand, power is the capacity of individuals or groups to access and control the process by which decisions, particularly those that affect their own lives, are made (FRIEDMANN, 1992). Empowerment, from this perspective, is made from powerless people's access to political space (FRIEDMANN, 1992). Powerless people assume an active part in reconstructing the public domain, helping to create a political space suitable for working out the policies that will sustain a development that involves them. Empowerment in this view focuses on social changes by structural transformation (TEMBO, 2003, p. 26-30). It is not the end of social management but is a significant part for people emancipation for society transformation.

Proposals that promote partnership between local people and Government for people's contribution to development programmes with their resources, skills and knowledge means that governments work more suitably and the partnership leads to the empowerment of the community (HILDYARD *et al.*, 2001; BOWYER, 2003). Partnership enables people's participation in Government programmes and may be used as a basis for people to empower themselves (CORNWALL, 2001; CLEAVER, 2001). The use of partnership to achieve political space to influence social transformation based on political empowerment of the poor has been recast as an essential element for urban programme development (WORLD BANK, 2004).

Increasing concern in social exclusion has extended the understanding of partnership beyond the implementation of particular projects to comprise much wider issues connected with the relationship between Government and civil society (VASCONCELLOS; VASCONCELLOS, 2009). Such an extension in the use of the participation approach means that it is no longer simply concerned with single issues. Instead, partnership has been linked with good governance (TENDLER, 1997; WORLD BANK, 2004). This means that partnership has been brought into direct contact with equitable treatment and empowerment. This new

form of interaction between Government and civil society means that innovative entry points have been launched for direct public involvement in the process of Government (TENDLER, 1997). Therefore, the debate about the direct involvement of ordinary people in the political structure has changed from 'scaling up', 'institutionalisation of participation' (CLEAVER, 2001) and participatory techniques that can influence the policy process (WORLD BANK, 2004) to a better understanding of the complex nature of the interaction between individuals and the social structure (TEMBO, 2003).

As an aim, partnership improves the chances of direct democratic involvement in governance and public transparency and makes the relationship between local people and local governance more direct (FLORISBELO; GUIJT, 2004; WORLD BANK, 2004; CORNWALL; GAVENTA, 2006). Partnership is able to work as a policy for other local development strategies that bring together different groups to conciliate their diverse interests (CLEAVER, 2001; CORNWALL, 2004) within the process of territory development (VASCONCELLOS; VASCONCELLOS, 2009).

Universities have played key roles to put together local government agencies and civil society organisations for working in partnership (VASCONCELLOS SOBRINHO, VASCONCELLOS; TAVARES, 2012). In fact, there are an increasing numbers of universities undertaking long-term partnerships with local government agencies to improve peoples' quality of life in poorest urban and rural communities (REARDON, 2000) and then spreading their roles into society. University is not only a locus to produce and convey knowledge but a significant social actor for supporting a new social structure. The university should contribute for society development and for territorial development where it is placed (ORTEGA; GASSET, 1982). Partnership between local government agencies and civil society organisations intermediated by universities has been shown as an innovative mechanisms for strengthening citizen participation as right in the governance process.

3 SUSTAINABLE *Município* PROJECT FOR TERRITORY DEVELOPMENT

The Sustainable *Município* Project was conceived by the University of Amazonia (UNAMA), a private uni-

versity located in Belém, capital of Pará state. UNAMA is a 23 years old university that offer 33 undergraduate courses and five postgraduate programmes distributed into four studies centres and one institute: (a) Biological and Health Centre, (b) Education and Human Science Centre; (c) Exacts Studies and Technological Centre; (d) Applied Social Studies Centre and (e) Institute of Law. In 2014, UNAMA launched the first PhD administration program of northern Brazil which the Sustainable *Município* Project is linked to.

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

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

The Sustainable *Município* Project has five basic principles: first, municipal sustainable development is an endogenous process of changes that involves economic growth necessarily linked to improvement of

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

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

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



The Sustainable *Município* Project faced some difficulties in its implementation process in mid-2009. However, after two years of its existence it received an award from the Association of Higher Education Main-tainers (ABMES). The ABMES graced the University of Amazonia an honourable mention by its innovative initiative in carrying out the Sustainable *Município* Proj-ect. For this, the project trajectory demands a critical analysis of its achievements and failing.

4 *MUNICÍPIO* OF BENEVIDES: THE FIRST CHALLENGEABLE EXPERIENCE IN PARÁ STATE

Benevides is part of Great Belém that accord- ing to IBGE (2010) is the most inhabited region in Pará state with 2.042.417 people. The great Belém is composed by five *municípios*: Belém, Ananindeua, Marituba, Benevides and Santa Bárbara. According

to official statistics, Belém, Ananindeua and Marituba have high urbanisation index which are respectively 99.35%, 99.76% and 87.16%. Benevides and Santa Bárbara are typical rural areas that are changing their territory structure. Benevides, for example, changed its urbanisation index from 10.37% to 53.83% between the years of 1996 and 2007 (IBGE, 2007). Benevides population grew up from 35.546 to 51.651 inhabit- ants (IBGE, 2010). This growing means a rate around 4.2% per year.

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

Table 1: Great Belém Population (1980-2010)

Município	1980	1991	2000	2007	2010
Belém	341.289	1.244.689	1.280.614	1.450.697	1.393.399
Ananindeua	26.742	88.151	393.569	513.885	471.980
Marituba	- - -	- - -	74.429	105.425	108.246
Benevides	9.743	68.465	35.546	47.318	51.651
Santa Bárbara	- - -	- - -	11.378	13.605	17.141
Total	377.774	1.401.305	1.795.536	2.130.930	2.042.417

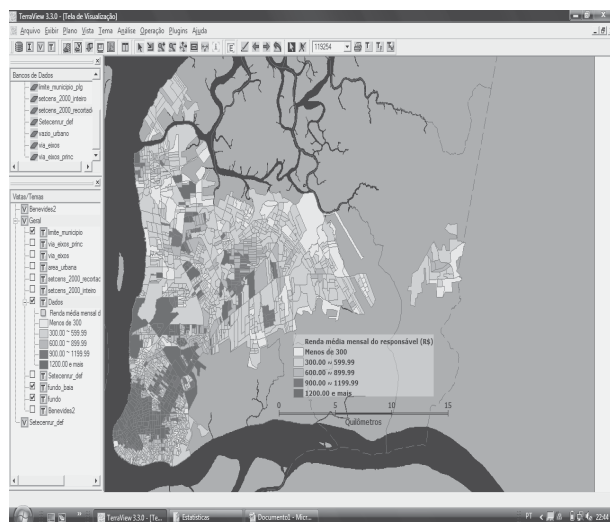
P.S. Benevides lost part of its population in 1991 and 1994 for legal creation of *municípios* of Santa Bárbara and Marituba.

Source: IBGE (1980; 1992; 2002; 2007 and 2010)

Benevides takes an uncomfortable position of periphery and poor area of great Belém. According to IBGE (20010), most of Benevides population takes less than US\$325.00 (R\$600,00) of income, the lowest income in great Belém. Taking MDS (2013), there are 8.196 very poor families linked to Brazilian Federal Government programme called *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) that aims to directly transfer income from gov- ernment to heads of poor families as a form to attain their basic needs.

There are other data corroborating with the analy- sis that Benevides is a poor *município* that needs exter-

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



Map 1: Spatial Distribution of Income in Great Belém
Source: UNAMA (2010)

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

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

5 SUSTAINABLE *MUNICÍPIO* PROJECT: A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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

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

What is expected of Uni-CS-LG partnership are improvements of public management performance (a) enhancing transparency, accountability and democratic control over the entities, both public and private, involved in municipal planning processes; (b) institutionalizing decisions making done by all actors involved in the arrangement; and (c) renewing mission, skills and capacities of public administration and then making it less bureaucratic and vulnerable to external pressures. However, what this kind of partnership brings about is what the university role in this process and to what extent private university is ready to take this role.

In the scope of the project, traditional university behaviour with society breaks for three reasons: firstly, because the *município* is conceived as the space where various kinds of knowledge should interact. Researchers and university managers' staff need do adapt themselves for an interactive process of collective learning. Knowledge, viewed from a social construction approach⁵ emphasises that individuals and collective groups of people are continually constructing and reinventing their understanding of themselves and the world around them (JACOBS, 2002). Individuals are socialised into a system of beliefs, norms of behaviour and institutions what means that reality⁶ is constructed through human activity as a product of socialisation (LONG, 1992; JACOBS, 2002). However, the understanding of knowledge as a social construction contrasts with the rational, positivist view of knowledge



derived from a traditional scientific viewpoint that some of UNAMA's managers' staff has. In the meetings to debate the project implementation, some of UNAMA manager's staff continually demonstrates their thinking that university has the knowledge and the society should only to absorb it. In Brazilian Amazonia, there is already a large body of literature showing the importance of traditional population (aborigines, *caboclos*, black people and others) to generate knowledge from their point of view, particularly in their relationship with environment.

Secondly, because participatory approach is fundamental to carry out an integrated and interdisciplinary multi-actors project that has a socio-economic development aim. Participatory approach means sharing of power between all actors involved in the project. As the project brings an interdisciplinary perspective, participatory approach means involving of actors from different field of knowledge. In fact, participation as a new form of interaction between UNAMA managers' staff and researchers means that innovative entry points have been launched for direct researcher involvement in the process of university structure and organisation. This is because the Sustainable *Município* project is an institutional actions project that demands multi-actor attitude to achieve its objective. However, the direct involvement of researchers in the university structure and organisation suggests changes its actual form of administration from 'scaling down' decision to a more participatory appraisal. Nevertheless, project management concept has been extended from business environment to managements of systems. This means that a project like the Sustainable *Município* needs different techniques to deliver results once some of them are not tangible at all. The complex project matrix request changes from the traditional and hierarchical pattern that UNAMA has.

Thirdly, the understanding about the meaning of partnership with *Prefeitura* Municipal so far has been restricting to financial support. However, as described in the second section of this paper, partnerships motives are not only shaped by ideas of material gain of the enrolled partners, but by a sense of common aim supported by trust between its actors. This is because partnerships based on trust evoke the notion of partnership as a prolonged process and as the result of a long-term relationship between the actors. Such part-

nerships are characterised by a focus on its actors, their independence and enthusiasm in sharing values and visions to achieve a common objective. As previously said in this paper, partnership based on trust is associated with the idea of stakeholders working together for mutual benefit, voluntarily sharing values and goals in embedded relations.

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

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

However, one of the meanings of the Sustainable *Município* project is to promote the empowerment of the powerless people, since it enables them to contribute with their information, knowledge and skills to the elaboration and implementation of subprojects or actions that affect them. Powerless people should assume an active part in reconstructing the public domain, helping to create a political space suitable for working out the policies that will sustain a development that involves them. In other words, the Sustainable *Município* project focuses on social changes by structural transformation meaning that resources have to be achieved in order to

change priorities and the powerless individuals' interests are pursued. Nevertheless, part of the *Prefeitura* of Benevides staff tries to reinforce its domain of ideas and ideologies what in political terms signifies continuation of certain sets of power imbalances.

The *Prefeitura* of Benevides political culture and institutional management customs related to this culture mean that the type of interaction with the most vulnerable communities is weak and dominated by practice which is ineffective in producing changes in favour of these communities. This suggests that the idea of partnership through synergetic relations between government and civil society will be hard to be achieved and a challenge for the UNAMA project staff. In this case, the UNAMA project staff needs to be aware with all *Prefeitura* proposals and the meaning of these proposals. If not, the Sustainable *Município* project may be only a support to *Prefeitura* to carry out its own ideas and projects and use Sustainable *Município* project outputs for political gains. Less concerned with the inclusion of economically and socially marginalised groups in process of development; current government leaders try to use the Sustainable *Município* project space to access financial resources and to reinforce or to secure political power. A great risk that Sustainable *Município* project has offered is the 'institutionalisation of exclusion' with the pseudo-agreement of university and civil society representatives.

Sharing-power and loosing-power is the greatest paradox that *Prefeitura* of Benevides faces in being partner of the Sustainable *Município* project. Empowerment means possibility to powerless people access resources, control elements of local government projects and then to make people choices in the context of governance. Although the process of broad-based popular involvement in political structures for good governance improve the effective targeting of resources and Government awareness of local needs, this involvement may address a shift of political power. That is why the *Prefeitura* permanently tries to have control on the activities that the Sustainable *Município* project offers. However, the Sustainable *Município* project has taken some successful achievements that in some way mean power sharing and/or social empowerment. Among others outcomes, the project helped the Benevides to take (a) a socio-spatial analysis aiming to identify the poorest districts in the *município*. From this study, it was

possible to plan social service assistance for teenagers and elderly people that are facing social risk. The project also helped to organise worker cooperatives and a recycling social factory. The idea was to create jobs and income for social vulnerable people. Others activities were also carried out such as local government capacity building and food security and nutrition analysis from a master dissertation.

6 CONCLUSION

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

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

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



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

At local government level, the *Prefeitura* of Benevides staff is constantly trying to preserve its political space and creating an arduous environment for the definition of common aims. This is because *Prefeitura* of Benevides staff makes continuously efforts to put its ideas in practice into the Sustainable *Município* project. However, disputes inside the project not only affect those who are disputing the political space, but mainly affect the poor population who is waiting to have access to university services and actions to contribute for their livelihoods improvement. In fact, sharing-power and losing-power is the greatest paradox that *Prefeitura* of Benevides faces in being partner of the Sustainable *Município* project. In the context of the Sustainable *Município* project, partnership is mediated by social networks which are determined by changing configurations of power. Since the Sustainable *Município* project brings power in new ways, the *Prefeitura* of Benevides staff is always challenging researchers' proposition in terms of open the project to civil society as whole. However, the researchers believe that only through civil society participation, resources will mobilized and an opportunity will be created for forming shared meanings that will increase the chances for the successful implementation of the intervention

A great challenge for the construction of partnership between university, local government and civil society has been its capacity to change the partners thinking. In fact, they are in a learning process although with paradox issues. It is important to provide incentives for learning from sharing knowledge and experiences. Joint learning starts from the different knowledge that the actors bring to the learning, although these are not necessarily equally valued. The joint perspective implies that the learning is involved in a social process which involves a multiplicity of actors and relations. Joint

learning in development projects is always situated in a context of who enact the knowledge. Following the dominant view of knowledge, a partner is learning by participating in, creating and recreating continuously a particular project. It means that the reality can be learned collectively leading to an increased capacity to manage changes.

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(Endnotes)

¹ A preliminary version of this paper was presented at 2ème Congrès TRANSFORMARE 19-20 mars 2012, Paris.

² The authors recognise that civil society is a broad concept. However, in this paper civil society is understood in oversimplified way. Civil society is represented by local organisations (associations, cooperatives, workers unions and others) that defend interests and demands of local people.

³ The lowest political-administrative level of the Brazilian Government structure. It comprises its own local Government and legislative bodies. Geographically, it involves urban and rural areas.

⁴ Political-economic relationship where the powerless becomes the 'client' and the 'dependent' of a powerful political group and commits his/her political support and vote.

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⁵ The foundation of constructivism includes the work of Jean Piaget (1955) and Lev Vygotsky (1978). Piaget's idea of constructivism was based on his view of the psychological development of children's thinking using logical reasoning. Constructivism theory developed by Vygotsky states that children learn concepts from their everyday notions and from adult concepts through interaction with teachers and their contextual settings.

⁶ Berger and Luckmann (1966) influenced the analysis of the term social construction when they argued that everything we know is in fact the product of socialisation and the consistent reinforcement of the learned definitions of reality.