

12 - TOWN SQUARES: SPACES FOR LEISURE AND SOCIABILITY IN BARRA DO GARÇAS, MATO GROSSO

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INTRODUCTION

Barra do Garças is the ninth most populous municipality in the state of Mato Grosso (IBGE, 2016). Its urban perimeter contains some large parks, such as Serra Azul State Park (PESA) and Das Águas Municipal Park, along with various public squares, with these spaces being a predominant leisure option for the city's citizens.

However, the spaces do not uniformly serve the municipality's population, since not all districts have public squares, and many of them have unfavorable conditions for access. This context poses a problem in relation to public leisure activities in Barra do Garças, since these spaces are not equally accessible by all segments of the population.

Based on the importance of spaces for leisure and sociability, this study aimed to analyze the forms of sociability and its relationship with the cultural interests of leisure in the squares of Barra do Garças.

Robba and Macedo (2003, p. 17) define public squares as "[...] free urban public spaces destined for leisure and mingling of the population, accessible to citizens [...]", stressing the importance of these spaces in the composition of the city, by offering a setting for diversified experiences of society.

These spaces do more than beautify; they bring a fundamental functionality to the quality of life of citizens, by providing a chance for a fulfilling city life, contemplating a dynamics of diverse social values that are essential to the lives of residents. The squares are imbued with values that compose people's lives, serving for parties and other activities where the entire community can interact, i.e., they have important functions in the cohesion of citizens in the community.

According to Orth and Cunha (2000), squares are spaces for equilibrium of people in the agitated life of the city. They are settings essential to the quality of life, going beyond the prevailing structures of the city composed of structures that attribute a cold and rigid system.

In light of these points, it is also necessary to consider an inherent factor, sociability, which is closely related with public squares, because as described by Barros (2010, p. 1), the square "is commonly defined as a place for meeting, circulation and sociability," a specific place for people to gather, interact and thus materialize sociability.

The author (BARROS, 2010, p.2) also emphasizes that "as urban elements, squares are spaces for sociability propitious for meeting, mingling, passage and symbolic exchanges," configuring them as spaces for multiple experiences, a locus for sociability of individuals, fundamental to society as a whole and the individuals who compose it, by allowing them to meet and engage in leisure and social activities.

Therefore, it is important to mention that a "[...] characteristic of sociability is its democratic nature, because no matter the differences that exist among the members of a group, these are set aside [...]" (OLIVEIRA, 2014, p.16), making the leisure space of the square inclusive and inviting, since any individual, regardless of social class, gender or age, can enjoy the sociability of leisure.

A Dumazedier (1974, p. 94) states that "[...] leisure is primordial a liberation from professional work [...]. Leisure is a liberation from fundamental primary obligations [...]", so that everything that is not part of obligatory activities can be classified as leisure activities.

People often go to squares after work or after picking up their children from school, to gather in general or meet a specific person. These are the practices of sociability configuring leisure in the square. In this respect, "[...] leisure is characterized by a search for a state of satisfaction [...]" (DUMAZEDIER, 1974, p.95). In other words, leisure provides satisfaction by allowing individuals the necessary escape from coercive environments where obligations dictate their activities, making their routine more pleasant.

In short, leisure is an extremely important practice in everyday life, and can be experienced in various forms, providing mental and physical equilibrium, improving the quality of life and adding values. Hence, it is an activity that needs to be encouraged and esteemed in society.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Initially, we mapped Barra do Garças to identify and count the public squares in the city. We found 19 squares, located in 15 of the city's 64 districts. Then we briefly observed each square to ascertain their level of use. Three squares were selected for having a satisfactory level of use as indicated by the strong flow of people: Praça da Matriz, located in the Cidade Velha district, Praça Sebastião Alves Júnior, located in the Centro Comercial district, and Praça das Mães, located in the Campinas district.

The data were collected by systematic observation, with a script for construction of a field diary, to note the following parameters: timing of usage; age range and gender of users; whether users were residents of the region, families or groups of friends; the activities of visitors and whether these were practiced in groups or individually; cultural interests; forms of sociability; and the physical structure of the square.

The squares were observed in October and November 2016, starting with Praça da Matriz, followed by Praça Sebastião Alves Júnior and Praça das Mães, for a total of 14 days for each one. Praça da Matriz and Praça das Mães were observed from 7:00 to 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. on all days, while Praça Sebastião Alves Júnior was observed from 7:00 to 8:00 a.m. in both weeks, and from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the first week and 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. in the second week.

For analysis of the data we used the classifications of cultural contents proposed by Dumazedier (1974).

PUBLIC SQUARES AS SPACES FOR LEISURE AND SOCIABILITY

Based on the considerations regarding the classification of cultural interests of leisure proposed by Dumazedier (1974), the forms of sociability found involved physical, artistic and social interests.

Physical interests were noted with greater frequency in Praça da Matriz, such as walking, jogging and use of exercise equipment. This interest was not observed frequently in Praça Sebastião Alves Junior, where people only sporadically used the

horizontal bars or engaged in stretching exercises. In Praça das Mães, which is not suitable for walking or jogging, the exercise equipment area was the central point of physical activities, while children had a space for football. Despite being a small square and distant from the city center, it still attracts local people for physical activities.

Artistic activity was only observed once, in Praça da Matriz, where a young man belonging to a church group was playing guitar.

Social interests were pursued intensely in all three squares, with people conversing in groups, observing the scenery and passersby or circulating through the space. Praça da Matriz stood out in this respect as a place where people meet to engage in activities together.

Sociability in the squares was identified in different intensities, influenced by the particular infrastructure of each one. In particular, Praça da Matriz was refurbished and upgraded in 2014, while Praça Sebastião Alves Junior, located in the city center, is deteriorated, limiting its attraction to groups, prompting people to use Praça da Matriz more intensely, both during the week and on weekends.

According to Costa (2008), a square is a space composed of social relations, not just a physical structure, so if it is not used by individuals it loses its meaning. Therefore, we perceived that Praça Sebastião Alves Júnior has lost part of its social meaning in the city due to the dearth of people, indicating that the people in the surrounding area do not attribute esteem to the space.

This lack of users can mainly be associated with lack of upkeep, giving it a decadent characteristic that does not attract users. Therefore, it is essential for public squares to be regularly maintained, to preserve their structure of benches, exercise equipment and green areas, as well as to keep them clean, since "the maintenance or the creation free spaces is thus a necessity and constitutes a matter of public health [...]" (LE CORBUSIER, 1993, p.32).

As mentioned, in 2014 Praça da Matriz was refurbished, making it much more propitious for gathering. The new physical structure makes it a more agreeable environment for meetings. This was intensified with the establishment of two food kiosks, causing people to spend more time. As stated by Costa (2008, p. 46) "[...] urban renewal involves an extreme/dramatic treatment of the edified fabric, [...] the rehabilitation does not destroy the fabric, it adapts it to new situations of urban functionality."

Many times the people engaging in physical activities during the week or on weekends were observed going to the kiosks afterward to meet other people. In general, people used this square to spend some time with other people or just relax by themselves doing nothing. Praça da Matriz particularly favors gathering in groups due to its structure, in particular its well-maintained benches and the food kiosks. As noted by Silva et al. (2012, p.12), structural aspects are important to attract users to public spaces.

Therefore, these spaces need to have agreeable and harmonious appearance to attract people to frequent them in their leisure moments, to improve their quality of life.

Praça das Mães is mainly a meeting point for people living in the immediate vicinity, where they converse or just observe the movement. They tend not to stay for extended periods, instead soon returning to their residences. The characteristic as a meeting place is marked, where people sit to talk and interact with each other and the space. Such spaces for leisure have a singular character in society, as points for meeting and social interaction (MÜLLER, 2002).

It is evident that Praça das Mães is mainly a specific space for people living in the immediate surroundings. In other words, people do not tend to come from other districts to spend time there, because "[...] to stay there one has to be a resident, has to be someone who uses and delimits territories for use" (SEABRA, 2004, p.183). In other words, the residents of the district have a strong feeling of belonging to the square.

This is an important factor that marks the squares in Barra do Garças as fundamental spaces, because the city does not have parks with leisure equipment where people can practice activities at no charge. The city's leisure spaces are limited, and "[...] it is fundamental to make clear the importance attributed to the leisure spaces in cities, because they serve to propagate a relation between the space and individuals" (SILVA ET AL., 2012, p.11).

When referring to town squares, it is important to stress that "[...] they are free public spaces, with the function of social mingling inserted in the urban grid as an element to organize circulation [...]" (CARNEIRO AND MESQUITA, 2000, p.29), so one of their functions is to enable interaction in society to occur in a specific spaces, conferring organization to the city.

Town squares serve in urban life as public spaces for sociability "[...] in which the intimate relations of the primary group are weakened and collective relations are strengthened [...]" (LEITÃO, 2002, p. 17). This reinforces the relevance of these places in citizens' lives, because they promote proximity among individuals. The dynamic of cities has an intense and impersonal character, so squares serve to aggregate more social interactions in urban life, since they are free spaces for the entire public "[...] permitting people to meet each other, where they strengthen collective relations, where fundamental exchanges and conviviality make a difference" (SILVA AND BARROS FILHO, 2015, p.5)

In general, one standout observation was that it was rare for people to practice physical activity alone. Instead, groups of friends, couples or even entire families went to the squares to walk and use exercise equipment. As noted by Silva et al. (2012, p.9) "[...] people need a place where they can be involved in the spheres of public life and social aspects [...]"

Therefore, despite the differences, all three squares have the same basic aspect as spaces for sociability, where people go to meet each other, so that social interest guides the process of sociability.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In Barra do Garças, the town squares are the predominant options for leisure, where people gather to engage in various forms of leisure activities, such as physical exercise, observe the scenery and principally, irrespective of the activity, to meet with each other, with friends and family members, to converse or participate in some other interpersonal interaction.

It was obvious that sociability is a very strong interest in the squares observed, since these spaces are designed for leisure. Sociability is what confers life to the square, without which it loses its essence. This aspect was perceived more strongly in Praça da Matriz, which underwent refurbishment in 2014, involving a complete reorganization of the environment, thus altering the square's dynamic.

This space has acquired a new meaning in the city and for the dynamics of its life, because the renovation has expanded its possibilities to engage in leisure activities with greater quality and diversity.

Despite the various questions related to the precarious structure of many of the city's squares, people still use most of them. This is an important indication of the importance people attach to gathering with others, despite negative aspects related to support structure.

It is interesting to reflect on the plight of the people living on the periphery of the city. We noted that 49 districts in Barra

do Garças do not have any public leisure equipment, or the equipment is poorly maintained or totally destroyed, constituting dead spaces in the city.

This is an unfortunate reality, because a large portion of the population does not have easy access to leisure options, something that is important to all. Without this support, cultural interests wind up being excluded, lowering the quality of life of people and precluding them from fully enjoying their rights as citizens. Therefore, the government needs to develop the city more homogeneously, so that residents of all parts have access to leisure, without exclusion. A particular question to be raised is why only one public square underwent a major refurbishment, instead of a broad effort to upgraded other spaces or even build new squares in the districts where they do not exist.

We also found that all the cultural interests of leisure involved the search for sociability, because all the activities observed were carried out in groups. This is in line with the fact that human beings need to be near others, living in society, so the social interest guides the process of sociability.

The observations revealed that the individuals use the squares to interact in some form, be it with other people or with the space, by practicing some activity, characterizing the squares as places propitious of sociability. This is an important aspect to people's lives: interacting in groups is essential for humans due to the richness these experiences provide.

Sociability is inherent to human nature, and it was noteworthy that the squares are a means to satisfy this social need. Therefore, they need to have special attention from public officials, given their crucial role in people's lives. Sociability enriches life, adding experiences, since social activities are essential to the evolution of the human being.

This study can provide a better understanding of the sociability of the three town squares observed, but there are still questions that need to be analyzed in depth, such as the lack of leisure equipment in so many of the city's districts and how the population deals with this question, the lack of maintenance of the squares located outside the central region, and how the need for sociability is satisfied in these places.

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TOWN SQUARES: SPACES FOR LEISURE AND SOCIABILITY IN BARRADO GARÇAS, MATO GROSSO ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the forms of sociability and their relationship with the cultural interests of leisure in three public squares in the city of Barra do Garças, Mato Grosso (Matriz, Sebastião Alves Júnior and Mães). These spaces were systematically observed in October and November 2016, to detect the cultural interests of leisure and the forms of sociability in leisure activities, such as groups engaged in conversations, people circulating and admiring the landscape, engaging in physical exercise, etc., involving various age ranges and both sexes. All the cultural interests of leisure that were identified emphasized sociability, since regardless of their activities, people went to meet others, in search of interaction, making the squares settings for sociability.

Keywords: Squares; Sociability; Leisure.

PLACES DE VILLE : LIEUX DE LOISIRS ET DE SOCIABILITÉ À BARRADO GARÇAS-MT RÉSUMÉ

Cet étude a analysé les formes de sociabilité et sa relation avec les intérêts culturels du loisir des places de ville Praças da Matriz, Sebastião Alves Júnior et Mães de la ville de Barra do Garças-MT. Pour la réalisation de cette recherche, une observation systématique a été réalisée entre les mois d'octobre et novembre 2016. Il a été détecté des intérêts culturels du loisir et avec ces mêmes les formes de sociabilité tels que, des rassemblements de personnes dans des groupes de conversations, randonnées et admiration du paysage, activités physiques, entre autres. Ces formes de sociabilité concernent plusieurs groupes

d'âges et les deux sexes. Tous les intérêts culturels du loisir qui furent identifiés incitèrent à la sociabilité, étant notoire qu'indépendamment des activités que les personnes effectuaient aux places de ville, elles allaient à la rencontre d'autrui, à la recherche interaction. Ce qui fait des précitées places de ville un point de rencontre pour la sociabilité.

Mots-clés: Places de ville; Sociabilité; Loisirs

PLAZAS: ESPACIOS DE OCIO Y SOCIABILIDAD EN BARRADO GARÇAS-MT

RESUMEN

Este estudio analizó las formas de sociabilidad y su relación con los intereses culturales y de ocio de algunas plazas de la ciudad de Barra do Garças-MT: Matriz, Sebastião Alves Júnior y das Mães. Para esta investigación se hizo una observación sistemática, en los meses de octubre y noviembre de 2016. Se detectaron los intereses culturales del ocio y sus formas de sociabilidad, como personas reunidas en ruedas de conversación, paseando y admirando el paisaje, haciendo actividad física, etc., los cuales involucraron grupos de distintas edades y de ambos los géneros. Todos los intereses culturales del ocio que fueron identificados enfatizaron la sociabilidad, siendo evidente que, independiente de las actividades que las personas realizaron en la plaza, iban al encuentro del otro, en busca de la interacción, lo que hace, entonces, de las referidas plazas, un punto de encuentro para la sociabilidad.

Palabras-clave: Plazas; Sociabilidad; Ocio

PRAÇAS: ESPAÇOS DE LAZER E SOCIABILIDADE EM BARRADO GARÇAS-MT

RESUMO

Este estudo analisou as formas de sociabilidade e sua relação com os interesses culturais de lazer das Praças da Matriz, Sebastião Alves Júnior e Mães da cidade de Barra do Garças-MT. Para a realização desta pesquisa foi realizada observação sistemática, nos meses de Outubro e Novembro de 2016. Foram detectados interesses culturais do lazer e dentro destes as formas de sociabilidade, como pessoas reunidas em rodas de conversas, passeando e admirando a paisagem, fazendo atividade física, etc., as quais envolveram várias faixas etárias e ambos os gêneros. Todos os interesses culturais do lazer que foram identificados enfatizaram a sociabilidade, sendo notório que independente das atividades que as pessoas realizavam na praça, iam ao encontro do outro, em busca da interação, o que torna, enfim, as referidas praças um ponto de encontro para a sociabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Praças; Sociabilidade; Lazer