

Afuá, a refuge from urbanity

Afuá, um refúgio da urbanidade

Afuá, un refugio de la urbanidad

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Abstract

Waterfronts can be presented as spaces whose articulating role can reduce spatial isolation and increase tolerance to difference by rescuing urbanity values. The experience in the municipality of Afuá, a city in the north of the Marajó Archipelago at the mouth of the Amazon River, in Pará, aims to identify factors that increase the urbanity that emerges there and its results, the urbanity itself, and provide subsidies for the establishment of criteria and parameters for the analysis of urbanity in waterfronts. The analysis was performed using the method of recording observations in real time and systematically, called the Diary (Gehl; Svarre, 2019). Afuá is a refuge, a safe place that has not been exposed to hostile situations. It exemplifies how the relationship between water, the city, and people can be a starting point for the desired urbanity.



In this sense, what can we learn from Afuá? What urbanity-inducing factors exist in Afuá, and how do we plan public spaces using them? This article deals with urbanity on waterfronts and how to create favorable conditions for its occurrence.

Keywords: Urbanity; Waterfronts; Afuá; Public spaces; Refuge.

Resumo

As frentes de água podem se apresentar como espaços cujo papel articulador pode diminuir o isolamento espacial e o aumento da tolerância à diferença, por meio do resgate dos valores da urbanidade. A experiência no município de Afuá, cidade ao norte do Arquipélago de Marajó, na foz do Rio Amazonas, no Pará, tem como objetivo identificar fatores que elevam a urbanidade lá aflorada e seus resultados, a urbanidade propriamente dita, e fornecer subsídios para o estabelecimento de critérios e parâmetros para análise da urbanidade em frentes de água. A análise foi realizada pelo método de anotar observações em tempo real e de modo sistemático, denominado Diário (Gehl; Svarre, 2018). Afuá é um refúgio, um lugar seguro que não se expõe a situações de hostilidade, um exemplo de como a relação da água, da cidade e das pessoas pode ser um ponto de partida para a urbanidade tão almejada. Nesse sentido, o que podemos aprender com Afuá? Quais são os fatores indutores da urbanidade existentes em Afuá e como planejar espaços públicos utilizando-os? Este artigo trata da urbanidade em frentes de água e sobre como criar condições favoráveis para sua ocorrência.

Palavras-chave: Urbanidade; Frentes de água; Afuá; Espaços públicos; Refúgio.

Resumen

Frentes de agua pueden presentarse como espacios cuyo papel articulador puede reducir el aislamiento espacial y aumentar la tolerancia a la diferencia, a través del rescate de los valores de la urbanidad. La experiencia en el municipio de Afuá, ciudad en el norte del Archipiélago de Marajó, en la desembocadura del río Amazonas, en Pará, tiene como objetivo identificar factores que aumentan la urbanidad que allí emerge y sus resultados, la urbanidad misma, y otorgar subsidios para el establecimiento de criterios y parámetros para el análisis de la urbanidad en los frentes de agua. El análisis se realizó mediante el método de registro de observaciones en tiempo real y de forma sistemática, denominado Diario (Gehl; Svarre, 2018). Afuá es un refugio, un lugar seguro que no ha estado expuesto a situaciones hostiles, un ejemplo de cómo la relación entre el agua, la ciudad y las personas puede ser un punto de partida para la urbanidad deseada. En este sentido, ¿qué podemos aprender de Afuá? ¿Cuáles son



los factores inductores de urbanidad existentes en Afuá y cómo planificar los espacios públicos usándolos? Este artículo trata sobre la urbanidad en los frentes de agua y cómo crear condiciones favorables para su ocurrencia.

Palabras clave: Urbanidad; Frente de agua; Afuá; Espacios públicos; Refugio.

INTRODUCTION

We come from water; our bodies are largely water, and water plays a crucial role in our psyche. We need constant contact with water; it should always be around us; and we must revere water in all its forms. (Alexander *et al.*, 2013, p. 324).

The quote by Alexander *et al.* (2013) demonstrates much of the essence observed in Afuá, a city north of the Marajó Archipelago, at the mouth of the Amazon River, in Pará, where, through appropriations and behaviors, one can prove the condition for an identity, historical and relational urbanity, transmitting a wealth of essential elements for the quality of spaces on its waterfront. This refuge, called Afuá, was built spontaneously by the population since its colonization, with strong social ties that resulted in the vigor of collective life and urbanity.

Most Afuá families were born, raised, and probably died or will die there, influencing

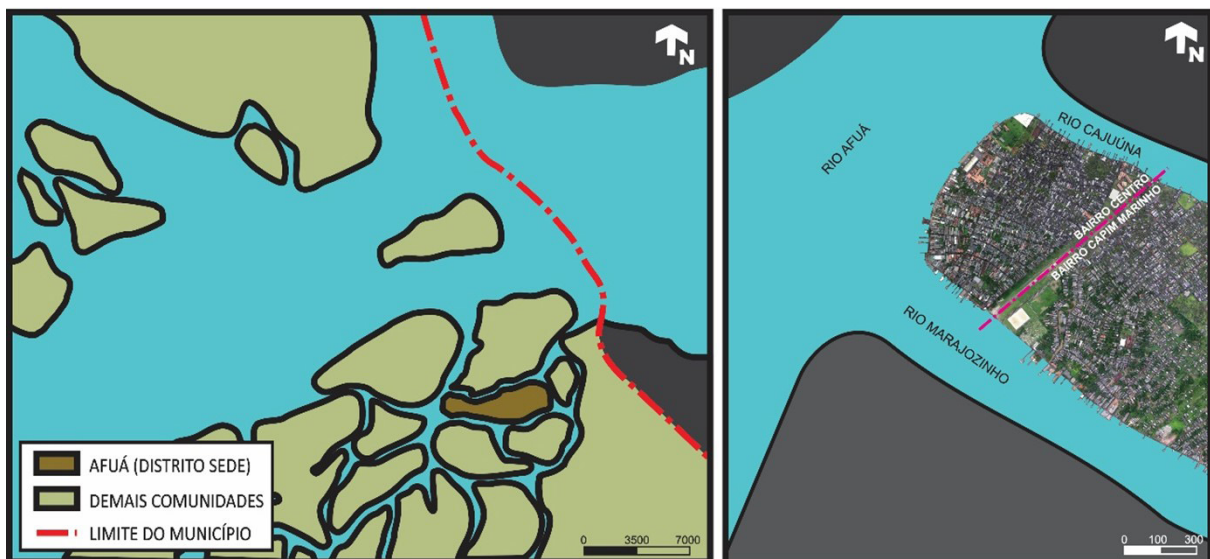


Figure 1: Location of Afuá in the Marajoara Gulf (a) and the main district (b). Source: Prepared by the author based on aerophotogrammetric image.



the affective relationships of trust and good coexistence between neighbors and the community. One of the possible factors of this coexistence is the geographical condition in which the city is located: an area affected by floods, which makes residents come together to solve what would be a problem.

The municipality has its history linked to the creation of the villages of Soure and Chaves, beginning in 1665, and the installation of its district in 1890. From then on, the seat of the municipality developed, initially occupying the banks of the river until the future airstrip (Bairro Centro) and later the Capim Marinho neighborhood after the airstrip (Figure 1).

Surrounded by three rivers — Afuá, Cajuúna, and Marajozinho —, what could be an isolation and something negative for urban vitality is the primary cause of its urbanity. Corroborating Gondim (2015 *apud* Rocha, 2017), among three functions that a boundary, in this case, natural, can act is that of union, which, in the case of Afuá, had the power to unite everything that is within the perimeter, strengthening the identity of citizens; and cultural, creating affective ties between them, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and political inclination.

In the speech of an Afuá resident, the importance of rivers is evident: “The river is my street.” The river system is as essential as the road system in an ordinary city, through the dynamics of river crossings made by residents between different communities, as well as the integration of man and river and their respective respect, essential for urbanity to occur on waterfronts.

The urban layout was established irregularly and compactly, mainly connecting the banks of the Afuá River to the parallel road of the airstrip, with other prominent and secondary roads perpendicular to the river emerging. However, unlike other cities, the roads were not planned at ground level since Afuá is located over the Amazon basin, and this led to the most peculiar feature of the town: the absence of motorized vehicles, prohibited by municipal law, so as not to damage the stilted structures of streets/sidewalks. This feature shows respect for natural conditions and the riverside culture, with its suspended houses and streets flexible to the flow of the tides. The blocks have varied sizes and shapes, reaching over 400 meters long. Still, this dimension is not a negative point to urbanity due to other factors, such as the diversity of land use, the width of roads, and the smooth border between public and private, among other aspects that we will see next.

The riverside way of life in Marajó and the culture inherited from the caboclos, in daily activities such as cooking, planting, building, and interacting with nature, are intangible and unique heritage in Afuá. In the buildings, wood, and straw represent the materiality of the municipality's vernacular architecture. Religiosity is also part of the solid cultural customs of the Afuá people, especially the dedication to Our Lady of Conception, patron saint of the municipality, which has festivities, started in 1870, every year from October to December, including the river, air and land



candle, as well as pilgrimages and cultural activities. Evangelical culture has also been present since 1911, with events such as The Crusade and The Açaí Festival aimed at valuing local gastronomy (Prefeitura Municipal de Afuá, 2017).

We were motivated to conduct this research¹ followed by the concern to know what the favorable conditions for the occurrence of urbanity in waterfronts, seeking to demonstrate that places with urbanity have more positive effects on the quality of space than places without urbanity and there are elements (causes) that can increase or decrease these effects. It also arises from the need to understand these causal factors, aiming at a necessary approximation of the particularity of the place. As objectives, we seek to identify factors (causes) that increase urbanity in Afuá and, consequently, its results, that is, urbanity; we also aim to provide subsidies for establishing criteria and parameters to analyze urbanity in waterfront spaces.

Jan Gehl and Rubén Pesci, conceptual proximity of urbanity verified in Afuá

Gehl emphasizes in his research that the urban quality of a city is measured by the quantity and quality of public space for pedestrians. Their studies point to optimizing public attractions and indicate attitudes to welcome a rich and safe social life, which depends on three factors: social life, public space, and buildings - in this sequential order. For Gehl (2006, p. 21), "the presence of other people, of activities and events, of inspiration and stimuli, is one of the most important qualities of public spaces." In Gehl's research, we can see inductive (causality) and result (urbanity) elements: the first factor (social life) aims to record the occurrence of urbanity, and the second and third factors point to the conditions that the space must have to facilitate its occurrence.

In their publication, *New City Life*, Gehl *et al.* (2006) present 12 quality criteria for public spaces, divided into three categories: protection (from traffic and accidents, crime and violence, and unpleasant sensory experiences); comfort (opportunities for walking, standing/walking, and sitting); and enjoyment (scale, opportunities to enjoy the positive aspects of the climate, and positive sensory experience). Regarding the list of criteria, the author (Gehl, 2018) points out that, despite having been elaborated in a school of Architecture and Urbanism, there is only one item that relates to the aesthetic qualities that space should have, showing that, first of all, we must consider the needs to protect people and expand opportunities to walk, stand, sit, look, talk, listen and comfortably express themselves.

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Pesci (1999) conceptualizes urbanity as the art of knowing how to live in the city, requiring five (5) components to achieve a degree of quality, as follows:

1. A multifocal city that addresses the importance of decentralization and how numerous centers or foci of probable social interaction can recover the human scale in social relations and coexistence in nuclei or foci where the distances between activities and their diversity ensure a greater richness in human experience.
2. A city of interfaces that considers the ecology and the point of contact (or interaction) between two or more ecosystems. The concentration or exchange can be physical (natural and/or built) or social. For example, Pesci cites the River Seine in Paris, which produces a positive natural and social interface for the city.
3. A city with open spaces provides an urban configurational structure and spatial quality. The author emphasizes that open spaces are essential for urbanity and its social appropriation, and in these spaces, greater freedom and greater possible use value should be supported.
4. A city with popular participation highlights the importance of knowing the urbanity that each person needs in each city, as well as microculture, locality, interface, and public space.
5. A city of flows and sustainability provides for a multi-sectoral, integral, holistic, and renewable urbanity, adopting the abovementioned principles: multifocality, interfaces, open spaces, and participation. Multifocality shortens distances, protects identities, and fosters microcultures; interfaces correct damage to natural resources; open spaces improve the use of soil, water, air, flora, and fauna resources and ensure social sustainability; and participation defines social awareness and good resource management, cultural sustainability.

Pesci's research (1999) indicated a critical element to achieve urbanity in waterfronts, touching on points not identified by other authors, through the relevance of interfaces, which can be active or passive but to promote urbanity, through the good relationship between man and nature. On the other hand, Gehl (2006) highlights the categories of protection, comfort, and pleasure in Afuá, described next.

Recording of Urbanity in Afuá

The recording of urbanity sought to capture the activities and the different groups that develop sociabilities, building identities and giving meaning to the places on the Afuá waterfront. For the elaboration of the urbanity record, a Diary was carried



out, described by Gehl and Svarre (2018) as a method of noting observations in real time and in a systematic way and aims to increase knowledge about human behavior in public space through notes of details and nuances observed. The urbanity records for the construction of the Diary were made on different days and times in July 2018 and have been compiled in the following description.

Looking out of the hotel window, movement starts around 7 a.m. when the goods arrive on the boats to supply the trade, and the first bicycles and bike taxis begin to circulate along the waterfront (1). It's 8 a.m., and the traders open their doors, organizing the goods outside: clothes, handicrafts, and food (2). While they advertise their products, some men drink and play pool in the Barrius bar. The women carry their baskets full of shrimp, fish, fruit, and vegetables to display on the corner of Av. Generalíssimo Deodoro (3). The sound of radio advertising starts with the morning mass. On the rafters, families carry groceries towards the catraios. Tricycles with cargo carriers of the most diverse models transport the food and products of the stores. The scenes change constantly: colors, behaviors, smells, sounds, feelings, and movements - there is a high **DEGREE OF BELONGING** in the relationship between people and the city. **DIVERSITY** is expressed in the different ethnicities, ages, incomes, genders, and interests in the typologies that animate the urban scene. It's 10 a.m., time to come downtown to buy the food for lunch: at the municipal market, if the dish of the day is meat; at the Rural Producer's Market, if the dish of the day is seafood, there is shrimp of all sizes in the straw baskets. Lack of seasoning? It is on the bicycles of street vendors (4). Retirees put their chairs on the balconies of their houses or on the other side of the street to watch the movement, looking for shady places, and the degree of **WELL-BEING** is reflected on their faces, being sure that they have had a good life, with many pedals and without the carbon dioxide of cars (5). Bicycles and colorful umbrellas squeeze onto the Afuá waterfront. The density of **MOVEMENTS** is high: 165 bikes pass in 10 minutes. The urban space seduces passers-by, who create living spaces on their own, coining a welcoming atmosphere that embraces diversity and values the identity of Afuá citizens. Residents begin to pass by with their shopping bags. Firefighters stand in Praça da Bandeira waiting for a call or ready to give information. At noon, the sun is intense, reflecting on the colorful facades of the houses. Residents begin to move quickly to their homes. The men carry their wives and children on their backs—the waterfront empties. Traders put away their goods, and almost all establishments close. The radio-post goes silent. At a slow pace, residents stay on their balconies to escape the heat. It was 3 p.m., and the merchants returned their goods in the yards. "The Virgin of the Great Conception Boat will leave for Macapá at 8 p.m. Get your ticket." this radio advertising is returning with the program, extending until 6 p.m. After informing the schedules of the boats and the social and religious events of the city, the musical program continues, at some points having to compete with the sound coming from the houses and bars. Meat deliverers unload a whole ox to the Casa de Frios. Late in the afternoon, young people and children settle in the squares, on stilts, and the rafters with their bicycles and friends. **AFFABILITY** relationships



prevail on the waterfront (6). For the older ones, it's time to sit on the balcony to keep up with the movement. Children will play in the Children's Square. Choppes (or chup chup, or sacolés, depending on the region of the country) are being sold. At Praça Micaella Ferreira, it's time for zumba, and then there's crossfit (7). The company Virgem da Conceição puts the time that the boat will leave the next day. They already know how the tide will be. The sun begins to set, and the reddish hue colors the Afuá River (8). The bicilance leaves in a hurry. There must have been some emergency. The snack carts begin to take their places: *charque*, *calabresa*, *coxinha*, two young men park in front of the Children's Square. It's 7 p.m., and the friendly Tacacá vendor stands on the corner of Banco Bradesco. A ladle of *tucupi*, a little starch, and more *tucupi*, *jambu* leaves, and dried shrimp finish the dish. With or without pepper? You can sit down. Stores close. Young people sit on bicycles, rafters, or the street, especially near the Dr. Nelson Salomão Sports Court (9). Some eat snacks, others buy treats, and the sound with the light effects brightens the waterfront. Party on the court, time to wear the new clothes they bought in the shops. The day is over, and all the Afuá waterfront's **VITALITY** rests to start again tomorrow (Figure 2).

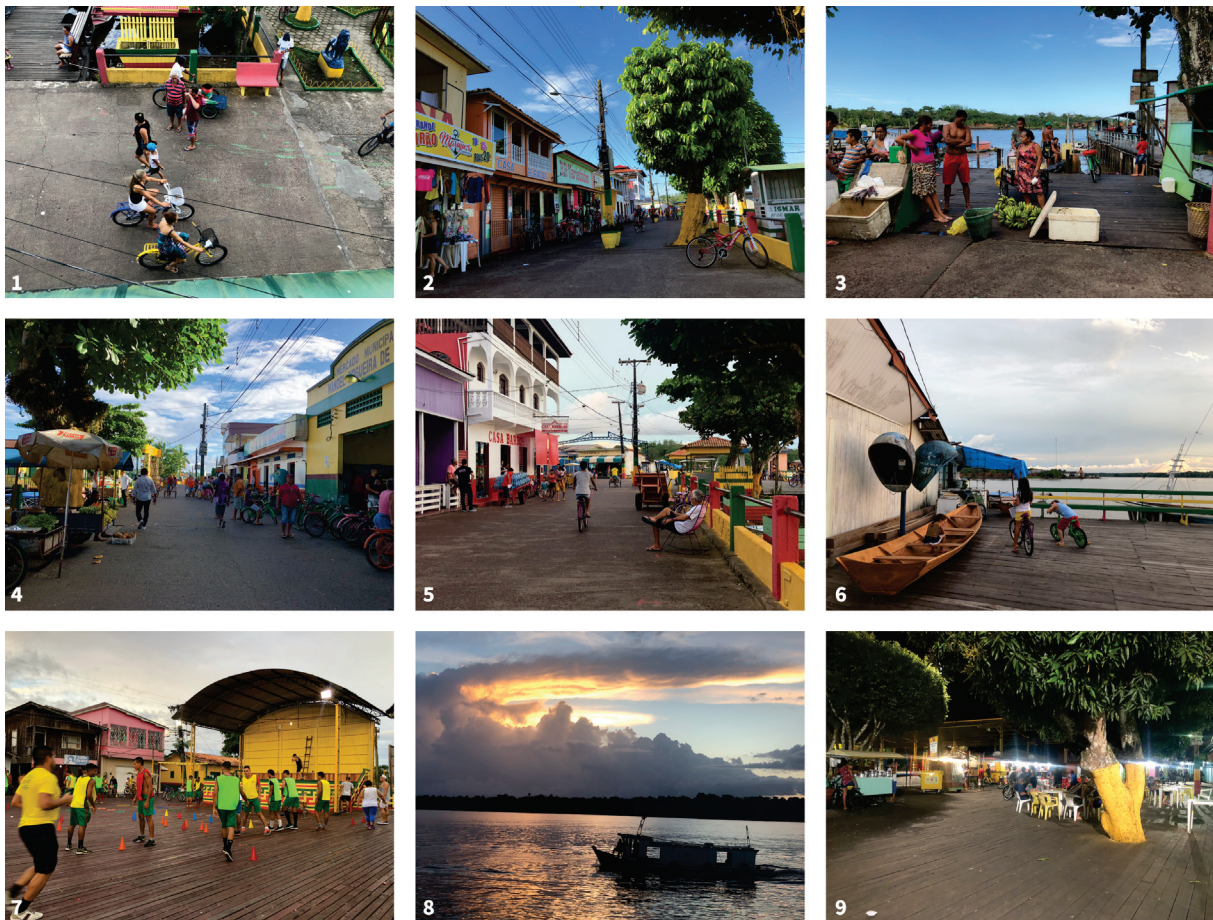


Figure 2: Record of urbanity in Afuá. Source: Author's Archive, 2018.



The daily activities recorded demarcate urbanity: purposeful walking and cycling, meeting friends, shopping or simply enjoying the river, outdoor exercise, fun on the sports courts, shopping in street commerce, and conversations about bicycles. The feeling of security reflects this configuration: 81% of people interviewed say they feel safe on the riverbanks in Afuá. We also realized that the riverside way of life incorporates a harmonious and sustainable coexistence between man and the river, reflected in social and cultural relations and the built space.

In Afuá, we were able to verify, according to the concept of Gomes (2009), that sociabilities and affective relationships are built in a neighborhood context, in which individualism is not the predominant phenomenon, reflecting in the process of cooperation between individuals through reciprocal dependence between them, which also produces resistance.

Lessons from Afuá: factors inducing urbanity

In Afuá, the *genius loci*, translated by the stilts, bicycles, and rivers, become elements of identity converted into the urbanity of the spaces, the neighborhood relations, and the welcome existing among the residents of the city. The stilts unite people, the bicycles give identity, and the rivers ensure a sense of belonging to this Amazonian territory. The absence of cars makes the space more democratic and exclusive to people, promoting diversity and social inclusion, a sense of belonging, and a desire to stay. The city and its residents give meaning to urbanity, altering the objects and codes of space and the ways of coexisting. This section presents the elements that we believe induce the occurrence of urbanity in Afuá.

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The municipality is located in the position of an estuarine city (near the mouth of the river, in estuaries) and has an excellent **city-river relationship** that we can define under three aspects: a) city of small population and territorial size; b) located on the banks of three rivers, with variable widths - 800m on the Afuá River, 170m on the Cajuúna River and 300m on the Marajozinho River, with floods that flood the city at some times of the year; c) traditional and spontaneous spatial planning, focused on the riverside front, valuing socio-cultural and economic relations. The riverine populations, rooted mainly in communities outside the district of Afuá, live on forest and aquatic resources present in the region and, in addition to their consumption, sell their products in front of the city. According to Trindade Jr. *et al.* (2011), riverside cities establish a strong relationship with their surroundings (villages, towns, and communities) located in their vicinity and with the dynamics of nature, river flood movements, and the rhythm of the forest.

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Afuá is a compact city, presenting a maximum distance, in the urban area, of 500 meters to reach the waterfront (Rio Afuá, Marajozinho, or Cajuúna), establishing a permanent and easy contact of people with the water. The city's **compactness** is due to the density of the grid, making the circulation of people and bicycles intense both on weekdays and weekends, always ensuring a high level of copresence on the streets.

As mentioned, only bicycles and their variations are allowed as a means of intra-urban transport; no motorized vehicle or motorcycle can circulate. Bicycles have been related to the routine of residents since the 1980s, and to meet this reality, several variations of bicycles were created: bike taxis, tricycles, cargo carts, and lunch carts, among others. The bike taxi is an adaptation made with two welded bicycles, designed by Afuá resident Raimundo do Socorro Gonçalves, known as Sarito, and is used for different functions: bicilance (for transporting patients), advertising bike taxi, funeral bike taxi, firefighter bike taxi, among others.

In the rural areas and for transportation from these areas to the district headquarters, different types of boats are used - canoes (with tail or rowing motor), catraias, motorboats, or voadeiras. The use of bicycles and boats as means of transportation is related to **mobility** in the city, positively affecting social relations and the coexistence of residents, so crucial in the pursuit of urbanity.

* * *



Figure 3: Urban facilities and squares located on the waterfront of Afuá. Source: (a) Adapted by the author from Google Earth, 2019; (b) Author's Archive, 2018.



Public spaces on the Afuá waterfront play an essential role in integration because they have become a space for meeting, sociability, cultural recognition, appreciation, and identity building concerning the community's history. The street is, par excellence, the address of the *genius loci* of Afuá, establishing a smooth transition zone between the public and the private and being an inducer of the copresence of people. There are also private enclosures facing the roads, especially the balconies of the residences, where the residents place chairs and hammocks to enjoy the movement, and the benches in front of the commercial establishments, which animate the public space and guarantee the "eyes of the street," contributing to the urbanity. In addition to the streets, in the studied area, there are six squares with distinct urban furniture and enclosures created in the widening of the roads perpendicular to the waterfront, with available seats facing the street (Figure 3).

In this context, we realize the importance of the street as a space for socialization, promoting the meeting of residents and ensuring equity that occurs with the population's access to education, health, and leisure facilities, linked to the perspective of quality of life and spaces that allow leisure activities to be open, with the **equal participation** of all residents, regardless of social class, physical condition, gender, ethnicity, among other aspects.

* * *

The **diversity of uses** is another critical factor for the occurrence of urbanity. Jacobs (2011) has noted that different people are essential for vitality at various times and with different motivations. In Afuá, on the waterfront, the greatest diversity of uses is found. The commercial part is usually located on the first floor of the buildings, and the upper floor is the residences.

Mixed uses ensure the existence of social and cultural relations, especially on the river bank, with the manifestation of intense appropriation of space. Commerce becomes a meeting place where people buy the products they need and take the opportunity to meet each other.

* * *

Many cities, even having the river as the main factor for their foundation, have turned their backs on it, but this is not the case in Afuá, as the rivers reinforce the dependence on urban life. The city's **centrality** is found on the waterfront, occupying a privileged position in integration with the river and becoming an attractive hub of flows and movements. The complex formed by the wharves, responsible for the main accesses from the city's interior to the river and from the river to the town, together with the mixed uses, acts in the system as a strong magnet of centrality and inducer of copresence. We can say that urbanity on the waterfront in Afuá is, in a way, fueled by the location of centrality in this region.

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Transitional spaces, such as balconies, gardens, and sidewalks, are where the public and the private meet, establishing relations of urbanity. The treatment given to these places has a decisive influence on life in the urban space (Gehl, 2013). The **smooth transition between public and private** on the Afuá waterfront prioritizes the human scale through details, colors, textures, and objects that awaken the senses, the number of openings, the rhythms between buildings, the vegetation, and the quality of the promenade, making walking and staying in the public space more attractive.

The absence of walls and railings in most buildings reinforces the possibility of interaction between public and private spaces and contributes to **visual permeability**. Balconies also play a decisive role in the level of street activity. Several older adults with reduced mobility were observed on their balconies, following the movement of the street and calling their acquaintances to chat.

* * *

The vernacular heritage of Afuá is constituted naturally and traditionally that the riverside communities have produced their habitat. Vernacular architecture originates in the same place where it is located, is created by widespread knowledge, follows the norms, customs, and ideas passed down from generation to generation and has high cultural value. Within this architecture category, we can highlight in Afuá the stilt-type constructions, with a constructive system using wooden pilotis, appropriate for the areas of floodplain forests that relate to the place and nature of the Amazon.

The vibrant color palette of the city contrasts with the natural landscape composed of the green of the forest, the ocher of the rivers, and the sky that alternates between blue and gray when it is loaded with clouds: green, orange, pink, lilac, turquoise, yellow, blue or red are some of the colors used and become an element that contributes to the **legibility** of the city for its residents (Figure 4). The colors of the houses are also reflected in how people dress and in the colors of the bicycles that circulate through the cities.



Figure 4: The colors of Afuá. Source: Author's Archive, 2018.



Talking to people in Afuá, they express enormous pride in the town on the river, the houses suspended on stilts, the colorful paintings, the ornaments, and the well-executed finishes. The attractiveness and aesthetics of spaces are essential for perception, identity, and imaginability, and they affect existing behavior and urban relations.

* * *

Finally, seeing, smelling, hearing, feeling, experiencing, and representing are attributes that should be considered in cities that aim for urbanity, creating a collection of fragments of experienced places perceived by all human senses, as occurs on the Afuá waterfront. The senses - sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste - as sensory receptors of urban space become transmitters of emotional experiences, so crucial in the urbanity of places. In Afuá, everyday experience is a **sensory experience** captured through the senses. Colors and textures in the constructive details of the buildings, stilts, docks, and boats moored there, sounds of the local radio and the residents' narratives, aromas, and tastes of the snack carts and markets, and the grandeur of the rivers. The movement of people and bicycles are presented to us through the senses, allowing us to build identity, culture, and memory, resulting in the structures of sociability.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

What have we learned from Afuá?

Firstly, we learned that urbanity is directly related to the forms of coexistence and, regarding its occurrence, we verified that it must present intensity through the density of users, copresence of social relations, and the degree of belonging of users; vitality through the different forms of appropriation in spaces; affability, through the interaction between residents and visitors; and a sense of security, protection, well-being and affective feelings.

We learned that urbanity is colorful, expressed in the faces of people satisfied with where they live, reflected in the high degree of belonging and appropriation, in the respect for water and its fauna and flora, and in the coexistence of different groups that respect their differences.



We have learned that urbanity in Afuá results from the articulation of a series of factors that do not depend specifically on one or another activity but rather on the arrangement of free and built spaces on the waterfront, the functions that rivers assume in people's lives, the details of the facades, the remoteness of motor vehicles, among other characteristics already mentioned throughout the article.

We learned that the waterfront of Afuá, this refuge unknown to many, is recognized as a place of affection by its residents, becoming a shelter of urbanity, where residents are the main actors of this relationship through their coexistential micro-practices carried out daily.

We have learned that the essential thing is to seek the balance of interaction between water, city, and people in free and built spaces so that waterfronts establish a condition of urbanity and dynamic coexistence and take into account the need to capture the essence of social life already existing in these places.

Finally, we learned that to achieve urbanity in waterfronts. We must seek ways to make new ways of modeling social practices blossom, resulting in urban relations, thinking about the individuality of each one and, above all, the collectivity.

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