


LEISURE IN PUBLIC SQUARES: PERCEPTION OF USERS OF THE SQUARES OF THE HISTORIC POLYGONAL OF SÃO CARLOS - SP

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ABSTRACT: Leisure, as one of the social functions of the city, plays an important role in the health of the population, but has suffered interference along the modifications of the postmodern urban layout, especially because of the emptying of the city's center at times that exceed commercial hours, keeps the population away from staying in places intended for leisure. In this sense, the present study, based on the combination of bibliographical research, case study and quali-quantitative analysis model, we sought to assess the appropriation of the squares in the Historical Polygonal of São Carlos, bringing to light the importance of leisure as a social function of the city and as a fundamental right to the citizens. Through the results obtained, it was possible to observe that little has been done so that the spaces aren't updated to human needs. It was seen that the available equipment does not correspond to the expectations of the population in the exercise of the right to leisure in the region, characterized by large stretches of circulation and few opportunities for stationary activities or active leisure. It is expected that the methodology addressed will serve as a motto for future studies, both in different regions of the municipality and in other medium-sized cities, with a view to reducing socio-environmental differences and ensuring orderly and sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: Leisure. Squares. Sustainability.

DIREITO AO LAZER NAS PRAÇAS PÚBLICAS: PERCEPÇÃO DOS USUÁRIOS DAS PRAÇAS DA HISTORIC POLYGONAL DE SÃO CARLOS-SP

RESUMO: O lazer, como uma das funções sociais da cidade, desempenha papel importante na saúde da população, porém sofreu interferências ao longo das

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modificações do tecido urbano pós-moderno, especialmente com o esvaziamento do centro da cidade em horários que excedam os comerciais, afastando a população da permanência em espaços abertos dessas regiões. Nesse sentido, a partir da combinação de levantamento bibliográfico, estudo de caso e análise quali-quantitativa, buscou-se avaliar a apropriação das praças da Poligonal Histórica de São Carlos, trazendo à luz a importância do lazer como função social da cidade e como direito fundamental dos cidadãos. Por meio dos resultados obtidos, foi possível observar que pouco tem sido feito para que os espaços sejam atualizados às necessidades humanas. Viu-se que os equipamentos disponíveis não correspondem às expectativas da população no exercício do direito ao lazer na região, caracterizada por grandes trechos de circulação e poucas oportunidades de atividades estacionárias ou de lazer ativo. Espera-se que a metodologia abordada sirva de mote para estudos futuros, tanto em diferentes regiões do município, quanto em outras cidades médias, com vistas a diminuir as diferenças socioambientais e garantir o desenvolvimento ordenado e sustentável.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Lazer. Praças. Sustentabilidade.

Introduction

Nowadays, just over half of the world's population is concentrated in cities and the projection is that this number will reach 70% by 2050. In Brazil, this movement gained momentum at the end of the 20th century, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, with the rural-to-urban migration (IBGE, 2010). According to the census, Brazil reached a level of 84% of the urban population in 2010 (IBGE, 2010).

With accelerated urbanization, socio-spatial segregation became more pronounced and public spaces received different approaches. According to Grosbaum (2012), the public space observed in European cities at the end of the 18th century, with the creation of sidewalks, public parks, cafes and theaters, was gradually replaced by industrial capitalist models. The incentive for subdivisions and gated condominiums changed urban space by prioritizing private space over public space which, according to Grosbaum (2012, p. 35) “opposes the democratic ideals of heterogeneity, accessibility and equality that lead to citizenship”.

The exclusionary behavior of contemporary society is based on insecurity and a generalized feeling of fear (BAUMAN, 2009). From then on, new physical barriers are

built, with a view to creating isolated spaces that, although physically located within the city, are socially outside it, offering an alternative – to those who can afford it – to the deterioration of public space. The author points out that the tendency to seek refuge in private spaces ends up becoming the biggest obstacle to experiencing what is different and differences, increasing the risk of common areas being reduced to residual spaces between private buildings.

Therefore, the fragmentation of the urban fabric gives new meaning to the terms public and private, since cities present the development of new centralities, urban mobility and the widespread use of automobiles. In this new context, spaces of flow are more important than spaces of permanence, presenting new forms, functions and meanings (NARCISO, 2009).

The relationship between identity and place should not be limited to the private space, the house, but create a dialectical relationship with the street, the square, the public space, where affective or solidarity relationships and neighborhoods take place (LOBODA, 2016). In this regard, democratizing leisure implies democratizing space and, for the majority of the population, the space for leisure is urban space – cities are the great leisure facilities (MARCELLINO, 2007).

Space results from the constitutive relationships of the concrete subject of history (SOUZA, 2009). Geographic space is, therefore, a representation of human action. Given the diversity of realities within space and the power relations established by society, however, different social layers have different approaches to the available environments.

Leisure, one of the social functions of the city, plays an important role in the health of the population, as it is related to the availability of time for social, socializing and recreation activities, but has suffered interference throughout the changes in the

post-modern urban fabric. Even though there is an effort by environmental agendas to encourage access to public spaces to guarantee the fundamental right to leisure, it is necessary to observe whether cities act in accordance with these.

Urban public space is understood as responsible for the development of the ability to coexist with others and the enjoyment of human bodily practices, being, according to Alex (2011), the central point of the manifestation of public life. When it comes to leisure, Rolnik (2000) states that it is capable of humanizing the city, promoting vibrant spaces that exceed the circulation function and promote new possibilities for approaching urban space. Corroborating the idea of sustainable development of cities, the 2030 Agenda in item 11.7 calls for the urgency to provide universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible and green public spaces, particularly for women and children, elderly people and people with disabilities (UN, 2015).

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to verify the evolution of the morphology and urban appropriation of public spaces aimed at guaranteeing the fundamental right to leisure, based on mapping the squares of the historic polygon of the municipality of São Carlos-SP³. Therefore, the aim is to analyze the forms of popular manifestation in the center's squares, identifying and qualifying spaces that do not fulfill this social function and, based on the pillars that guide the research, suggesting public leisure policies for the municipality.

The methodology was characterized by three stages: bibliographical survey, field research/qualitative and quantitative analysis and evaluation of results. The qualitative-quantitative analysis took place in two moments: firstly, based on the exploratory physical-environmental survey of public squares in the Historic Polygonal region of São Carlos, state of São Paulo, cataloged by the Pró-Memória Foundation. In

³ Resulting from master's thesis entitled "Assessment of Public Squares: Perspectives of Urban Dynamics and Public Leisure Policies in the Squares of the Historic Polygonal of São Carlos – SP (NAVARRO, 2021).

this context, only the perspective of the author was considered, through observation and analysis of existing equipment, based on studies by De Angelis, Castro and De Angelis Neto (2004) and Maciel (2016).

The second approach is characterized by the application of an online questionnaire⁴, using the Google Forms platform, aiming to measure the interaction and spatial relationships of the population, their appropriation (or not) and their movements and distributions in the squares of the historic polygonal of São Carlos-SP. Based on studies conducted by De Angelis, Castro and De Angelis Neto (2004) and Ornstein (1992), with adaptations, the questions were organized into a 5 value scale, which includes: excellent, good, reasonable, poor and terrible.

It is believed that this work is a contribution to the development of a methodology that considers popular opinion as fundamental in the construction and provision of quality accessible spaces, which meet the needs of the population as a whole in consolidating already established rights.

Urban Dynamics and the Right to the City

The increase in the world population in the last 60 years – which includes a jump from approximately 2.5 billion to 7 billion inhabitants in 2011 – is one of the characteristics of the transition of the rural population, based on the means of agricultural production, to a life urban (BENTO *et al.*, 2018). Stigt, Driessen and Spit (2013) point out that, currently, more than 54% of the world's population lives in cities. In Brazil, the degree of urbanization increased from 81.2% in 2000 to 84.4% in 2010 (IBGE, 2010).

⁴ The questionnaire consists of 12 multiple-choice questions and two open questions and was approved by the Research Ethics and Human Beings Committee of Universidade Federal de São Carlos [Federal University of São Carlos].

Offers of better living conditions are important elements for the growth of urban life and “encompass consumption, work, health, housing, education, culture, security, leisure, hygiene, in addition to aspects such as social justice, human dignity, among countless others” (COLENCI; OLIVEIRA, 2017). The author emphasizes that “dealing with this topic means dealing with the social functions of the city, or, broadly speaking, the Rights to the City”.

The Right to the City is a human and collective right, related to present and future generations. Thus, in Brazil, the Right to the City is described in the City Statute, which provides for the right to a sustainable city, guaranteeing the right to urban land, housing, environmental sanitation, urban infrastructure, transportation and public services. , work and leisure (BRASIL, 2001, article 2, items I and II). Article 2 also encourages “the correct spatial distribution of the population and economic activities of the municipality and the territory under its area of influence, in order to avoid and correct the distortions of urban growth and its negative effects on the environment” (BRAZIL, 2001).

As a representative of a relevant instrument for the consolidation of the right to human dignity and equality, Urban Law is capable of guaranteeing, through adequate urban planning, democratic access to goods that include the individual in society, making the physical space of the city is one of the means of promoting the dignity of the human person (COLENCI; OLIVEIRA, 2017).

The transition in the organization of cities, however, is a very significant movement and certainly the most important demographic change of the last decade, even though the phenomenon does not happen harmoniously between different societies and populations - worldwide, more than two thirds of the population live in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In these regions, it is estimated that, in the coming years, while a

fifth of the population increase will occur in large cities, almost half of this growth will occur in smaller municipalities (CAIAFFA *et al.*, 2008).

Therefore, in addition to population density, the so-called “medium cities” present greater urban and economic growth because they are incorporated into the technical-scientific environment and function as hubs for important areas of concentration of jobs and/or establishment of the manufacturing industry. From the point of view of attracting population flows, there are many factors that converge so that medium-sized cities protect themselves from disorderly growth and, thus, stimulate a complex set of spatial interactions (REOLON and MIYAZAKI, 2015).

In this regard, Rolnik (2000) highlights that the loss of the city's multifunctionality disaggregated its social functions, defining each of them a separate and specific place and mission. The social functions of housing, work, circulation and leisure were, over time, disconnected. As a consequence, urban fragmentation and monofunctional zoning, which tend to reduce public spaces as commuting circuits, directly affect the quality of the population's free time and, not infrequently, in the emptying of certain urban areas outside business hours, such as the city downtown. According to Andrade, Lima and Loureiro (2016), it is an uninteresting process as it underutilizes the broad infrastructure network, even contradicting the concept of sustainability.

Urban planning must be responsible for the development of the territory through the use of land in its social, economic, environmental, cultural and institutional function (BENTO *et al.*, 2018). Being based on sustainability issues, in addition to avoiding environmental degradation, it contributes to the city's health and transcends the candidates' term of office, reverberating in the maintenance of urban structures for future generations.

In the case of Brazil, Monte *et al.*, (2018) explain that the specificities and complexities of Brazilian socio-spatial formation require care that goes beyond the adoption of models imported from realities in developed countries. The Brazilian urban crisis demands responses based on knowledge of empirical reality, with a view to combating out-of-context ideas, common in the history of Brazil's urbanization process (MARICATO, 2013). Therefore, it is essential that Brazilian municipalities, especially those that are in the process of expansion, review the paths taken so far and adopt new positions to achieve compact and connected cities.

Urban Public Spaces and Leisure

It is known that man recognizes himself in his home, however, it is possible to point to public space as responsible for the development of abilities to coexist with others and the enjoyment of human bodily practices. Rolnik (1988, p. 7) points out that “building and living in cities necessarily implies living collectively. In the city you are never alone [...] the man alone in the apartment or the individual in the car is a fragment of the whole, part of the collective”.

As stated by Matos (2010), public spaces can be divided into two typologies: circuit spaces, which include the mobility of people and vehicles (such as carriage roads, pedestrian promenades, in addition to spaces intended for parking) and residence spaces, generally provided with furniture according to the type of use or behavior they want to encourage - such as squares and parks.

In this context, Alex (2011, p. 23) characterizes the square as a “public space for meeting and conviviality, formed by several openings in the urban fabric, which direct different flows and uses, being the central point of the manifestation of public life”. They are spaces capable of giving the city a specific shape and identity, often centered

on spaces intended for experiences in the areas of leisure, culture and sport (RECHIA, 2005). Considered by Matos (2010, p. 22) “that it is in these spaces that urban life and animation manifests itself and where much of the socialization of its users takes place”.

Similarly, Gehl (2013) classifies approaches to public spaces between moving and stationary activities. Thus, the author relates the quality of the space offered to the approach of it by passersby, that is, even if there is a large flow of people walking along the sidewalks, this pattern can only mean a gap in quality urban transport or a large distance between services that the city offers. In the case of stationary activities, two distinct scenarios are established, which vary according to the degree of need: activities that do not depend on urban quality, such as street commerce and bus stops and; on the other hand, the optional approaches – recreational and contemplative, which are substantially influenced by the quality of the place.

Based on knowledge about human senses and needs, in addition to years of studies of public spaces in different places around the world, the reasons why people remain in these stationary spaces have been increasingly addressed. Gehl (2018) points out that, over the years, the idea has transformed into a list so simple (to the point of seeming obvious) that it can serve as a tool for comparing different public spaces. The current idea is that the table starts as a possibility for dialogue between a project team and includes 12 items structured into three main themes: protection, comfort and satisfaction.

In fact, the quality of these places can interfere with use and enable or prevent individuals from acquiring healthy habits (*SILVA et al., 2016, p. 252*). One of today’s greatest challenges is the maintenance of spaces that provide moments of decompression for the population and enable active modes of transport.

Although cities represent the main place where the workforce is reproduced, improvements in living conditions are not only related to an increase in workers' wages, but depend on the creation of efficient public policies that include the basic needs of human beings (MARICATO, 2013). In this regard, Roegen (1976), *apud* Veiga (2005) brings to light, based on the outline of eight guidelines called “minimum bioeconomic program”, proposals for behavioral changes necessary to increase the quality of life and sustainability indexes of human societies. The reduction in working hours, which culminates in an increase in free time for leisure, is part of the list proposed by the author.

Therefore, actions to defend the environment, protect and enhance natural and historical heritage, renovate degraded areas and recover historic centers, to the detriment of quantitative urbanism, contemplate the evolution of human well-being.

Leisure can be understood, according to Dumazedier (1979), as time freed from obligations and, in a way, as residual time from everyday tasks. In addition to the libertarian character, that is, apart from professional, family, social and political demands, there is the disinterested character – leisure does not need to be linked to any profitable or utilitarian purpose. Hedonistic, the experience of leisure is marked by the search for pleasure and is diluted in the functions of rest, fun and personal development as responses to the individual's needs in the face of social impositions (DUMAZEDIER, 1979).

Marcellino (1987, p. 29), in turn, states that “no time can be considered free from coercions or norms of social conduct” and proposes the term 'available time', since human experiences are not disconnected from life in society. The author also states that this matter is a result of historical processes, imbued with questioning values of society as a whole, full of culture and capable of influencing current structures.

The availability of time, according to Marcellino (1987), provides the option for practical or contemplative activity, in an approach with multiple possibilities that, according to Nahas *et al.* (2010), they can be cultural, artistic, nature observation, recreational activities, games, dances, sports, among others. However, Marcellino (2003) brings to light some barriers to democratic access to leisure, such as economic, gender, age and educational factors, with women, children and the elderly being the characters with the greatest difficulty in experiencing non-social leisure situations. home. For the author, democratizing leisure implies democratizing space and, for the majority of the population, the space for leisure is urban space – cities are the great leisure facilities (MARCELLINO, 2007).

In this regard, the first Athens Charter, a document originating from the 1933 International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), “fundamentally addressed the issue of leisure, elevating it to the status of a city function, contributing to the possibility of opposing to the oppression of work and the excessive mass of buildings and spaces in the city” (RODRIGUES, 2003, p. 25). In the same line, article XXIV of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of the United Nations (UN), clarifies, in 1948, that “everyone has the right to rest and leisure, to reasonable limitation of working hours and to vacations periodic remuneration”.

The 1970s represent a major milestone in behavioral changes, especially in developed countries, related to the environment. The Stockholm Conference, in 1972, was characterized as the first meeting to break with the autonomy of States in managing their natural resources without any external interference, guided only by the national interest (AGUIAR; MATTOS e CARDOSO, 2015). Since then, the frequency of environmental agendas has been maintained, with a view to evaluating the results

achieved and setting new goals for the sustainable development of member countries of the United Nations (UN).

In this regard, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, arising from the Rio+20 Conference, held in 2012 in the city of Rio de Janeiro, brings together 17 goals that aim to eradicate poverty, strengthen human rights and gender equality, corroborating including the Millennium Development Goals. “They [the goals] are integrated and indivisible, and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, environmental and social” (UN, 2015).

Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is the eleventh objective of the agenda and, among other subtopics, item 11.7 addresses the need to, by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible public spaces and green, particularly for women and children, elderly people and people with disabilities (UN, 2015). In this context, Matos (2010) highlights that the organization of public spaces, especially leisure spaces, is currently one of the vital aspects for the revitalization and quality of life in the urban environment.

Vibrant, accessible and safe public spaces, in addition to allowing the democratization of the city, act to reduce the impacts of climate change, such as reducing the dispersion of atmospheric pollutants and heat islands (BUENO *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it is possible to understand leisure spaces as part of the process of maintaining human and urban health, and are directly related to the sustainable development of cities.

In Brazil, following the 1988 Constitution, the topic was included for the first time as a social right for all citizens (BRASIL, 1988, artigo 6º); with the Public Power being responsible for encouraging leisure as a form of social promotion (BRASIL, 1988, article 217). The recognition of leisure as a rightful status was important for the

achievement of demands, both from the public authorities and from different spheres of society, for its materialization in the daily lives of Brazilians, and the guarantee of access to leisure allows the change of indices of social vulnerability, as it acts as a training tool for the people, promoting, in addition to social interaction, the improvement of human health (ISAYAMA and STOPPA, 2017).

Despite being institutionalized, leisure lacks a political definition in the constituent, which classifies it as a social right, but does not address it in depth, as happens with health, education and housing, for example. Public policies that are not very specific on the topic are a reflection of the leisure focus in the Magna Carta, and range from cultural or sporting projects. In municipalities, the scenario is the same: leisure departments, when they exist, also share space with sport, culture and tourism.

Not to mention that the new forms of entertainment as gyms, shopping centers, among other sporting events, have distanced the population from urban public spaces. Therefore, it is possible to observe that most leisure attractions belong to the private sector (ISAYAMA; STOPPA, 2017). Accordingly given the efforts of the less favored classes to maintain a (low) standard of living, leisure ends up being the privilege of a few (MARCELLINO, 1983).

Thus, with a view to breaking with the segregation imposed by the commodification of leisure, it is essential that the topic is understood in its entirety, moving between all spheres, with the aim of providing balance between different social functions, strengthening interpersonal relationships and the connection between man and the built environment. An achievement that approaches a “new world, with the search for plenitude, where life is lived as an exchange and where the qualitative is dominant, allowing the integral man to settle on the planet” (SANTOS, 2000, p. 36-37).

In view of the evolution of urban thinking, according to Kanashiro (2004), we can see the emergence of cultural, social and historical values incorporated to define new ideals for the 21st century city. And article 2 of the City Statute guarantees the right to sustainable cities, which, in addition to other rights, includes the right to urban infrastructure and public services in general (BRASIL, 2001).

Results and Discussion

Delimitation of Geographic Space and Data Collection Procedures

Located in the geographic center of the state of São Paulo, the city of São Carlos has 254,857 inhabitants, according to the latest census (IBGE, 2022).

The municipality increasingly demonstrates characteristics of disorderly growth, along the lines of contemporary Brazilian cities. Accordingly, the movement of emptying the housing use of central areas is repeated and is even reflected in the appropriation of consolidated open spaces which, according to Rodrigues (2018, p. 132) “despite the different reasons that made central squares reduce their importance as meeting points of urban life, they still have the potential to promote social inclusion, quality of life and the appreciation of spaces that concentrate historical, artistic and architectural heritage of cities.” These are spaces capable of receiving public policies that would benefit the entire population and contribute to containing the construction of new disconnected free areas.

Analysis of Leisure Spaces at Historic Polygonal

Public squares, identified in the present study as spaces aimed at guaranteeing the social right to leisure in the central region of the municipality of São Carlos, state of São Paulo, make up the Area of Historical Interest, provided for in article 79 of Law

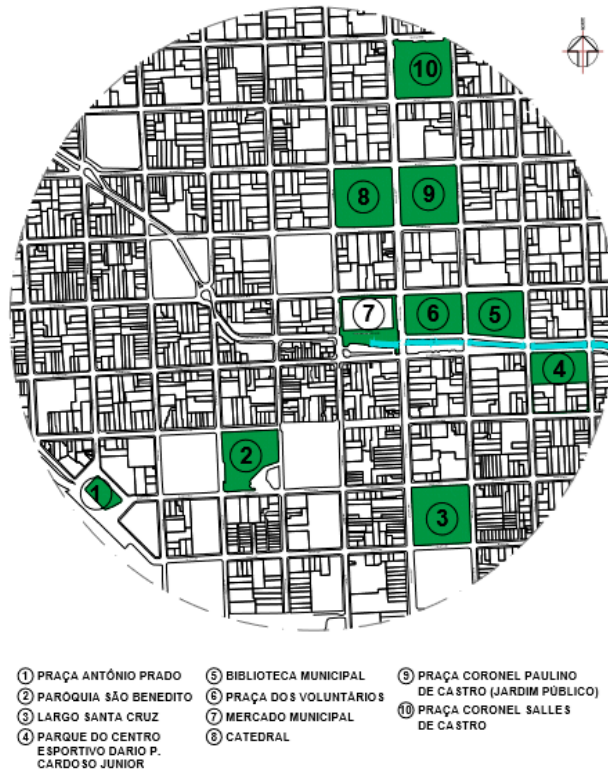
No. 18,053, of December 19 2016. The Ordinance Plan even attests to the importance of these spaces as part of an urban complex to be preserved as historical heritage, capable of maintaining identity and collective memory (SÃO CARLOS, 2016). It is possible to observe, in the city studied, the repetition of the movement of housing peripheralization and appropriation of central regions, already consolidated, with commercial activities.

Although it is interesting for local vitality during the week, purely commercial areas do not generate activities and movement outside business hours and on weekends. Thus, Jacobs (2009) highlights the need for spaces based on a diversity of uses, with a view to increasing local security through the permeability of facades in the middle of sidewalks and the experiences of passers-by, or social actors.

Likewise, aspects attributed by Gehl (2013) in relation to the human scale in public areas demonstrate that contact between the building and the city is lost in buildings that exceed five floors – a factor that reduces the clarity of perception and reduces the occurrence of natural surveillance (GHEL, 2013). In the case of the historic polygonal region of São Carlos, the gauge is limited to 9 meters above street level, in accordance with the municipality's ordinance plan, which immediately presupposes a positive assessment in this regard for all squares.

In total, the historic polygonal has 10 squares, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Section of the Historic Polygonal (500m radius)



Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

The expansion of the urban fabric, characteristic of the mid-20th century, was responsible for major transformations. From then on, life in the city and interaction with public space were identified as a field to be studied with greater attention (GEHL, 2018). From the 1960s onwards, it became clear that there was a need to assess the target audience's perception of the construction of new spaces. The study of squares and public spaces is also part of another scale, that of urban design, characterizing the process of evolution and renewal of city fragments. It is still common, however, to associate Brazilian squares with images of poverty and abandonment. “Disguised as parking lots or surrounded by fences (a trend seen in large urban centers), squares succumb under the weight of savage urbanism to the detriment of leisure and collective interest” (DE ANGELIS, CASTRO; DE ANGELIS, 2004, p. 60). The author adds that the population ends up becoming complicit in the loss of noble collective space,

expanding the possibilities of speculation and disregard for “public things”. According to Pacheco (2016, p.100), active participation in the city and the ways in which space is occupied expose a process of struggle that transcends the right to come and go.

In this sense, among the different approaches for collecting information from users of an environment, Ornstein (1992) highlights interviews, questionnaires, group meetings and daily notes on users' behavior. In this regard, aiming to understand the perception of users of the squares of the Historic Polygon de São Carlos, a structured questionnaire was developed, due to the ease of quantification through a scale of values which, according to Ornstein (1992, p. 112) “guarantee the anonymity of interviewees and minimize likely inappropriate interpretations by interviewers”. Thus, based on studies by De Angelis, Castro and De Angelis Neto (2004) and Ornstein (1992), with adaptations, the questions were organized into a 5 value scale, which includes: excellent, good, reasonable, poor and terrible.

89 people participated in the research, 48.3% male and 50.6% female. 1.1% of people interviewed preferred not to inform their gender.

For the interviews, the following age groups were considered: people under 20 years old (between 18 and 20); between 21 and 40 years old; between 41 and 55 years old and over 55 years old, with a view to measuring the diversity of appropriation of spaces and serving as a basis for outlining public policies that, in addition to contemplating spontaneous initiatives, serve to attract new people. In addition to age, in relation to the occupation of those interviewed, the data suggests that 61.8% of people are workers and workers, while 36% are students, 1.1% are retired or retired and 1.1% are unemployed or unemployed. The adherence of interviewees to downtown squares was also assessed. 84.3% said they frequented the spaces, while 15.7% said they did not frequent the region. A diversity of uses of the Historic Polygon of São Carlos-SP was

noticed, with 56.2% using the region to resolve personal matters; 24.7% go to work and 19.1% carry out leisure activities.

Regarding active leisure, 92.1% said they did not practice any type of physical activity in the spaces, while 4% said they used the spaces for physical activities and 3.9% used the spaces sporadically. 70.8% said they frequented the spaces once a week; 11.2% said they visit the region between two and three times and 18% visit more than three times a week.

The majority of interviewees consider the facilities in the squares to be reasonable (52.8%). For 30.3%, the facilities are poor. 14.6% consider the spaces to be good and 2.3% consider the facilities to be terrible. No interviewee classified the squares as excellent.

The accessibility item was evaluated by the interviewees as follows: 52.8% consider it poor; 30.3% classify it as reasonable; 7.8% see it as good and 9.1% classified it as excellent. The paving of squares received the following perceptions: 40.4% consider it poor; 37.1% classify it as reasonable; 13.5% classified it as bad while 9% classified it as good. There was no excellent evaluation by any interviewee.

According to the Global Street Design Guide, all streets must be universally accessible, accommodate different travel speeds and be legible for all users, especially the elderly, children and women (GLOBAL STREET DESIGN GUIDE, 2018). NBR9050 (2020) recommends travel spaces (public sidewalks) of 1.50 m wide (1.20 m being tolerable), enabling movement in pairs, to accommodate people with reduced mobility. The floor surface must be regular, firm, continuous and non-slip (ABNT, 2020).

In this regard, the normative specifications justify users' perceptions, since, with the exception of Praça do Mercado Municipal and Praça do Centro Esportivo Dario

Placeres Cardoso Junior, which have concrete paving, all other squares are covered in Portuguese stone that, despite being a material suitable for public spaces, it demands high maintenance.

Regarding lighting, the participants expressed themselves as follows: 32.6% consider it reasonable; 31.5% rated it as poor; 21.3% classified it as poor while 13.5% classified it as good. 1.1% consider the lighting to be excellent. The purpose of lighting, in addition to ensuring road safety, is to assist in spatial orientation and can contribute to the identity of the space, ambiance, recreation or commercial promotion (DORNELES, LUZ e ELY *et al.* 2014). The authors point to tall posts as recommended for street lighting. However, in living spaces, intermediate posts are recommended, in order to allow people to recognize each other at a prudent distance, strengthening the feeling of security. Low posts should be used to indicate differences in level and obstacles on the route, helping to create urban scenes and enhance architecture (DORNELES, LUZ and ELY, 2014).

With the exception of the Dario Placeres Cardoso Junior Sports Center, which does not have intermediate lighting posts, the other squares comply with this requirement. What does not make the lighting inviting in these places is the absence of low poles, making environments less contrasting and inviting at night. Given this, users' perception is in line with the literature.

The item “suitability of spaces for young people and adults” received the following feedback: 48.3% consider it poor; 34.8% rated it as reasonable; 7.9% classified it as bad while 7% classified it as good. 2% consider the spaces suitable for young people and adults.

The “perception of participants of benches and social areas” was assessed as follows: 49.4% consider it precarious; 28.1% rated it as reasonable; 12.4% classified it

as poor, 9% classified it as good. 1.1% consider the benches and social spaces to be excellent. According to the Accessibility Guide in Squares and Parks, street furniture must be easy to see and identify, with contrasting colors in relation to the surrounding floors and vertical elements. Waste bins, drinking fountains, public telephones and bicycle racks, for example, must be used without limiting their quantity and must allow user access without physical effort, whether sitting or standing – for example, waste bins with different openings, which must be distributed to every 50 meters, and drinking fountains at different activation heights (DORNELES, LUZ and ELY, 2014). Once again, literature and user perception coincide.

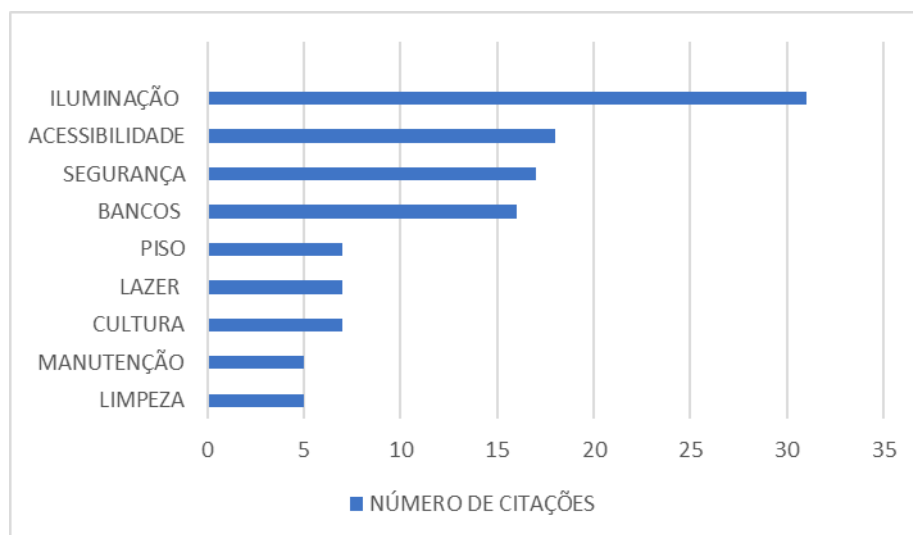
The spaces most mentioned by interviewees point out: 67.4% frequent the municipal market square regularly; 49.4% cited the Cathedral square as the most frequented; 21.3% indicated Largo Santa Cruz; 19.1 pointed to Praça Coronel Salles de Castro and the Municipal Library; the São Benedito parish was mentioned by 12.4%; Praça Coronel Paulino de Castro was mentioned by 9% of those interviewed while Praça Antônio Prado received 6.7% of votes; the Dario P. Cardoso Junior sports center received 3.4% of the votes.

Pacheco (2016), suggests that if, on the one hand, leisure can be understood by different approaches and cultural manifestations, carried out with autonomy and freedom, on the other, it can be an indicator of the commodification of time. In the same line, activities carried out in religious environments can occur through advertising campaigns, cultural elements or as debt and obligation (CHRISTOFFOLI; PEREIRA e SILVA, 2012). It is no coincidence that the municipal market square emerged as the first option for research participants, followed by the Cathedral square, facilities that do not directly depend on public policies to attract the population.

When asked about how leisure manifests itself in everyday life, the most cited answers indicated⁵: friends' house was the most voted item, with 86.5% of responses; the cinema item, 55.1%; shopping center was mentioned by 34.8%; 27% cited squares as leisure facilities; clubs appeared in 16.9% of responses. Other responses were given and include bars, recreational farms, rural areas, rowing, cycling and studying, gym, traveling, go-kart track and walking along the SESC waterfront.

When asked if there was anything to improve in the squares in the center of São Carlos-SP, two responses were negative. On the other hand, among the 87 people who said yes, the following words stood out (Chart 1):

Chart 1: Words most cited in interviewees' answers



Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

Water fountains, trash cans and trees appeared three times each. The installation of cameras was also suggested twice. Cycle path and walking space appeared once. One participant mentioned that “some LID (Low Impact Development) compensatory techniques⁶ They could improve not only the infrastructure, but optimize the public

⁵ Referring to question 17 of the questionnaire applied, in which participants could list up to three options as an answer.

⁶ LID presents the planning of urban spaces through the conservation of hydrological processes, redirecting rainwater for reuse, infiltration and evaporation, mitigating the impacts arising from disorderly urbanization (United States Department of Defense, 2004, *apud* ZANANDREA; SILVEIRA, 2019).

space to generate more comfort for those who visit, in addition to helping with landscaping.” In the same direction, there was a response suggesting more green and gray infrastructure and better planning of existing infrastructure.

The question was even raised that the squares could serve as decompression areas for local workers. Answer 86 shows that: “it should be a cozy, bright space, a refuge for people who work nearby and who would have a place to rest peacefully, whether at lunchtime or at any time. A place that serves everyone, not just homeless people.”

Answer 12 adds that the squares are, in fact, spaces of flow: “for the most part, the squares are well cared for, but they are simply large walks. We rarely find structures other than banks, which does not attract these spaces to other activities, such as sports and cultural activities. We can think of sports courts, physical exercise equipment, arenas or stages and small stands. Of course, this does not ensure its use, but social mobilization occurs more spontaneously when the instrument is already available”.

Answer 82, in turn, indicates that: “these are not spaces considered for leisure, the tree-lined areas do not have security, they are squares where, for the most part, homeless people or drug users live. They do not have spaces for family sitting, for example, toys for children. They are, for the most part, central spaces that only serve as passageways.”

Accordingly, it is possible to observe that, although the historical polygonal region of São Carlos – SP has a significant number of spaces aimed at guaranteeing the exercise of the social right to leisure, there are not enough attractions for people to stay in the places. The perception of frequency of access, the lack of quality furniture and the paving of squares are below what the literature and design standards envisage – directly compromising accessibility, especially for the most vulnerable groups, such as women,

children, the elderly and people with disabilities. It is also necessary that public leisure policies are understood beyond sports initiation initiatives, as foreseen by the Department of Sports and Leisure of São Carlos – SP and that there is, in fact, a commitment to the maintenance of public leisure spaces existing before the creation of new equipment, as stated in the Municipal Master Plan.

With a view to offering other options that transcend home leisure or costly activities, there are examples of policies to encourage human participation in the spaces offered by cities. It should be noted, however, that the availability of equipment alone does not guarantee the experience of leisure, requiring planning that, in addition to optimizing the use of these places, encourages access by a greater number of people who care for their conservation (ALLEN, 2011).

The results of the applied questionnaire represent good indicators of the desires of city users regarding an ideal public space, being an important material to be considered in the design of public policies. There are also concrete examples of successful initiatives on the topic in various parts of Brazil. In Curitiba (PR), for example, a great national model of cultural identity was created based on the connection between urban planning and environmental preservation, generating a peculiar profile of local culture through the daily use of the city's parks, strengthening the feeling of belonging (RECHIA, 2007). The author adds that other cities in Paraná are marked by intense planning that combines, among other dimensions, culture, leisure, sport and nature preservation (RECHIA, 2007, p. 91).

Encouraging the participation of the school community in the construction of living and active public spaces, which serve as a stage for learning that goes beyond the school walls, strengthens the emotional bond and increases a critical, creative and liberating perspective in these spaces.

Marcellino *et al.* (2007, p. 10) state that “it is very important to understand the entire process of planning, construction, administration and animation of the equipment, so that, with this, a policy of cultural democratization can be implemented in a more appropriate way”.

The National Sports and Leisure Policy proposes, in addition to carrying out a diagnosis of the cities' sports and leisure structure, coordinated actions between the different levels of public administration (or public-private partnerships and between the community) for the construction, modernization, revitalization, preservation, optimization and maximization of spaces and equipment for experiencing sport and leisure with safety and quality, aiming to meet the needs of the population (BRASIL, 2005).

Finally, it is essential that leisure stops being considered as an uncompromising element, reduced to sports practices, and occupies a prominent place in the planning and construction of a more human, compact and diverse city, which guarantees its integral practice, as foreseen in the Plan Director of São Carlos, in the Federal Constitution and in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Final Considerations

In the past, public squares constituted meeting spaces, cultural and political manifestations and leisure opportunities, as they offered an environment for common use by everyone in society. The transition from rural life to urban life, driven by the offers of better living conditions in cities, however, characterized the process of fragmentation of the urban fabric, strengthened by the individualist and consumerist model from the second half of the 20th century.

Since then, a common scenario has been observed in some Brazilian cities: the emptying of centers and the occupation of the outskirts, dispersing the population among new disconnected infrastructures, characteristic of the disorderly growth of the urban layout. Therefore, with the road system overloaded by increasingly long commuting trips, the population's available time was severely impacted, especially those with low incomes, dependent on public transport. Then, it was possible to observe the encouragement of cities to build rapid travel routes instead of prioritizing the human scale and non-motorized modes of transport.

In this regard, it is believed that containing the disorderly growth of medium-sized Brazilian cities has a direct impact on the optimization of citizens' free time - an important tool for urban planning strategies to be reviewed - envisioning a compact and integrated urban network, which enables the construction of diverse spaces, aligned with the real needs of different types of people, regardless of motor skills, gender, age and social class and that overlaps with the design that privileged individual modes of transport, as observed in the second half of the last century.

With subsidies for the evaluation of public spaces based on comfortable conditions for the movement and permanence of people, it was possible to verify the importance of evaluating users in the construction of spaces that meet human needs to the detriment of the desires of those who design them, such as permeability of the look, walkability, protection from noise and dirt, clarity of information and signage, in addition to the possibility of appropriating spaces in a playful way.

Leisure permeates naturally among the ruling classes, but it is not yet a reality for people who cannot afford it. Currently, based on the understanding of the importance of strengthening human rights and reducing environmental inequalities, the

theme makes up the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, continuing the idea of building an inclusive and accessible city.

Based on the responses to the questionnaire, it was possible to see that, despite the availability of open spaces (in quantity) in the region, the municipal policy for maintenance and conservation of existing public spaces must be increased. Problems such as poor paving, which generate inaccessible routes, as well as low-quality lighting, which compromise the use of squares at different times of the day, distance users from spontaneous interest in the locations, preventing them from taking advantage of the urban space in the central region.

It was noted that the available equipment does not meet the expectations of the population when exercising their right to leisure in the region. There is a high number of benches, disproportionate to the amount of trash cans, large stretches of circulation, but few opportunities for stationary activities. Only one, among the 10 squares, offers active leisure options through courts. It was not identified any walking or alternative transport paths (such as skateboarding, rollerblading and cycling) and there are no reports of popular gyms – factors that put the squares at a disadvantage when compared to other offerings in the municipality.

In this line, through the analysis of the squares in the center, it was possible to observe that little has been done to ensure that the spaces are updated to human needs, such as the provision of gym equipment, walking paths that encourage the practice of physical exercise and routes that favor alternative modes of transport, in addition to facilitating the journey of people with disabilities, since the arrangement of existing equipment would allow the creation of an active mobility cordon, connecting the squares and prioritizing pedestrians.

Based on what has been exposed, it is expected that the study will be used as base for other approaches, both in São Carlos-SP, in the different neighborhoods, and in several medium-sized cities in the country, with the aim of reducing socio-environmental differences and guaranteeing the orderly and sustainable development, since, with the decrease in the income of the average population, the possibility of paying for leisure becomes unfeasible, thus increasing social inequality.

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