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# ARAGUAÍNA–TO, COMPETITIVE CITY IN THE INTERIOR OF THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON: BETWEEN PRACTICES AND DISCOURSES

ARAGUAÍNA–TO, CIDADE COMPETITIVA NO INTERIOR DA AMAZÔNIA BRASILEIRA: ENTRE PRÁTICAS E DISCURSOS

ARAGUAÍNA–TO, CIUDAD COMPETITIVA DENTRO DE LA AMAZONIA BRASILEÑA: ENTRE PRÁCTICAS Y DISCURSOS

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**ABSTRACT:** Araguaína – TO is problematized, as a competitive city, considering the urban diversity in the Brazilian Amazon, as well as its socio-historical condition, which gives it regional protagonism. To this end, we handle the concept of the medium-sized city proposed in Trindade-Júnior (2015) and the theories of Lever and Turok (1999) on competitive city, also focusing on the conceptual framework on marketing of cities. Methodologically, we mobilized data on the concentration of companies and jobs, cold storage plants/slaughterhouses, as well as global economic partners, values and types of exports; and we demonstrate how these commercial practices attest to regional insertion and protagonism. We also mobilized different discursive materialities from the last three municipal administrations of the city (from 2013 to 2024), given our interest in the official discursive production concerning the marketing of the cities. The analysis show the contiguous relationship between practices and discourses regarding Araguaína as an attractive city, being authorized, in terms of meanings, by the discourse of the organization of its spaces.

**Keywords:** Competitive city. Araguaína. Brazilian Amazon.

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**RESUMO:** Problematizamos Araguaína – TO, como cidade competitiva, considerando a urbanodiversidade na Amazônia brasileira, bem como sua condição sócio-histórica, que lhe confere protagonismo regional. Para tanto, manuseamos o conceito de cidade média proposto em Trindade-Júnior (2015) e as teorizações de Lever e Turok (1999) sobre cidade competitiva, tendo também como foco o arcabouço conceitual sobre *marketing* das cidades. Metodologicamente, mobilizamos dados sobre concentração de empresas e empregos, plantas frigoríficas/abatedouros, bem como sobre parceiros econômicos globais, valores e tipologia das exportações; e demonstramos como essas práticas comerciais atestam inserção e protagonismo regional. Também, mobilizamos diferentes materialidades discursivas das três últimas gestões municipais da cidade (de 2013 a 2024), dado o nosso interesse na produção discursiva oficial em torno desse *marketing* das cidades. As análises mostram a relação contígua entre práticas e discursos sobre Araguaína como cidade atrativa, sendo autorizada, em termos de sentidos, pelo discurso da organização de seus espaços.

**Palavras-chave:** Cidade competitiva. Araguaína. Amazônia brasileira.

**RESUMEN:** Problematizamos Araguaína - TO, como ciudad competitiva, considerando la diversidad urbana de la Amazonía brasileña, así como su condición socio-histórica, que le otorga protagonismo regional. Para ello, manejamos el concepto de ciudad media propuesto en Trindade-Júnior (2015) y las teorías de Lever y Turok (1999) sobre ciudad competitiva, centrándonos también en el marco conceptual sobre marketing de ciudades. Metodológicamente, movilizamos datos sobre concentración de empresas y empleos, cámaras frigoríficas/mataderos, así como socios económicos globales, valores y tipos de exportaciones; y demostramos cómo estas prácticas comerciales atestiguan la inserción y el protagonismo regional. También movilizamos diferentes materialidades discursivas de las últimas tres administraciones municipales de la ciudad (de 2013 a 2024), dado nuestro interés por la producción discursiva oficial en torno a este marketing de ciudades. Los análisis muestran la relación contigua entre prácticas y discursos sobre Araguaína como ciudad atractiva, siendo autorizada, en términos de significados, por el discurso de la organización de sus espacios.

**Palabras clave:** Ciudad competitiva. Araguaína. Amazonía brasileña.

## INTRODUCTION

The literature on Brazilian urbanization has as one of its most significant references the set of interpretative propositions presented by Milton Santos (2017, 2018, 2020). Problematized in Sposito (1999), his work is also a reference for studies on cities in the Amazon, such as those by Trindade-Junior (2011, 2015). Considering these observations, we state that the perception of the region as a synonym of equally homogeneous spaces and social dynamics referenced in fragmented occupation that presents itself limited to the notion of a repository of biodiversity and commodities for the world is significantly questioned by works that deal with

their specificities, their internal interactions, and links with national and global economies. The literature mentions the difficulty of “recognizing” it based on endogenous attributes”<sup>5</sup> (TRINDADE JÚNIOR 2015, p. 306); and the unfolding of many proposals for integrating the region via government development plans for industrial and consumer markets in the center-south of Brazil and in the northern hemisphere are pointed out by Becker (2009), by Cardoso and Muller (2008), by Fonseca (2007) and by Rodrigues (2014).

Such initiatives, presented by the literature as developmental policies according to Fonseca and Monteiro (2007), with Dathein (2015), with Fonseca and Salomão (2017), as well as with Salomão (2017), have their consequences summarized in Becker (2001), when pointing out the implantation of what he calls the technical-political mesh from the perspective of understanding the “space as isotropic and homogeneous, with profound disregard for social and ecological differences, had extremely perverse effects in the areas where it was implanted”<sup>6</sup> (BECKER, 2001, p. 141).

The negative evaluations of the development plans implemented during the 1970s and 1980s brought about the need to structure new public policies for the Amazon referenced by the so-called sustainable development. Thus, the programs with an environmental focus implemented since the beginning of the 1990s, such as the *Programa Nacional de Meio Ambiente* I and II and the SPRN (*Subprograma de Política de Recursos Naturais*)<sup>7</sup>, linked to the PPG-7 (*Programa Piloto de Proteção das Florestas*)<sup>8</sup>, are addressed in Siqueira (2006) and in Kohlhepp (2018) from the perspective of strengthening Brazilian regulatory and environmental protection institutions via national and international funding. However, the apparent dichotomy between the models referenced in commodity production and sustainability is approached under critical interpretation in Loureiro (2009) and in Da Fonte (2017), who consider such propositions as a continuum, since “they only have different denominations (...) are linked to the dynamics of capital in order to appropriate natural wealth, privileging large international corporations”<sup>9</sup> (DA FONTE, 2017, p. 104).

The dispute of perspectives and of their speeches about the Amazon are here observed; parameters of integration to biodiversity and protagonism of traditional ways of life are opposed to the scientifically parameterized hyper-productivity model of agropastoral and mining activities referenced by national and international capital. Two notions synthesize the conception of the Amazon, according to the discourses and interpretations that are structured on and from it. The first of these notions concerns the understanding of the so-called volatile frontier proposed by Rabello (2013), who, when mobilizing the concept of frontier, resorts to reference approaches formulated by Ariovaldo Umbelino de Oliveira (1993), by Otávio Guilherme Velho (1979), by João Pacheco de Oliveira Filho (1979), by Bertha Koiffmann Becker (1990) and by José de Souza Martins (1997); the thesis that is formulated is that border is representation and subject to cuts and homogenizations. Therefore, “the border is volatile. That is, it can be diluted in the air, depending on the interests at stake in the dispute for hegemony and meaning”<sup>10</sup> (RABELLO, 2013, p. 234).

The second notion, also linked to representations, concerns the analysis of the *Planos de Desenvolvimento da Amazônia*<sup>11</sup> (PDAs). Within the scope of this notion,

speeches are highlighted, in order to thematize a character region, understood as “an entity that needed to be occupied, developed, sustained, protected and the strategies (...) contained in the plans that benefited the Amazonians regardless of genres of life, social class (...)”<sup>12</sup>. (NAHUM, 2019, p. 18).

Diversity is observed in the discourses and in the interpretive perspectives, as well as in the literature, whose proposal is to constitute readings about the different dynamics present in the Amazon. The discussion about Amazonian cities is part of this context, especially if we consider the statement made by Trindade-Júnior (2011) about the urban issue: “the reading of regional reality is recurrent as if cities did not assume so much importance, or even, as if different types and levels of cities were not part of regional urban diversity”<sup>13</sup> (TRINDADE-JÚNIOR, 2011, p. 136). Therefore, we share the perspective proposed by Trindade-Júnior (2011) that it is possible to approach urban dynamics in the Amazon, highlighting the different demographic configurations and interactions with the urban network both in its surroundings and in other regions of the country and the world.

Considering the context exposed up to this point, we propose as an objective for this article to discuss the city of Araguaína, located in the north of the state of Tocantins and 380 km away from the capital Palmas, as a competitive city verifying its practices and discourses. To achieve this objective, we are based in a concept and three variables that will be structured from secondary data on production chains and the profile of industries in Tocantins provided by FIETO; and the speeches formulated by the local public power in its institutional channels of communication. The concept of competitive city that we take as a reference concerns the

the degree to which cities can produce goods and services which meet the test of wider regional, national and international markets, while simultaneously increasing real incomes, improving the quality of life for citizens and promoting development in a manner which is sustainable (LEVER; TUROK, 1999, p. 792).

In addition to economic growth, quality of life, income distribution and sustainability must be observed. The three variables adopted are the following: 1) dynamics of economic production of Araguaína from its insertion in the animal protein production chain and its relations with foreign trade; and the concentration of companies and the generation of formal jobs in the state of Tocantins. It is worth mentioning that this variable refers to practices and will be presented as a result of the research 2) the discussions about the competitiveness and marketing of cities and 3) the institutional discourses produced by the local public power, which will also be presented as a practice and, therefore, a research result. Therefore, the text is structured in 5 parts. First, this introduction which now ends; the second, that will discuss Araguaína in the Legal Amazon and the networks for the circulation of goods; the third will address competitive cities, the marketing of cities and their conceptualizations; the fourth part will expose different discursive materialities produced by municipal management, in order to build our interpretation gestures, focusing on the discursivity of a competitive city; the fifth and last part presents our final thoughts.

## ARAGUAÍNA-TO IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

The territorial ordering of the Amazon from which Araguaína originates and also influences begins in a time frame significantly prior to the phenomenon of urbanization. According to Trindade-Júnior (2015), it is necessary to refer to the social production of the Amazonian space in moments that preceded the Portuguese occupation processes during the 17th century, since “diverse societies existing there were already responsible not only for the formation of a socially produced space, as by a given configuration of the territory”<sup>14</sup> (TRINDADE JÚNIOR, 2015, p. 307). The lack of consensus around such a perspective related to native peoples as protagonists of the Amazonian socio-spatial structuring contributes to the perception of the region as an empty space, whose biodiversity would not find parallel in urban social relations marked by the context in which they coexist “in conflict or harmony, indigenous populations with rubber tappers, transplanted settlers from the south or northeast of the country with riverine caboclos, agricultural mega-enterprises with incipient family production (...)”<sup>15</sup> (BECKER, 1999, p. 3).

The diversity of actors and different perspectives of proposals and models for the management and development of Amazonian territorial planning results in new relationships and typologies of urban spaces. The installation, from the second half of the 20th century, of road and rail corridors allowed the “incorporation of new spaces into the circuits of capital”<sup>16</sup> (MONTEIRO and COELHO, 2011, p. 37). The Belém-Brasília highway, whose construction dates back to the 1960s, cuts through the urban perimeter of Araguaína and is considered a “primitive accumulation mechanism that allowed agropastoral expansion in its extensive pattern, immediately attracted the pioneer front based on the production of rice, corn and cattle”<sup>17</sup> (BECKER, 1978, p. 113). Such variables result in intra-regional dynamism, which, according to the objective proposed for this work, allows us to reaffirm “an Amazon where the diversity of small and medium-sized cities arouses attention in understanding the current regional framework”<sup>18</sup> (TRINDADE-JÚNIOR, 2011, p. 136).

According to the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*<sup>19</sup> (IBGE), the population of Araguaína, estimated for the year 2021, is 186,245 people and classified by the same Institute as regional capital C in the REGIC 2018 (IBGE, 2020). The atypical demographic growth, with comparatively much higher rates than the state of Tocantins and Brazil, over the last two decades, is one of the characteristics of Araguaína and equally justifies it as a space to be problematized. Through Table 1, we will present the comparative data on the demographic growth of Brazil, Tocantins and Araguaína:

**Table 1** - Demographic growth of Araguaína in comparative perspective with Brazil and Tocantins.

	2000*	2010*	2020**	Growth 2010/2020	Growth 2000/2020
Brazil	169.590.693	190.755.799	211.755.692	11%	24,86%
Tocantins	1.155.913	1.383.445	1.590.248	14,94%	37,57%
Araguaína	113.143	150.484	183.381	21,46%	62,07%

Source: IBGE Cidades. Prepared by the authors. \* census 2000 and 2010 (IBGE); \*\* estimated population 2020 (IBGE).

Considering the discussions on medium-sized cities in Amorim Filho and Serra (2001), in Mata and Motta (2008), in Sodré and Ramires (2017), in Leite, Pacífico Filho and Pires (2021), in Lima (2017) and in Pacífico Filho, Borges, Teles and Cançado (2020), we observed that some variables present themselves as structuring: links with road transport, constitution of areas of influence, discussion of intra-urban space, connection with intra and extra regional metropolises and international commodity markets. Having participated in such discussions, we mention the following understanding for medium-sized cities to which we affiliate in this work, namely:

are defined, notably, by their importance and their respective insertions in the regional scenario and, *ipso facto*, are characterized mainly by the relative density of fixed lines and flows that meet not only local demands but are the result of combinations of influences and determinations from different scales, including the global level<sup>20</sup> (TRINDADE-JÚNIOR, 2015, p. 307).

Located on the margins of Highway BR-153, Araguaína has population characteristics, insertion and regional protagonism, marked by the equidistance of large metropolises in the North, Northeast and Midwest regions; and links with international trade chains that allow it to be classified as a medium-sized city. The next three graphic representations demonstrate the contextualization of the municipality from its location in the Brazilian Amazon, its economic dynamics considering the production chain of animal protein, the concentration of companies and jobs.

Located in the north of the state of Tocantins, Araguaína is equidistant in approximately 1,000 km from metropolises in the northern region, Belém; from the Midwest, Goiânia and Brasília; and from the northeast, São Luís. Such positioning gives it the possibility of regional protagonism and affirmation of the Amazonian urban diversity proposed in Trindade Júnior (2011). Let's see Figure 1:

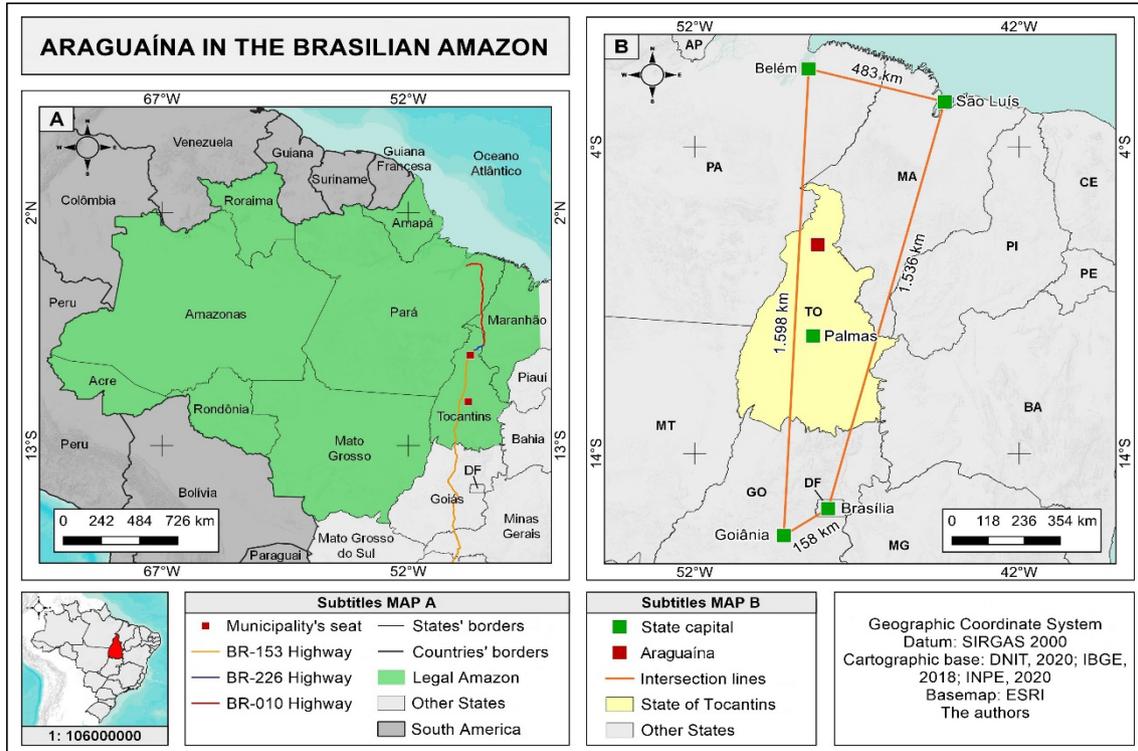
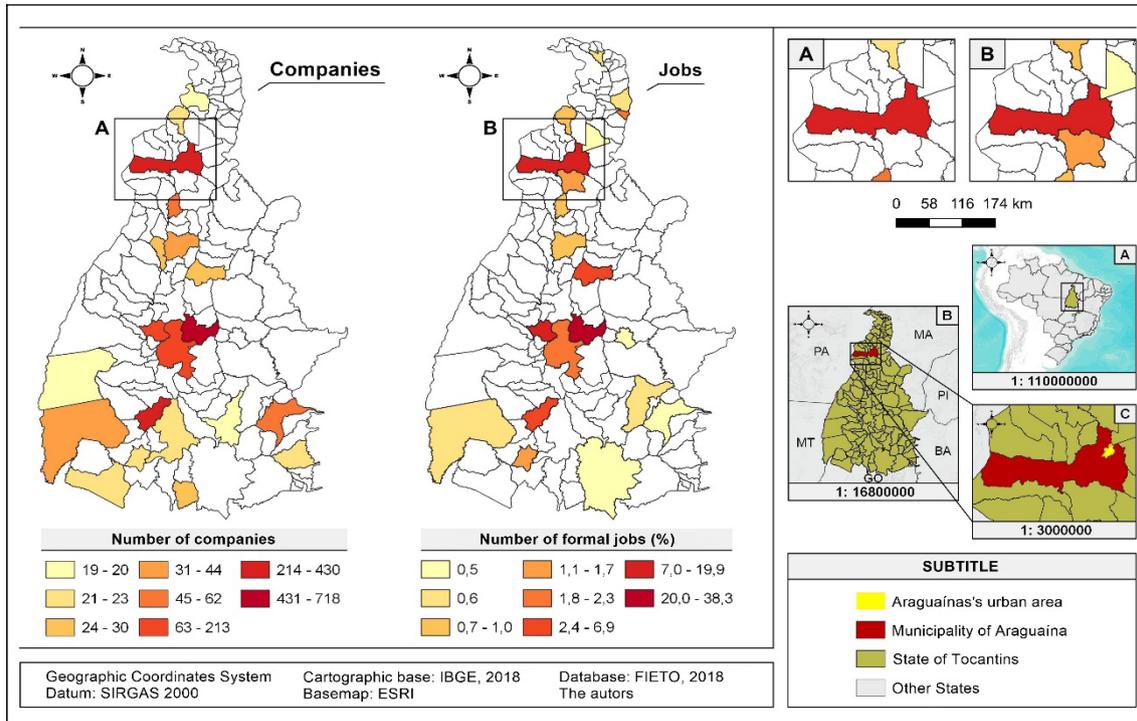


Figure 1. Araguaína in the Brazilian Amazon.

Regarding business activities and job creation, the *Perfil da Indústria do Tocantins – FIETO*<sup>21</sup> (2018) shows that, among the 20 municipalities with the highest number of jobs, Araguaína occupies the 2nd position behind only the capital Palmas. The same pattern is repeated when considering the 20 municipalities that generate the highest percentages of formal employment, data whose spatialization is shown in the following representation:



**Figure 2.** Concentration of companies and formal jobs in Tocantins and Araguaína.

The business dynamics and job creation are aligned with foreign trade networks guided by the production of commodities. In this aspect, Araguaína is part of the animal protein and beef production chain, as it is part of the group of largest beef producers in the state of Tocantins. The presence of three meatpacking plants in the municipality stands out, which gives it an atypical character, since, according to *the Associação das Indústrias Exportadoras de Carnes*<sup>22</sup> (ABIEC), its members are responsible for the production of 92% of the meat exported to global markets and the presence of similar establishments is registered in only 121 Brazilian municipalities. The data provided by the *Ministério da Indústria, Comércio Exterior e Serviços*<sup>23</sup>, via the COMEX STAT portal, allow us to visualize commercial partnerships on a global scale. This context is presented in the following three illustrations that expose: livestock production and cold storage plants/slaughterhouses in Araguaína, global economic partners, values and typology of exports:

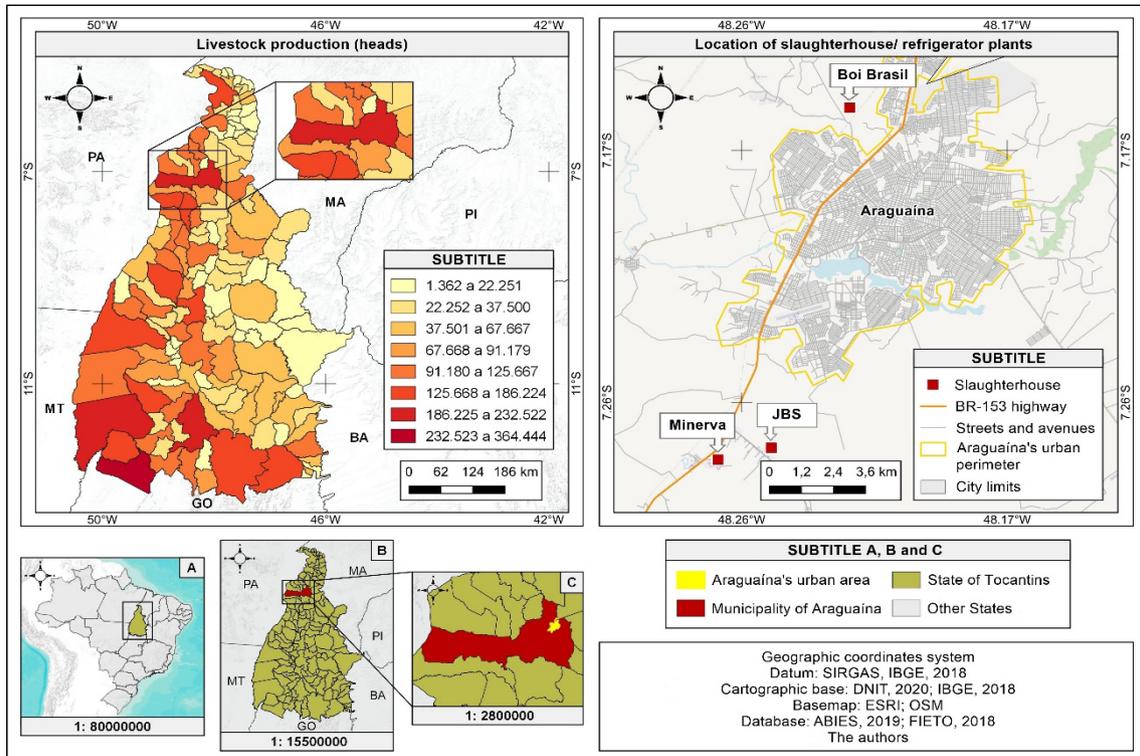
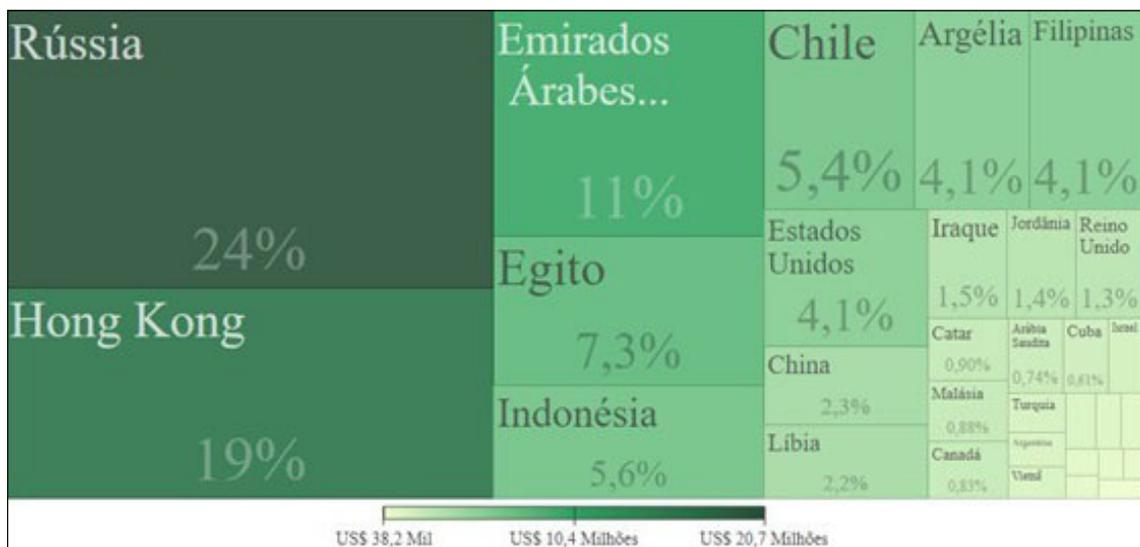


Figure 3. Meat production chain in Tocantins and Araguaína, cold storage plants.

The structuring of production mentioned above finds global connections, when considering that, according to data extracted from the Comex Stat portal, it appears for the year 2020 that Araguaína exported US\$ 84.83 million, occupying the 370th place in the export ranking of Brazilian municipalities. Next Figures 4 and 5 show the main trading partners in the world, as well as the typology of exported products.



Source: Comexstat. Available at Comex Stat - ComexVis (mdic.gov.br).

Figure 4. Araguaína – TO, exports and partner countries. Year 2020.



Source: Comexstat. Available at Comex Stat - ComexVis (mdic.gov.br).

Figura 5<sup>24</sup>. Araguaína – TO, typology of exported products.

The aforementioned capitalist production relations allow us to reaffirm our analytical perspective, that is, to observe the dynamics of competitiveness imprinted in the actions and discourses of the management of a medium-sized city in the interior of the Legal Amazon. This because:

to explore these marked differences in regional performance further, we examine the differing types of industries that constitute a regional economy. The distribution of economic activity by industry over geography reveals three different broad types of industries, with very different patterns of spatial competition and different drivers of locational behavior. Distinguishing them is essential in testing hypotheses about regional performance. (PORTER, 2003, p. 559).

The dynamics presented are linked to a series of institutional discourses issued by the local government, duly presented in the following topics, and that allow us to support the objective of this work, namely, to what extent Araguaína can be understood as a competitive city from the verification of its practices and discourses that are built from it.

## COMPETITIVE CITIES AND THE MARKETING OF CITIES

The discussion about competitive cities and the marketing of cities dates back to the late 1980s; reflections on the limits and possibilities of local protagonism are also from this same period, considering the economic recession of the 1970s. Questions that are current and relevant also for this work were presented as follows: “to what extent, despite the constraints of all kinds to which they are subjected, can municipal governments significantly alter the alienating and miserable daily life of the vast majority of citizens?”<sup>25</sup> (VAINER, 1986, p. 13).

The debate is linked to the notion of scale, whose preponderant questions are found in the field of Geography; and that, in urban and regional studies, it receives theoretical and methodological contributions from different areas such as Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology, Economics and History, resulting in “a series of other expressions in the current production of Social Sciences in general. Globalization, regional blocks (...) local development, local power (...) competition between places and cities (...)”<sup>26</sup> (VAINER, 2006, p. 9).

Thus, the debates between globalist and localist perspectives unfold, the latter interpretative aspect referenced in the propositions of Borja and Castells (1997) for the Istanbul Conference; the power of localities and the insertion of cities in the dispute for global markets are affirmed. Also linked to the last aspect, local power, the so-called marketing of places or marketing of cities is structured as an interpretative proposal in the field of studies on the urban issue.

The possible contradictions in the processes of accentuation of the promotion of development with a focus on the locality find place in the following proposition: “market forces tend to increase and not decrease inequalities between regions (...) namely, due to the effect of migrations, of capital and trade movements”<sup>27</sup> (CABUGUEIRA, 2000, p. 111). A similar interpretative perspective on the possibilities of accentuating regional inequalities from the competitiveness of places is demonstrated with the following arguments via work development, whose focus is the analysis of regional inequalities in India: “(...) spatial polarization of development creates economic inequalities, which are accompanied by social inequalities”. (OHLAN, 2013, p. 842).

Competitiveness problematized in the European context, based on its theoretical and political assumptions, receives the following question: “is competitiveness just an entrepreneurial skill to sell or could be a premise of development?” (VOINESCU and MOISOIU, 2015, p. 512). The aforementioned interpretations allow us to resume the objective of this work: observing its practices and discourses to understand Araguaína as a competitive city in the interior of the Brazilian Amazon. An integral part of the competitive perspective, city marketing occupies a place of reference in its operationalization.

The City marketing is affirmed in Sanchéz (2001) as a constitutive element of the so-called new rationality of capitalism through which “space also takes shape through adequate representations and images, which explains the importance it has been acquiring (...) as instrument of urban policies”<sup>28</sup> (SANCHEZ, 2001, p. 31). We emphasize that city marketing has been presented over the last few decades as an integral tool in the list of instruments for managing local power (SANCHEZ, 1999). Considering the transformations implemented in Curitiba and Barcelona, Sanchez (2001) seeks references in Bourdieu & Wacquant (2000) to interpret, through the so-called symbolic imperialism, the imposition of certain urban images that can translate investments whose characteristics are spatial and social concentration within urban areas, which, as a rule, reflect the expectations and desires of the middle classes (SANCHEZ, 2001). Constitutive elements of these discourses are the expressions: economic recovery, rebirth of the city and experience of urban services (SANCHEZ, 2010); and the “urban space is transformed into a showcase”<sup>29</sup> (PASQUOTO, 2016, p. 3).

Furthermore, it should be considered that cities are not independent bodies in the political and administrative scenario of nation states, constantly relating to the imposition of the legal apparatus characteristic of state bureaucracies. This dynamic is verified from the following statement: “they are not completely independent entities, subject to many policies and activities planned and implemented from a central level” (KACHNIEWSKA, KOWALSKI, SZCZECH-PIETKIEWICZ, 2018, p. 187). When discussing limits and contradictions about the competitiveness of cities, we summarize, through Table 2, next, elements of urban marketing, which, as one of its pillars, allow us to visualize incongruities:

**Table 2.** Constitutive elements of urban marketing and its negative derivations.

urban marketing elements			
iconic architecture	emblematic events	brands	speech/ slogan/ logo
negative derivation			
architectural and urban standardization	scenario creation	expulsion of the population from the areas that received the interventions	Attraction of tourists, workers and investors out of step with the real offer of opportunities

Source: Pasquoto (2008). Adapted by the authors.

A significant reflection on what is understood as negative derivations can be found in Duarte and Czajkowski Júnior (2007), when they propose discussions about the ethical limits that surround the marketing of cities and when they coin the expression “cities for sale”. It is possible to observe via practices and literature that such procedures, contemporaneously referred to as marketing of places or marketing of cities, are a constitutive instrument of governance that goes back to the origins of the institutions that regulate life in society, that is, “for some time each locality has felt the need to differentiate from others, in order to assert their individuality and distinctive characteristics”<sup>30</sup> (OCKE, 2014, p. 671).

The different temporalities, considering only landmarks linked to contemporaneity, are exemplified through the Conference of European Cities held in 1986 in Rotterdam, whose main proposition was the definition of cities as central promoters of the economy; resulting in the network formed by the 50 most important cities in Europe during the following conference held in Barcelona and constituting the movement of Eurocities (CASTELLS and BORJA, 1996). In Latin America, marketing cases in the cities of Curitiba (BR) and Medellín (COL) during the 1990s and 2000s respectively are highlighted. Next, we summarize the definitions and discussions about competitive cities proposed by international organizations. Let us consider, next, Table 3 with the formulations produced by international organizations on the conceptual framework of competitive cities:

**Table 3.** The definition of competitive cities by international organizations.

World Economic Forum	UN Habitat	The World Bank Group	OECD
City competitiveness can be defined as the set of factors–policies, institutions, strategies and processes – that determines the level of sustainable productivity of a city.	Strategies to enhance competitiveness seek to create mechanisms through which cities:	This report defines a competitive city as one that successfully facilitates its firms and industries to create jobs, raise productivity, and increase the incomes of citizens over time	New modes of entrepreneurial urban governance would be increasingly structured by organisational forms (...)
City Competitiveness Taxonomy:  <b>1. Institutions (how to reform).</b> This is the governance or decision-making framework for competitiveness (...)	Strategies to enhance competitiveness:  <b>Quality of life</b> Quality of life is linked to accessibility and affordability of quality housing, schools and education, civil rights, personal and national security (...)	A framework is proposed for nurturing a competitive city by:  <b>(a)</b> prioritizing firm-level performance,	“Urban entrepreneurialism”, have some distinctive characteristics:  <b>First</b> , it ultimately aims at fostering and encouraging local economic development.
<b>2. Policies and regulation of the business environment (what to reform)</b> The framework of public policies and regulation shaping competitiveness indicates what to reform (...)	<b>Government responsiveness</b> Factors affecting competitiveness include transparency and accountability (...)	<b>(b)</b> considering the determinants of that performance,	<b>Second</b> , while the previous approaches were basically led by the public sector, the new approaches are becoming increasingly market-driven
<b>3. Hard connectivity</b> Infrastructure has been an important factor in city competitiveness	<b>Infrastructure</b> Strategic infrastructure is needed to support transport, logistics, telecommunications and municipal services that significantly affect city competitiveness.	<b>(c)</b> determining the policy levers available to improve performance, and	<b>Third</b> , urban entrepreneurialism involves fundamental change in the attitudes towards, and relationship with, the private sector (...)
<b>4. Soft connectivity</b> Soft connectivity is the social capital that makes investments in hard infrastructure and new technology more productive	<b>Human resources development</b> High levels of human capital give cities competitive advantage	<b>(d)</b> combining the scope and capacity of the city public administration with private partnerships and intergovernmental leverage	<b>Lastly</b> , policy planning in the new approaches shows strong characteristics once distinctive to private businesses, such as risk-taking, inventiveness, promotional and profit motivation

Source: World Economic Forum (2014); UN Habitat (2015); The World Bank Group (2015); OECD (2007).

Adapted by the authors.

Competitive cities, marketing of cities and marketing of places are elements that, according to our interpretive perspective, are present in the speeches and symbologies created by the public power of the municipality of Araguaína. We chose the year 2017 as a timeframe and the creation of the official channel on the Youtube network entitled *Investe Araguaína*; in the next topic we will proceed to the analysis of the emitted speeches, slogans and symbologies.

## OFFICIAL SPEECHES, SLOGANS AND MEANINGS

In this section, not losing sight of the theoretical considerations up to this point in the text, we will mobilize different official discursive materialities, with the objective of understanding how Araguaína is signified as a competitive city in the interior of the Brazilian Amazon. We are interested, more closely, in the discursive functioning of what urban marketing is concerning Araguaína, thus particularizing one of the specific elements that is the triad “discourse/slogan/logo” (PASQUOTO, 2008).

Thinking about this triad, analytically, puts us in the place of theoretical dialogue based on Discourse Analysis (DA) formulated by Michel Pêcheux and his interlocutors, in France, in the 1990s. In Brazil, this field was (and is) densely practiced by many scholars; in particular, we mention Eni Orlandi, considering her role in the diffusion and transformation of DA from her gestures of (re)formulation of theory in the Brazilian intellectual space.

As an effect of the theoretical dialogue, the aforementioned triad will be approached in the light of the expression “discursive materiality”. This is because discursive materiality presupposes the gesture of verbal and/or non-verbal formulation in which a concrete act reveals the materialization of the text itself. The subject, under certain broader socio-historical and ideological conditions, formulates the text in its materiality. Articulated to this gesture of formulation, there is the constitution of meanings, that is, there are meanings already formulated and in circulation in society. And it is this constitution of meanings that enables, in historicity, the gestures of reformulation. As a third constitutive dimension of the production of the senses, there is circulation, based on the specific conjuncture of the senses.

The discursive materialities analyzed in this text are mobilized from different official discursive practices of the municipal management of Araguaína, such as: official website of the city hall, *Investe Araguaína* channel on Youtube, imagery texts alluding to this channel and imagery text with the slogan of the last three municipal administrations (from 2013 to 2024). From the DA’s point of view, it is worth noting that these materialities constitute our research archive, presupposing our gesture of selection and composition of the material for analysis.

In the wake of Guilhaumou and Maldidier (2016[1986], p. 116), our affiliation to the definition of archive is relevant, as it allows us to think of “a reading that reveals devices, significant configurations”. Seeking to articulate such considerations to the discursive materialities to be focused, we can say that the materialities are inserted in a larger functioning, which is to build Araguaína, as a competitive city in the interior of the Brazilian Amazon. It is not for nothing that, inscribed in the discourses of urban marketing, we are interested in the aforementioned triad. And this triad can show, from our gestures of interpretation, “devices, significant configurations”.

Once our research archive is constituted, in the light of the objective proposed in this article, our next analytical procedure is to establish the criteria for the constitution of the *corpus*, that is, what will be particularized, from the discursive materialities, to actually be analyzed. The materialities are structured by the articulation between verbal

language (words, which form statements) and non-verbal language (images through the superposition of photographs, illustrations). Affiliated to DA, we are interested in the way these materialities mean, not losing sight of the discursivity of competitive cities.

In the tone of our arguments, the discursive matrix of competitive cities operates effects and coercion in territorial planning, causing dynamics to intervene in the urbanization process. Public spaces are dimensioned by the organization's discourse, that is, they are envisaged by the organization of empirical and/or abstract spaces, implying actions of planning and (re)construction of the city's infrastructure.

Our procedure for analyzing discursive materialities is based on two interdependent steps: (1) description of materiality, in view of the verbal discursive sequences (SDV) and the imagery discursive sequences (SDI), to be highlighted after the presentation of the figures with each discursive materiality; (2) interpretation of the sequences, based on the way they produce meanings for Araguaína's discursivity as a competitive city. The fact that the discursive materialities come from different spaces of circulation highlights the symbolic force of this discursivity.

Let's see, next, the first discursive cut (RD) of our analysis work:



Source: <https://www.araguaina.to.gov.br/portal/index.php>

**Figure 6.** Screenshot of the top of the Araguaína City Hall official website.

Based on this RD, we then specify the verbal and imagery discursive sequences to be focused on in our interpretation gestures. We are not interested in focusing on all aspects of materiality. Our investment in the research archive, as we have already highlighted, is limited to analyzing the discursive production on Araguaína as a competitive city. Here are the speech sequences:

SDV1: “The economic capital of Tocantins”.

SDV2: “Araguaína City Hall”.

SDI1: Araguaína flag on the left side of the image.

SDI2: illustration of the map of the State of Tocantins, showing the location of the municipality of Araguaína; the names of the State of Pará and Maranhão are mentioned, in order to locate some geographic limits of Tocantins with other States. This illustration is in the center of the image.

SDI3: juxtaposition of images on two planes. In the first, the following images appear: a group

of cattle and, right next to it, a locomotive. In the background, there is: a two-lane highway, making us believe that it is the BR-153; horizontal constructions and sparse buildings.

SDV1 highlights the slogan that circulated, as part of the marketing of municipal management, between the years 2017 to 2020. Although the current management (from 2021 to 2024) has the slogan “City that does not stop”, as part of the visual identity of the marketing, is that slogan that still appears on the official website. A look at other tabs on the site allows us to highlight that the city hall’s website has been updated with information about the management in progress.

The permanence of this formulation makes some senses work, inscribed in the narrative of Araguaína as a competitive city. It works with the memory that, although Palmas is the administrative capital of the State of Tocantins, Araguaína assumes a leading role as economic capital, based on its economic dynamics. Previously, we mobilized some formulations on the production of animal protein (beef) and on the generation of jobs in Araguaína; when we make a cross-reference between economic practices and discourses about Araguaína, we begin to perceive the symbolic strength of this contiguity.

As we are also interested in the discursive production of Araguaína as a competitive city, we perceive that the official discourse produces an erasure of other meanings about the city, legitimizing those circumscribed to the economic sphere. Discursively, this functioning of the sayable and the erasure of meanings is only possible because language is political. That is, language enables the unequal division of meanings in a society where some meanings are said and others are not.

Of the many and disparate feelings about Araguaína, why the legitimation of those inscribed in the economic perspective? Above all, why the maintenance of this slogan as an integral part of the visual identity of a supposed new management? As already highlighted, the management (from 2021 to 2024) took on another slogan, but this is the one on the city hall’s website.

As an effect of the discursive contradiction operating from this slogan, a question is (im)posed: For whom is Araguaína the economic capital? The contradiction lies in the fact that, despite proposing the narrative of the city as attractive, economic opportunities are limited to specific social groups. In the words of urban marketing, it is about thinking about negative derivations. There is, at work, the mismatch between: (1) projected attraction and (2) offer of feasible opportunities.

In the tone of our argument, we understand that this contradiction is constitutive and insuperable of the effects of the rationality of capitalism. This is because the discursivities put into circulation about cities point to the mechanism of power that local administrations have. To this extent, some urban images come to have symbolic protagonism.

Our research archive was created with the aim of showing the discursive functioning of some of these narratives about Araguaína as a competitive city. Our gesture of interpretation permeates the approach of verbal and imagery materiality, making the circulation of memory traces about the city in focus operate. This approach does not lose

sight of certain production conditions and specific circumstances surrounding Araguaína. It is not for nothing that we thematized the perspective of this city in the context of the formation of the Brazilian Amazon.

SDV2 and SDI1 present, respectively, sayings and images that represent the Araguaína flag. It is a way of identifying the city hall page, based on the official discourse on the institution of municipal flags and on their use in official practices. On the opposite side of the flag, images appear, whose verbal descriptions appear through SDI2 and SDI3.

SDI2 appears at the top center of the official website. The image in focus puts into perspective the discursivity of the geographic location of the municipality of Araguaína in the State of Tocantins, highlighting the territorial limits with two important states (Pará and Maranhão). This image puts in perspective, above all, Araguaína's narrativity with intra and extra regional connections. Here is one of the important aspects to propose Araguaína's discourse as a medium-sized city.

To highlight two of the geographic limits of Tocantins, where Araguaína fulfills the role of influence, is to work on the connection areas. Through Figure 1 presented above, more precisely from the intersection lines, we notice Araguaína's perspective being signified in its regional protagonism and in an Amazonian urban diversity. When comparing SDI2 with SDI3, we realize that the images put into official circulation ("two-lane highway", "cattle group", "locomotive" and "sparse buildings") reiterate the narrative of urban diversity. These are imagery elements that trigger traces of the urbanization of spaces and the Amazonian territorial organization.

If we look in retrospect at Monteiro and Coelho's (2011) considerations, we will notice that road and rail corridors assume relevant features for the "circuits of capital". There is, in this image, the representation of these two themed corridors, as memory operators. Therefore, these corridors participate in the discursive meaning of Araguaína as a competitive city; the influence and connection of the city is attested at different scales.

The slogan in focus, on the website, points to an intra-state economic protagonism, not forgetting to emphasize the areas of external influence. The images, especially the SDI2 and SDI3, attest to other scales of economic protagonism. This is the case, for example, of the animal protein production chain, in line with the aforementioned. The representation of the group of oxen shows, for example, the international scale.

Continuing our analysis work, we will present, below, one of the posters for the dissemination of the "Investe Araguaína" Project, launched in 2017, at the *Feira de Tecnologia Agropecuária do Tocantins*<sup>31</sup> (Agrotins, 2017). On the YouTube platform, a channel of the same name was created for the dissemination of videos. The Project also relies on other media (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook) as a means of circulating discourses about "Investe Araguaína". Another version of the aforementioned poster was adapted for these media, with minor image differences. We will mention them later.

Inscribed in our analysis procedure, we will derive the SDV and SDI from the disclosure poster in focus to build our interpretation gestures. Here is Figure 7:



Source: “Investe Araguaína” channel on Youtube.

**Figure 7.** Visual identity of the channel “Investe Araguaína” on Youtube.

SDV1: “Invest Araguaína. This is where Tocantins takes place”.

SDV2: “This is where Tocantins takes place”.

SDV3: “Economic capital of Tocantins”. “Capital of Matopiba”. “Heavy cattle capital”.

SDI1: illustration of an airplane in mid-flight with a path of smoke, converging on the geographic location of Araguaína. There appears a location icon on Google Maps, that is, a sticker, indicating where Araguaína is. The names of the following municipalities appear: “Palmas”, located in Tocantins, “Barreiras”, in Bahia; “Balsas” and “Imperatriz”, in Maranhão; “Marabá” and “Redenção”, in Pará.

SDI2: At the bottom of the poster, there is an illustration of the following elements: “truck traveling on the highway”, “set of oxen”, “complex of metallic vats”, “set of photovoltaic plates” and “fixed crane”.

SDV1 presents a formulation composed of two statements, whose meaning makes work the sense that Araguaína is the place to invest, because the State of Tocantins happens there. The first statement (“Investe Araguaína”) can take on two meanings: (1) as a declaration that someone (“he”, “she”, “you”) invests in Araguaína; (2) as an order for someone (“you”) to invest in Araguaína. Either as an affirmative statement, or as an imperative statement, Araguaína’s discourse as a competitive city continues to operate. The

second statement (“It is here where Tocantins happens”) is formed by the split structure “**Is... where...**”. The occurrence of this structure produces some effects of meaning for the terms placed after the “Is” and after the “where”. Without this structure, the statement would be formulated in these terms: “Here, Tocantins happens”.

This cleaved structure ends up generating a specific semantic property for the cleaved constituents, namely: (1) their specificity, their focus and (3) their effects: of contrast, exclusivity and exhaustiveness. Thus, the specificity and focus at stake, through this formulation, is that Araguaína is the place where the State of Tocantins takes place economically. The verb “to invest”, included in the name of the project launched in 2017, brings to light traces of the discursive memory that Araguaína is interested in in the application of resources, especially financial resources. Out of 139 municipalities in Tocantins, Araguaína is said to be the place for investment, because the state takes place there. The contrast, exclusivity and exhaustiveness, generated with the other municipalities, produce the undeniable effect that Araguaína is the place to invest. Therefore, it is a competitive city.

SDV2 presents the second statement that occurred in SDV1. However, this time, it is inserted in the illustration of the Araguaína map, more precisely in the central part, with a different color from the first occurrence. Before, the wording was white, in order to match the color, also white, of the name “Araguaína”. In the second occurrence, the statement appears in blue color.

SDV3 highlights other formulations, which circulated as an attribution to Araguaína, seeking to produce its symbolic place as capital of the State. Through these three formulations, three aspects stand out (“economic”, “Matopiba” and “heavy cattle”) for which we seek to symbolically build Araguaína’s role. In the scope of these aspects, based on the different scales, Araguaína stands out. There, the effect of exhaustiveness of the positive image about Araguaína is produced.

SDI 1 and 2 express important elements for the discursive production of Araguaína as a competitive city. SDI1, for example, works on the meaning of airport coverage, in Araguaína, in view of the effect that the illustrated plane starts from there. The effect of modernization and ease of access to Araguaína is produced, as an interconnected city. The indication of the names of other municipalities seems to reinforce the effect of the exhaustiveness of Araguaína as a competitive city. This location contrast allows us to glimpse the attribute of influence of the city in focus over the others pointed out in the map illustration. There is the institutionalization of Araguaína as an area of influence.

SDI2 presents the description of images that appear at the bottom of the poster. Not losing sight of the perspective that images are producers of discursive memory, as we are doing throughout this section, we can highlight some meanings at work there.:

(1) the image of the “truck driving on the highway” represents Araguaína’s discursivity with highway coverage; the image shows a highway in good condition. If the image of the plane, in the central part of the poster, produced the effect of interconnection, at this point on the poster, the referred image shows that it is established by the coverage of the highways. This interconnection of the city, through different means of transport, becomes

a favorable factor for potential investors. Another discourse is possible to be thematized: that, in Araguaína, spaces are taken care of and normalized. There is a discourse of organization about the city, assured by the perspective of urban planning of Araguaína.

(2) the images of the “set of oxen”, of the “complex of metallic barrels” and the “set of voltaic plates” reveal the perspective of the Araguaína connection, at different scales, around regional and international relations in the electricity market. commodities. It is not by chance that, through SDV3, we highlight the slogans that have already circulated over Araguaína. These images point to a discursive relationship with these slogans.

Seeking to think from the perspective of parafragment, that is, the constant versions that the image can receive, we will next mobilize another version of the poster presented in Figure 8. This other version circulated on the social networks of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. This is the cover image of the “Investe Araguaína” project on these social networks. This time, we are going to derive the SDI that express the new elements that appear in the aforementioned poster.



Source: Social network of the Project “Investe Araguaína” on Facebook.

**Figure 8.** Another version of the poster promoting the “Investe Araguaína” Project.

SDI1: illustration of a branch of soybeans.

SDI2: illustration of a microscope being handled by a woman, wearing typical laboratory clothes.

SDI3: illustration of a man, wearing a suit, tie and glasses.

SDI4: illustration of the logo of the city of Araguaína (2017 to 2020 management).

It is a paraphrase of the previous poster in which other elements are added, and others are re-signified. We thematized the new images through SDI. The discourse that Araguaína is the place to invest remains. Now, with the approach that the service sector is too. SDI2 and SDI3 work to expand the idea that the city offers services in this field. Therefore, its area of influence is not limited to the primary and secondary sectors of the economy. The business dynamics and its implications for job creation are put into perspective.

The illustration of the soybean branch (SDI1) takes center stage in the paragram of meanings over the network of production and trade of commodities led by Araguaína. The illustration of the fixed crane is re-signified as it is repositioned behind the truck on

the highway. The cattle illustration is also different from the first focused poster. The illustration of the logo of the municipal management of Araguaína expresses the institutionalization of meanings, as part of the urban marketing of Araguaína.

At this point in our analysis work, seeking to continue the dimensioning of the discursive production around Araguaína as a competitive city, we will mobilize the logos of the last three municipal administrations. Here is Figure 9:



Source: Images taken from Google.

**Figure 9.** Compilation of the logos of three municipal administrations in Araguaína.

In the municipal administration from 2013 to 2016, the visual identity of the management included the slogan: “Our city, commitment of all”, with the symbol of the junction of four “A”. Each “A” of a color represents: the executive power, the legislative power, the judiciary power and the people. The colors are motivated by the flag of the municipality. Officially, we worked with the perspective that this visual integration from the “A” expresses what appears in the verbal part of the logo: the city of Araguaína, as a commitment of all those involved in it.

Between 2017 and 2020, the visual identity remained with the integrated “A” symbol, but with a new slogan, namely: “The economic capital of Tocantins”. It should be noted that these two municipal administrations were the responsibility of the same mayor. From the point of view of the constitution of meanings, the two visual identities show different discursive processes, but that are interdependent: in the first administration, the meanings that circulated were that Araguaína needed a “modernization” of public administration. Only then it would be fine. At this point, we are working with the indirect mention of the slogan that circulated at the time of the campaign of the mayor who took office in 2013. It is the statement “Araguaína can be fixed”.

Inscribed in the speech analysis, we can say that the taking of a position by this logo makes the political-symbolic force of the empirical organization of the municipal administration work. This force, in the following administrations, will be inscribed in the empirical organization of the city. It is not by chance that the agenda of (re)organization of intra-urban space becomes the focus of practices and discourses. If, in the first administration, the focus was on the organization of public administration, in the second, the perspective put into circulation was that Araguaína played a leading role in the economic issue. Hence its symbolic place as the economic capital of the State of Tocantins. This symbolic place brings, in the midst of the senses, the idea that Araguaína is the place to

invest, to attract economic resources. The city is discursively projected in insertions (in terms of practices and discourses) increasingly in the regional scenario.

In the management from 2021 to 2024, the visual identity changed: from integrated “A” to sequenced and continuous arrows, articulated to another slogan: “City that does not stop”. The discursive memory makes working the sense that Araguaína has been marked by development processes and, for that reason, will follow this dynamic. The political-symbolic force alluded to above continues to produce effects in official discourse. This time, the discursive production is to endorse the senses that the care for the spaces of the city continues, the protagonism, at different scales, also continues.

Based on the research file created for this article, at this point, we focus on the action of municipal management (2017 to 2020) in relation to the US\$ 54.9 million loan agreement with CAF – Latin America Development Bank. On CAF’s official website, the establishment of this contract is reported as follows: “US\$ 104.9 million for sanitation in Araguaína and Santo André”<sup>32</sup>. Of this total, US\$ 50 million are destined for the city of Santo André; the rest of the money includes Araguaína. Let us consider, below, a discursive clipping (RD) of this news:

#### **RD 01**

In addition to the CAF representative and the National Treasury attorney, Mayor Ronaldo Dimas participated in the signing of the second contract, with Araguaína, in the amount of US\$ 54.9 million. The contract provides for the execution of the Araguaína Integrated Sanitation Project, with the objective of improving urban infrastructure, controlling floods and preserving springs and green areas, as well as implementing leisure areas in three basins (neblina and Jacuba streams and Lontra river)<sup>32</sup>. (Excerpt taken from the news on the website <https://www.caf.com/pt/presente/noticias/2019/12/firma-santo-andre-y-araguaina/>)

We perceive the discourse of the empirical organization of Araguaína’s spaces at work, as a way of reasoning about the loan. From the discursive point of view, we can highlight that Araguaína can be signified in different and different ways. In theoretical terms, we can say that there are material forms of existence of the city and the subjects. The nature of the research file in focus in this article allows us to thematize the first material form. The material form of the subjects circumscribed in and by Araguaína is beyond the scope of this work.

The discursivity of the infrastructure and the need to normalize spaces in Araguaína, even to make them suitable for global use, continued to operate effects in terms of the position taken by municipal administrations. Through each logo, we could see how the discourse of the empirical organization accentuates the imaginary and symbolic projections over the city. Araguaína’s material form of existence gained more and more defined contours to sustain the ideology (of practices and discourses) of a competitive city.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Throughout this article, we build the theoretical and analytical discussion around the perspective of Araguaína as a competitive city in the interior of the Brazilian Amazon. For that, two aspects were taken as a starting point: some economic practices based in the city, given the profile of the business dynamics and job creation, as well as its insertion in the animal protein production chain (beef); some official speeches of the last three administrations, seeking to think about how meanings are institutionalized and put into circulation about this perspective. We start from the principle that these two aspects are interdependent, although, in appeal to the rigor of thematic exposition, they are alluded, in this text, at specific moments.

The theoretical framework on “competitive cities” proved to be relevant for us to dimension these two aspects, not losing sight, especially, of Trindade-Júnior’s (2015) considerations about the concept of “medium-sized city”. The practices and discourses evidenced, from the clipping mobilized by us, thematizes the different scales of Araguaína’s influences. If we take advantage, even more, of the construct “urban regional diversity” of the referred author, we will perceive some specificities of the regional dynamics of Araguaína in many sectors. The focused practices and discourses attest to the different scales of incidence of Araguaína.

At this point, we would like to emphasize the conceptual dialogue between the considerations of Trindade-Júnior (2015) and those of Lever and Turok (1999), as there are presuppositions there to understand a competitive city. The regional, national and international scales are put into perspective, resulting, from their dynamics, even more: (1) real increase in income, given its distribution; (2) improvement in the population’s quality of life and (3) development linked to sustainability. The official discourse, in its different discursive materialities, puts into circulation exactly meaning(s) in this direction. Through the SDV and the SDI, we were building interpretation gestures around the discursive materialities, in order to show the discursive production of municipal administrations.

As seen in this article, the framework on “competitive cities” focuses on the socio-historical and ideological conditions with which this perspective was born and gained political-symbolic strength. In the wake of Sanches (1999), we even approach that city marketing appears as a strategy of local power. As it is a discursive production, it consists of words and images, which start to produce the city in its material form of existence. There are meanings about the city being constructed in the light of unequal and contradictory meanings. The research file on screen did not allow us to problematize the extent to which this official discourse fails; or, in the words of Pasquoto (2008), to what extent it shows the mismatch between the projection of attraction and the real offer of opportunities. Here is a task to be done.

Finally, we can highlight that the research archive, in its limits and possibilities, created conditions for us to theorize about practices and discourses regarding Araguaína as a competitive city, taking sides by the imaginary and symbolic unity as this city is signified by municipal administrations. Practices imply discourses, and vice versa.

## NOTES

- 5 Translated from Portuguese.
- 6 Translated from Portuguese.
- 7 National Environment Program I and II and the SPRN (Subprogram for Natural Resources Policy).
- 8 Pilot Program for Protection of Forests.
- 9 Translated from Portuguese.
- 10 Translated from Portuguese.
- 11 Amazon Development Plans.
- 12 Translated from Portuguese.
- 13 Translated from Portuguese.
- 14 Translated from Portuguese.
- 15 Translated from Portuguese.
- 16 Translated from Portuguese.
- 17 Translated from Portuguese.
- 18 Translated from Portuguese.
- 19 Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.
- 20 Translated from Portuguese.
- 21 Tocantins Industry Profile – FIETO.
- 22 Association of Meat Exporting Industries.
- 23 Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services.
- 24 0202 - Frozen meat of bovine animals. 0201 - Fresh or chilled meat of bovine animals.
- 25 Translated from Portuguese.
- 26 Translated from Portuguese.
- 27 Translated from Portuguese.
- 28 Translated from Portuguese.
- 29 Translated from Portuguese.
- 30 Translated from Portuguese.
- 31 Agricultural Technology Fair of Tocantins.
- 32 Translated from Portuguese.
- 33 Translated from Portuguese.

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