

THE CITY, THE FOREST AND THE CENTER: MANAUS CONFIGURATIONAL ANALISYS

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Short paper with poster

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Abstract

This paper is an exploratory study presenting a configurational analysis of Manaus – a Brazilian city located in the middle of the Amazon Forest, in the North portion of the country – focusing on its centre. Cultural and architectural issues are raised, as well as historical ones.

Introduction

Brazilian official Amazon rainforest occupies about 63% of national territory (510 million hectares); it has a green area equivalent to 22% of Earth's reserves and there is located 25% of water resources available. According to scientists, the Amazon concentrates more than 20% of known species in the world, what turns the area into the richest natural land in the planet, mostly because its biodiversity.

Unexpectedly, for most people, in the middle of this greenish jungle is settled a metropolis with over 2,1 million inhabitants, in a clear situation of contradiction between built environment and natural landscape. Manaus is one of Brazilian greatest metropolis, where is placed a powerful tax-free industrial zone. Nowadays, international tourism is developing and dozens of jungle hotels recently opened are redirecting politics and strategies toward a sustainable point of view.

In a historical approach, 335 years separate the foundation of *Forte de São José do Rio Negro* village – former Manaus denomination – to present time, and in this period people from Manaus – known as *manauaras* – saw the growth of a rich and special Brazilian cultural and architectural heritage. Hundreds of ancient houses, preserved buildings, original squares and monuments – built in a great variety of styles, defined a peculiar urban scenery. Contributes the fact the city has suffered influence from British people from 1880 to 1913 during the “Rubber Age”, when iron bridges, the downtown planning, the customs building, the downtown sewage farm and the complex of the harbour quay, which have been preserved so far, were built.

Manaus city settlement was defined by two axis: the river and the forest. Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and English settlers were there and finally, from the end of 19th century on, migrants from all over Brazil, specially from Northeastern region (*arigós*) and São Paulo state (*paulistas*).

Taking into account these preliminary information, the following analysis will be conducted considering space syntax theory: this study deals with the nature of social and spatial issues in the city centre and how aspects of urban physical structure may define a *peculiar* way of life. In other words, it is intended to understand how open spaces in Manaus dialogue and/or influence people movement in urban grid. It is not aimed here to conduct a deep *manauara* structure analysis, but explore whether or not public spaces promote social interaction or direct urban growth.

The analysis

Begging this investigation from Rio Negro riverbank toward West, one can note the city grid layout (Figure 1) points to a city centre much more orthogonal than suburban neighbourhoods, in an evident “vernacular” planned pattern. The more one gets away from downtown, the more sparse and discontinuous is the system.

Insert Figure 1 – City grid layout

Blank areas in the map correspond to the (1) International Airport of Manaus, (2) Federal University of Amazon and (3) Industrial District. In these spaces, pedestrian movement is almost inexistent and, considering the low level of intelligibility there, co-presence is previsible as negative.

In the convexity map, it is possible to identify barriers and convex spaces perimeters (physical restriction or allowance to movement), as also transitions between these and spaces closed/locked, whose accesses are controlled by doors, gates, railings, or any other element marking the distinction between public or private domain.

Regarding city centre's open spaces, selected categories must allow a better comprehension of this interaction between space and society, here understood as a system composed by probable encounters among people. To do this, syntactic theory considers that the human spatial

organisation, in urban or building scale, is defined by co-presence patterns deriving from the dynamism of barriers and permeabilities placement.

As can be seen from graphic analysis, the system of open spaces in the centre is clearly continuous, but it is also constituted by elements that can be identified and be analysed individually, like streets, squares and the most important avenues.

These opened spaces may be – or may not be – intensely fed via transitions born in the interior spaces. In an integrated system, like Manaus centre, we have to fold a small number of corners, in average, to go from a place to another, what seems to be positive to co-presence. The inverse happens in suburbs. As an example of segregated areas, we can list *cul-de-sacs* close to Silva Ramos and Ferreira Pena street.

In the not-intelligible systems, the occupation of pedestrians along lines tends to be random, and the grid does not contribute for a clear differentiation between places in integration terms. The centre of Manaus, because of its vernacular feature, can be considered intelligible and, consequently, more urban.

Continuing the investigation, alongside Ponta Negra beach, where a leisure project was installed, one can notice a sparse amount of entrances in relation to the remaining portion of the city. So we may suggest the intense levels of co-presence in this area is more related to the daily activities than to expected activities of leisure in the public spaces.

In the direction East, also accompanying the riverbank, sparse and discontinuous entries are found due to localisation of the Air base of Manaus, the old international airport of the city, today military airport.

Considering accessibility analysis, the integration map (Figure 2) shows a very powerful line, which connects the city centre to the rest of Manaus. It is important to say this line coincides with the main development axis defined by local government, especially after the transference of local government hall northward.

Insert Figure 2 – Axial map

In integrated systems, integration core tends to spread itself over the urban grid structure, but this is not the situation of Manaus, were a clear polarised area concentrates the most integrated lines. Comparatively, amongst South and North regions, we can say North portion is more formal while South one tends to be more urban.

Regarding land use distribution, big hotels, leisure structure for events, stadiums, *bumbódromo* and others tend to be located far downtown. Close or inside the centre perimeter are placed churches, schools, commerce and retail, public hospitals and other buildings like the Public Library, and the Amazon Theatre. The variety of labels is immense: banks, intense commerce of manufactured products from the tax-free zone, professional and personal services, restaurants, churches, two ports, currency exchange, travel agencies, theatres, cinemas, institutions of education etc. An observation is relevant: the Industrial District creates an intense flow in central Manaus (go-and-return, with great and small trucks), also on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, increasing movement.

Regarding users and visitors categories, people who deal with commerce, in working days, use the built space to develop activities, promoting the social contact. In weekends, cease the functioning of shops and institutions, giving place to tourism activities, strolls of boat, opera in Amazon Theatre square or simple visits.

In the centre of Manaus, intelligibility, as well as the predictability, is high. The absolute number of pedestrians is elevated, mainly in the area next to the tax-free zone commerce and the floating port. Some areas are non-residential, in others, by the other hand, houses are found just in a small number: close to Staircase of Remédios. There is located another port, with regional characteristics and being responsible for the flow connecting Manaus to those villages which are only reached by boat.

Conclusions

The essay shows Manaus with the urban predominance in the particular area of the center of the city. The great rate of the co-presence and the strong visual identity are undeniable, making us conclude from that analysis that Manaus downtown is a dense, profound area, where the space functions as a mechanism to promote social contacts and interaction.

The intense levels of co-presence on the streets are more related to the quotidian life than to the leisure activities at the public spaces; the great space constitution, a balanced structure, and

centered activities at the most integrated areas make Manaus be considered a city whose way of life is almost incomparable.

This exploratory research can contribute to a better comprehension of the urban structure and space in Manaus, serving as a basis or support for proposal of future architectural interventions or preservation of the historic center.

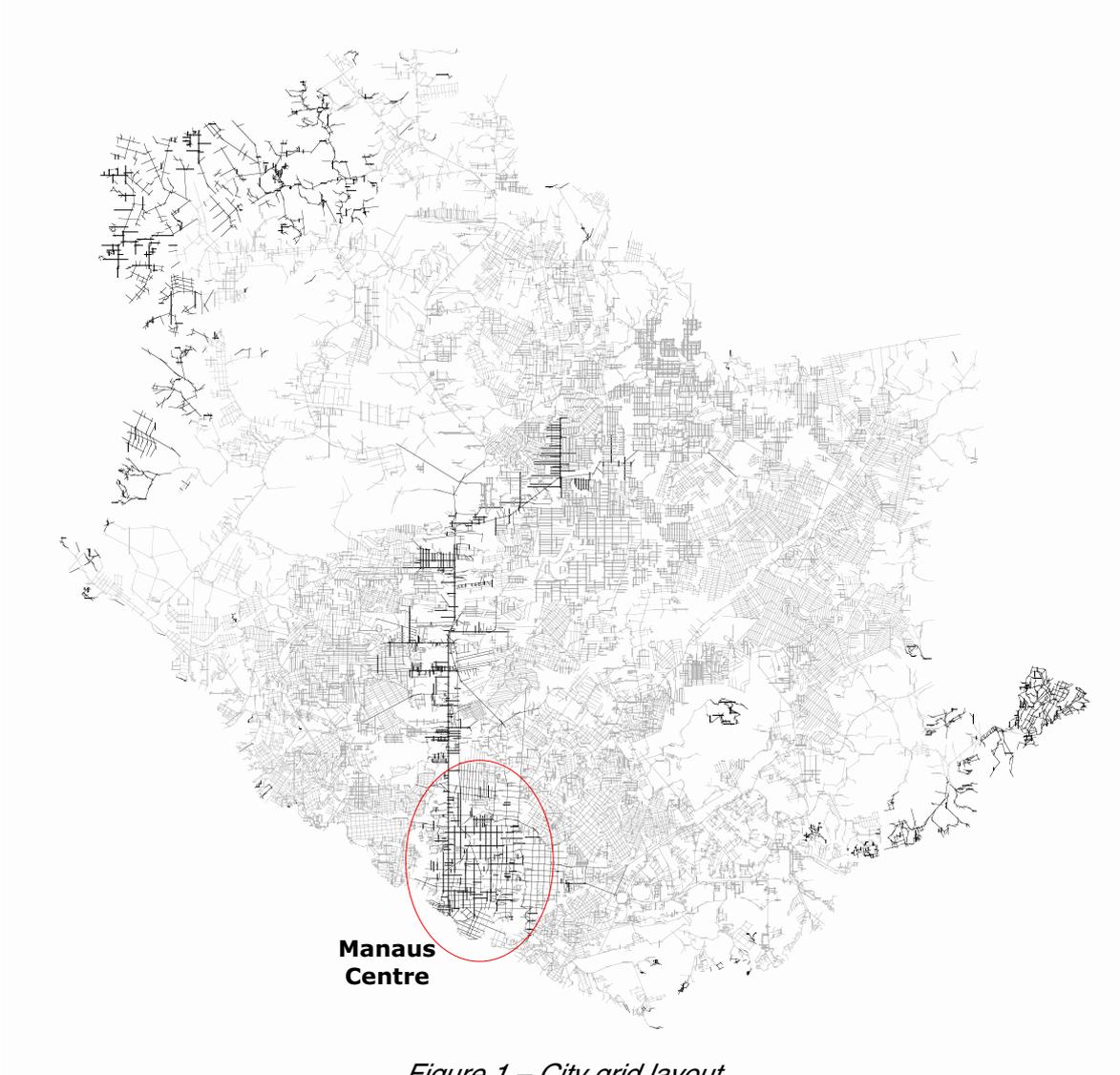


Figure 1 – City grid layout

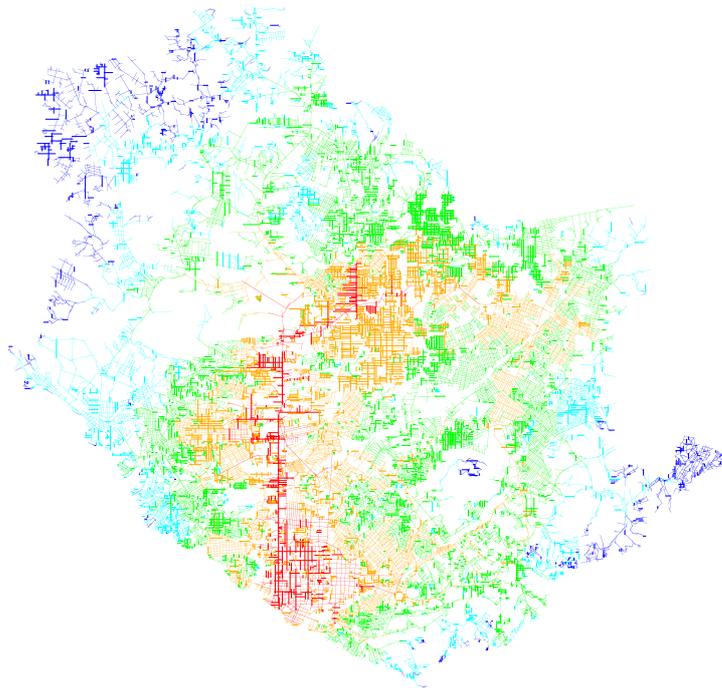


Figure 2 – Manaus axial map