

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR LEISURE PRACTICES: A LOOK AT THE PBH DECREE

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ABSTRACT: The Covid-19 virus has affected the global population in various ways, leading to the need for the implementation of sanitary measures to prevent its spread. In Belo Horizonte, these measures came through municipal decrees, which banned the operation of non-essential services. From that moment on, young people accustomed to frequenting bars, parties, and malls – places that generate intense crowding – found themselves in an unusual situation, being forced to adapt their practices to home life. In order to better understand these changes, we conducted a study analyzing the impacts of the pandemic on the leisure practices of these young people. Through a questionnaire applied at various leisure points in the city, we were able to observe how the leisure practices of young people were affected by the pandemic. These results emphasize the importance of adaptability and resilience of young people in face of new challenges.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic. COVID-19. Youth. Decrees. City hall. Leisure activities.

OS JOVENS E SUAS PRÁTICAS DE LAZER: UM OLHAR DIANTE OS DECRETOS DA PBH

RESUMO: O vírus da Covid-19 afetou de diversas formas a população mundial e, com isso, surgiu a necessidade da implementação de medidas sanitárias para evitar sua propagação. Em Belo Horizonte, essas medidas vieram por meio de decretos municipais, que proibiram o funcionamento de serviços considerados não essenciais. A partir desse momento, os jovens acostumados a frequentar bares, festas, shoppings – lugares que geram intensa aglomeração – se depararam com uma situação inusitada, sendo obrigados a adaptarem suas práticas à rotina do lar. Com o intuito de compreender melhor essas mudanças, realizamos um estudo que analisa os impactos da

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pandemia nas práticas de lazer desses jovens. Por meio de um questionário aplicado em diversos pontos de lazer da cidade, conseguimos observar como as práticas de lazer dos jovens foram afetadas pela pandemia. Esses resultados enfatizam a importância da adaptabilidade e resiliência dos jovens diante novos desafios.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Pandemia. COVID-19. Jovens. Decretos. Prefeitura. Atividades de lazer.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic, caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2 or the new Coronavirus, has affected the world population in many ways. Different other viruses due to its high rate of contagion and dissemination, SARS-CoV-2 imposed on society the need to create sanitary measures to prevent the spread of this microorganism and protect the world population. Thus, social distancing was one of the main measures adopted, resulting in a set of actions that aimed to reduce the number of people circulating to avoid possible infection by COVID-19 (WHO, 2021).

Such resolutions affected several industries of society, including leisure. Considered as a social right of all Brazilian citizens from the Federal Constitution onwards, leisure, according to the French sociologist Dumazedier (1976), can be classified as “a set of occupations to which the individual can freely engage, whether to rest, to have fun, to recreate and to entertain themselves, or even to develop their disinterested information or training, their voluntary social participation or their free creative capacity after freeing themselves or disembarking from professional, family and social obligations”.

Marilena Chauí (2006) states that leisure can be defined as a privileged place for both creativity and sociability to be expressed. When it comes to leisure, people have the opportunity to express their creative abilities, whether through artistic, sporting or cultural activities, thus promoting the manifestation of individuality. Not to mention that

leisure also provides an environment conducive to social interaction, where people establish connections, strengthen relationships and create bonds of friendship. In this regard, leisure presents itself as a fundamental dimension in everyday life, offering a space rich in possibilities for expression and human interaction.

In addition, in a broader approach, Gomes (2004, p.125) defines leisure as a “dimension of culture constituted through the playful experience of cultural manifestations in a time/space conquered by the subject or social group, establishing dialectical relationships with the needs, duties and obligations”.

In Belo Horizonte, the Local Authority adopted precautionary measures through the publication of municipal decrees, prohibiting the operation, for an indefinite period, of activities considered non-essential, pursuant to decree 17.523 signed by the, until then, mayor of Belo Horizonte, Alexandre Kalil (PSD) on January 7, 2021. Faced with the restrictions imposed by the municipal government, the young population of Belo Horizonte needed to rethink their form of entertainment. With the closure of parties, bars and gathering places, they were forced to look for alternatives that would allow them to enjoy moments of leisure without putting their health and that of others at risk. Thus, they began to invest in activities within their own home, such as watching series, films and playing video games. Beyond that, many chose to carry out outdoor activities, such as walking and running, in places away from crowds. These changes represented a challenge for young people, who had to adapt to a new social reality and rethink their forms of entertainment.

According to sociologist Carrano (1999), leisure practices play a fundamental role in the formation of the identity of young people, establishing networks of significant relationships. With the pandemic, however, these connections were profoundly affected, resulting in the emergence of new identities. Given this context,

this paper seeks to investigate the leisure practices adopted by young people during the period in which the City of Belo Horizonte (PBH) adopted restrictive lockdown measures, comparing them with the activities carried out before and after the closure. Furthermore, it aims to understand the impacts caused by these decrees on the lives of young people.

Methodological Procedures

This paper adopted a quantitative approach, with data collection carried out through the application of a questionnaire developed in *Google Forms*³.

- Data Collect

The questionnaire was widely distributed on the main social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, as well as among members of the Physical Education program at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais [Federal University of Minas Gerais] (UFMG). In addition, we dedicated several weekends to directly administering the questionnaire in the nine regions of Belo Horizonte, focusing on areas with a significant concentration of young people in that specific period.

Places such as Mercado Novo, squares, regional bars, sporting events (such as BOP GAMES⁴) and cultural events (such as SARARÁ⁵) were visited to collect data. The questionnaire itself consisted of thirteen questions, seven of which addressed leisure practices and six explored the profile of individuals.

- Sample

³ *Google Forms* is a survey management application, using questionnaire models or forms used by users, launched by the company Google.

⁴ BOP GAMES is an annual sporting event gathering several athletes from different modalities in a friendly and exciting competition. The initiative aims to promote sports practice, integration between participants and the spirit of overcoming.

⁵ Sarará is a cultural and musical event that promotes diversity and inclusion through music, art and cultural activities. With a schedule full of different activities and the presence of renowned artists, Sarará is a celebration of cultural and artistic diversity.

The sample comprised young people of both genders, aged between 18 and 29 years, who lived in Belo Horizonte during the pandemic period.

- Data Analysis

The analysis of data collected was conducted using the content analysis technique, with the aid of SPSS⁶.

Leisure

Leisure plays a fundamental role in the life of each individual, being intrinsically linked to culture in its broadest sense. According to Carmem Cinira Macedo (*apud* VALLE, 1982, p.35) cited by Marcellino (1998, p.37), culture can be understood as a “set of ways of doing, being, interacting and representing that, when socially produced, involve symbolization and, in turn, define the way in which social life develops”. In this regard, leisure manifests itself as an expression of culture in the time available.

Historical evolution and social changes over time have shaped the concept of leisure, resulting in a plurality of meanings and interpretations. As provided by GOMES (2018), the concept of leisure is permeated by conflicts, tensions, contradictions and complexities, allowing the coexistence of different perspectives.

According to Veal (2015), leisure is a socially constructed phenomenon and plays a crucial role in the formation of individual and collective identities. Marcellino (1987), in turn, highlights that leisure is a form of cultural expression, which reflects the values and characteristics of a society. In this regard, it can be said that leisure is essential for sociability, contributing to improving quality of life and strengthening interpersonal relationships.

⁶ The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) is a software for statistical analysis. Despite being statistical software, it is possible to perform other tasks with it, such as: simple database operations (split, merge, join, etc.); maps; graphics; etc.

Leisure is not an isolated phenomenon, but a reflection of the context in which the individual is inserted. As Gomes (2014) points out, leisure is a human need that manifests itself through playfulness, cultural manifestations and social time/space. Satisfying this need is a complex social practice that adapts to the values and interests of subjects, groups and institutions in different historical, social and cultural contexts.

Belo Horizonte, capital of the state of Minas Gerais, is a true treasure in terms of natural and cultural heritage. With its mountain ranges and hills that surround the city, Belo Horizonte provides a unique atmosphere for those seeking outdoor experiences. The city bears several of parks, spread across its nine regions, inviting residents and visitors to explore the lush nature that surrounds it.

Among the highlights, the Governador Magalhães Pinto⁷ Stadium, also known as “Mineirão”, which not only hosts sporting events of national and international importance, but also represents a significant part of the city's cultural identity, deserves special attention. Pampulha Lagoon⁸, a true historical and artistic landmark, is recognized as a cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO⁹. Its beauty and unique architecture attract art and history lovers, as well as those seeking an inspiring setting for leisure.

Not to mention that the city boasts the title of “Brazilian Capital of Bars” in recognition of its effervescent nighttime entertainment scene. The North-American

⁷ The Governador Magalhães Pinto Stadium, better known as Mineirão, is a football stadium located in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. Opened in 1965, the stadium has a capacity for more than 60 thousand spectators and has hosted several sporting and cultural events throughout its history, being considered one of the main sporting venues in Brazil.

⁸ Pampulha Lagoon, located in Belo Horizonte, is among the most important postcards of the city. Built in the 1940s, the lagoon is part of an architectural complex designed by Oscar Niemeyer, which also includes the Church of São Francisco de Assis, the Pampulha Art Museum and the Iate Tênis Clube. With a length of approximately 18 kilometers, the lagoon is an important point of leisure and contemplation for residents and visitors to the capital of Minas Gerais.

⁹ UNESCO is the acronym for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It was founded shortly after the end of the Second World War, with the aim of contributing to peace and security in the world, through education, science, culture and communications. The head office of UNESCO is in Paris, France, and operates in 112 countries.

newspaper *The New York Times* highlighted this unique characteristic of Belo Horizonte, where establishments of all types offer a wide range of gastronomic and cultural experiences. Bars are not only places to enjoy delicious food and drinks, but they are also meeting and celebration points, reflecting the warm hospitality of Belo Horizonte residents.

This wealth of leisure options contributes to the city's vibrant life and offers a multitude of choices for those looking to make the most of their downtime. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, and the restrictions imposed by Belo Horizonte City Hall, most of these leisure facilities were temporarily closed, forcing the population to adapt and look for safe and creative alternatives for their leisure activities.

One of the leisure activities that gained prominence during the pandemic was the consumption of films and series through streaming services. According to data from the Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2020-2024 report, released by PwC, the video streaming market in Brazil grew by 27.5% in 2020, driven by increased demand during the period of social isolation. In addition, practicing physical exercise at home has also become an alternative to maintaining leisure during the period of isolation. According to a survey carried out by Mindbody, a North American technology company for the fitness industry, 78% of Brazilians started exercising at home during the pandemic.

Decrees

From the moment the Covid-19 virus was identified in Brazil, the City of Belo Horizonte declared a Public Health Emergency Situation through Decree No. 17.297, of March 17, 2020. This measure was adopted in view of the need to contain the spread of the virus and preserve the health of the population against Coronavirus – COVID-19.

During this period, several other decrees were entered into, regulating different aspects of combating the pandemic and, consequently, guiding this research.

- Decree number 17.297, of March 17, 2020

“It declares an abnormal situation, characterized as a Public Health Emergency Situation, in the Municipality of Belo Horizonte due to the need for actions to contain the spread of viral infection, as well as to preserve the health of the population against the Coronavirus – COVID-19”.

- Decree number 17.328, of April 8, 2020

“It suspends for an indefinite period the Location and Operating Permits and authorizations issued for all commercial activities and takes other measures”

- Decree number 17.332, of April 16, 2020

“It makes the use of masks mandatory, restricts customer access to commercial establishments during the Public Health Emergency Situation in the Municipality and provides other measures”

- Decree number 17.523, of January 7, 2021

It prohibits the operation, for an indefinite period, of activities considered non-essential.

Not to mention that this decree regulated the opening hours of essential services: “Decree No. 17.523 also establishes the opening hours of authorized establishments. Among the authorized activities are bakeries, supermarkets, pharmacies and gas stations.”

All of these decrees above contributed to the total closure of the city, with only essential services for the population being operated. Considering that, this study aims to investigate, based on these documents issued by the City of Belo Horizonte, what were the leisure practices of young people and what were the impacts on the practices they already carried out. As time went by and the entire population of Belo Horizonte had

access to the vaccine, the PBH issued new decrees to ease restrictions and gradually reopen the city.

Young People

Youth is a period characterized by a set of physical, emotional and social transformations that occur between childhood and adulthood. It is a phase of discovery, questioning and identity construction, marked by the search for autonomy and the formation of values and aspirations. According to the Brazilian writer Machado de Assis, youth is “a happy time, in which instincts find their certainty, desires, their impetus, hopes, their faith; it is the age in which all obstacles are unknown, they narrow friendships, sacrifices are not measured, nor are interests weighed.”

According to Carrano (1999), “leisure practices are like networks of relationships, they define their identities and will change and form different identities”. With the pandemic, these practices were profoundly impacted and youth were affected unequally. For some young people, social isolation and the suspension of leisure activities represented a significant loss. As provided by Alcântara (2020), “the impossibility of leaving home, meeting friends, attending parties and cultural events, had a great impact on youth, generating anguish and frustration”.

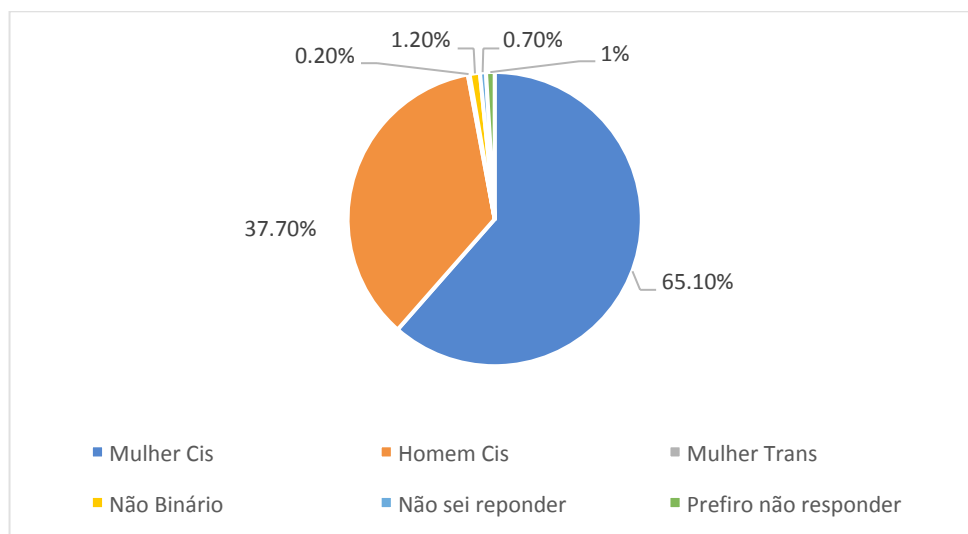
It is important to highlight, however, that not all young people were equally affected by the pandemic. As Bourdieu (2012) points out, “youth is not one, and social differentiation and economic diversity have an important impact on the configuration of the different 'ways of being' imposed on young people”. In fact, for those young people who already faced socioeconomic inequalities, the pandemic has only intensified these disparities.

In this regard, it is essential to understand the complexity of youth and take their different realities into account. In short, youth underwent transformations and challenges during the pandemic, reflecting the diversity of their practices and social positions. It is important to recognize the different realities faced by young people and promote inclusive policies and actions that take their needs and aspirations into account.

Results

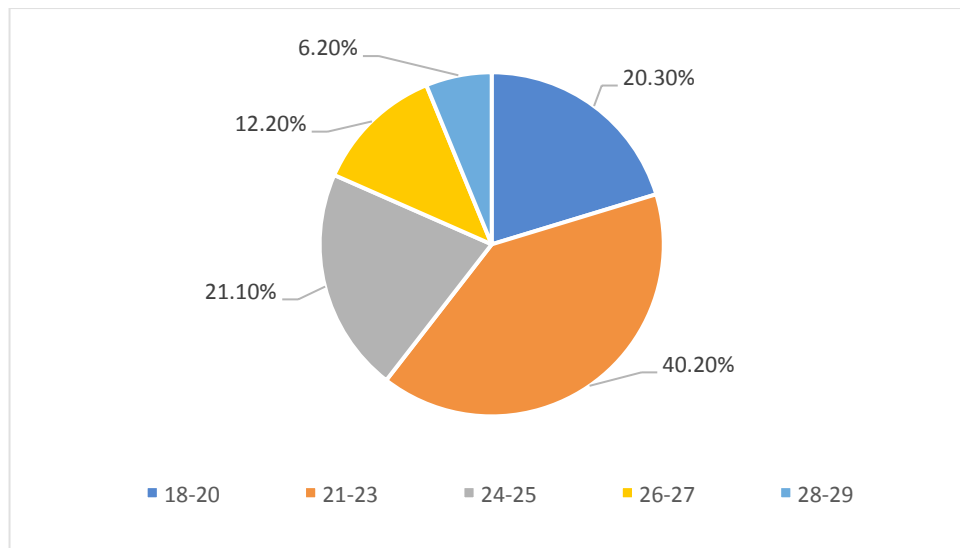
As previously mentioned, the purpose of this paper was to understand what leisure practices were carried out by young people before and after the PBH decrees, to compare them to, finally, understand what their impacts were. 419 people responded to the questionnaire, 272 (65.1%) cis women, 133 (31.8) cis men, 1 (0.2%) trans woman, 5 (1.2) non-binary, 3 (0.7) I don't know how to answer and 4 (1%) did not prefer to answer. The young people interviewed were between 18 and 29 years old, with 85 (20.3%) between 18 and 20 years old, 168 (40.3%) between 21 and 23 years old, 88 (21%) between 25 and 24 years old, 51 (12.2%) between 26 and 27 years old and 26 (6.2%) between 28 and 29 years old.

Chart 1: Gender of participants



Source: The authors (2022)

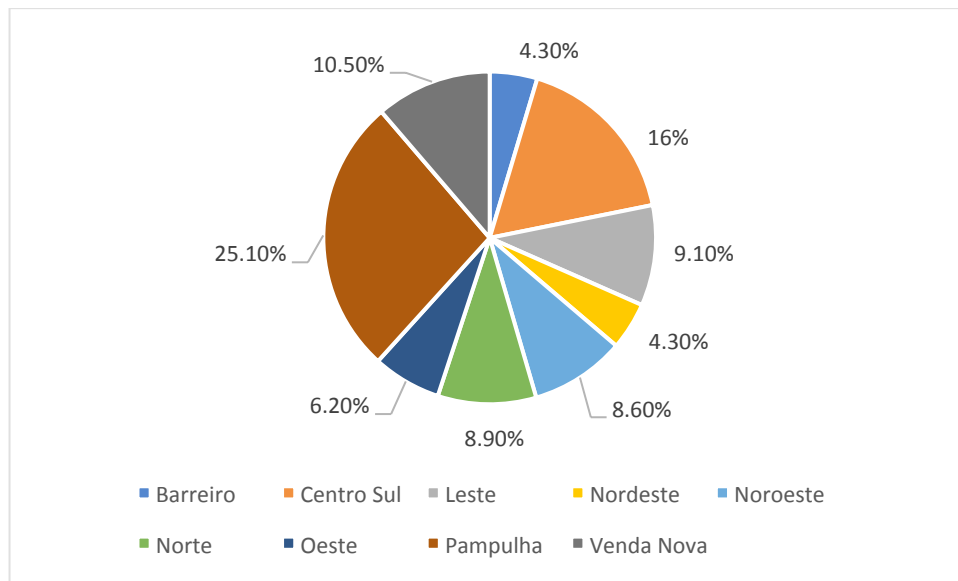
Chart 2: Age of participants



Source: The authors (2022)

The questionnaire covered young people from all regions of Belo Horizonte, with a predominance of answers in the Pampulha region with 105 (25.1%) answers, followed by the South-Center region with 67 (16%) answers, Venda Nova with 44 (10.5%), East with 38 (9.1%), North with 37 (8.9%), Northwest with 36 (8.6%), West with 26 (6.2%) and the regions Nordeste and Barreiro with the same number of answers. It is important to highlight that the variety of regions covered in the questionnaire allows for a wide diversity of perspectives and opinions from young people in Belo Horizonte. This geographic coverage contributes to a more comprehensive and representative analysis of the different social, economic and cultural contexts present in the city. Each region has specific characteristics that influence the behavior and perceptions of young people, and by covering them all, we are able to capture important nuances to understand local realities and also identify similarities and differences between regions. In this regard, the results obtained in the questionnaire provide a panoramic and more precise view of the main demands, challenges and trends among young people in Belo Horizonte.

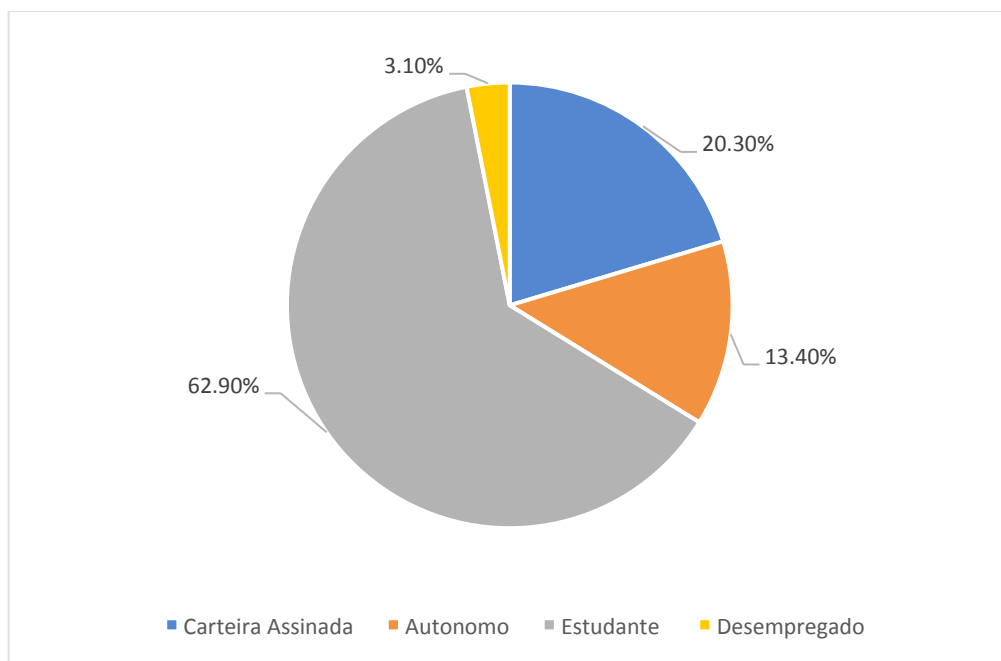
Chart 3: Region of participants



Source: The authors (2022)

Respondents were asked what their occupation was during this period, 263 (62.9%) claimed that they were just students, while 85 (20.3%) had a formal contract, 56 (13.4%) were self-employed and 13 (3.1) are unemployed.

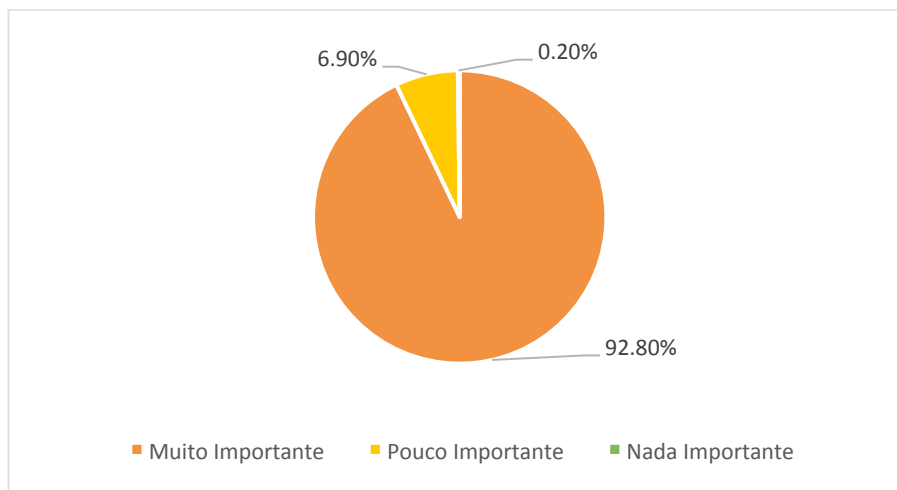
Chart 4: Occupation of participants



Source: The authors (2022)

When it comes to leisure, some very interesting results were captured, which demonstrated the difference in leisure practices before and after the decrees. The first question sought to understand the importance of leisure in the lives of the interviewees, the result was as expected, 389 (92.8%) claimed to have leisure as very important in their lives, while 29 (6.9%) placed it as little important and 1 (0.2%) as not important at all. These results are quite significant, as they reveal that most people recognize the importance of leisure in their lives.

Graph 5: Importance of leisure in the lives of participants

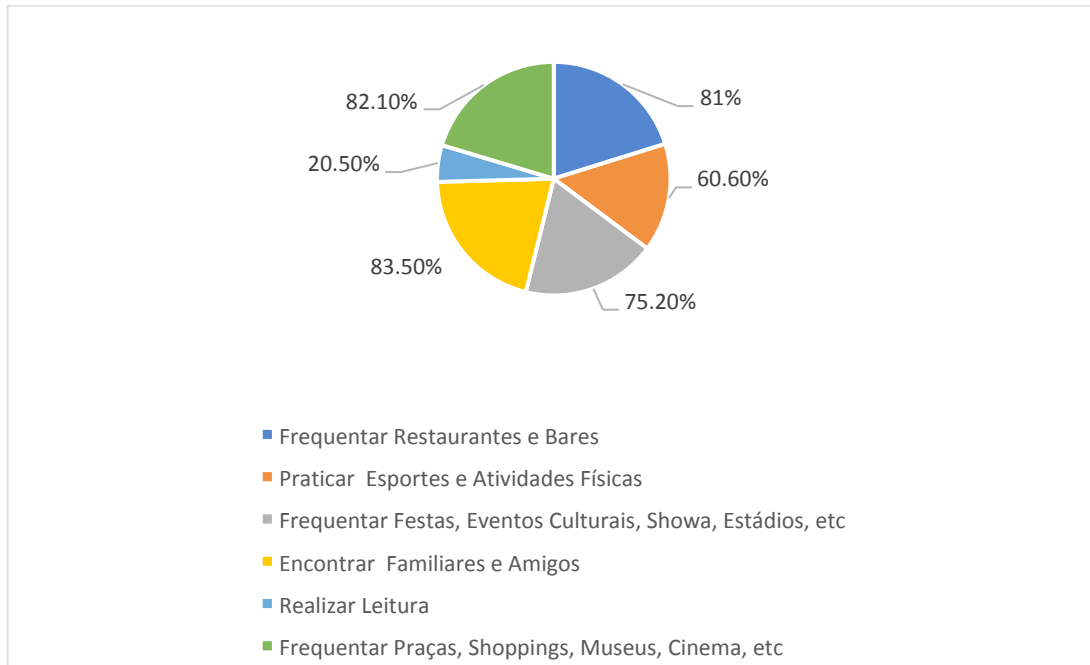


Source: The authors, 2022.

As the purpose was to understand what young people did before the city closed, they were also asked what their main leisure practices were, with predominant answers such as meeting family and friends with 350 (83.5%), visiting places open to the public such as squares, shopping malls and museums with 344 (82.1%), attending parties and events open to the public with 315 (81%), practicing sports and physical activities with 254 (60.6%) and reading with 86 (20.5%). In short, the results show that young people had a diversity of leisure practices before the city closed. These activities involved both social interaction, such as meeting friends and family, and taking advantage of resources available in the city, such as public spaces and events. Practicing sports and

reading were also mentioned, demonstrating an interest in activities that promote physical and mental health, as well as personal development.

Graph 6: Leisure practices of participants before the PBH decrees



Source: The authors, 2022.

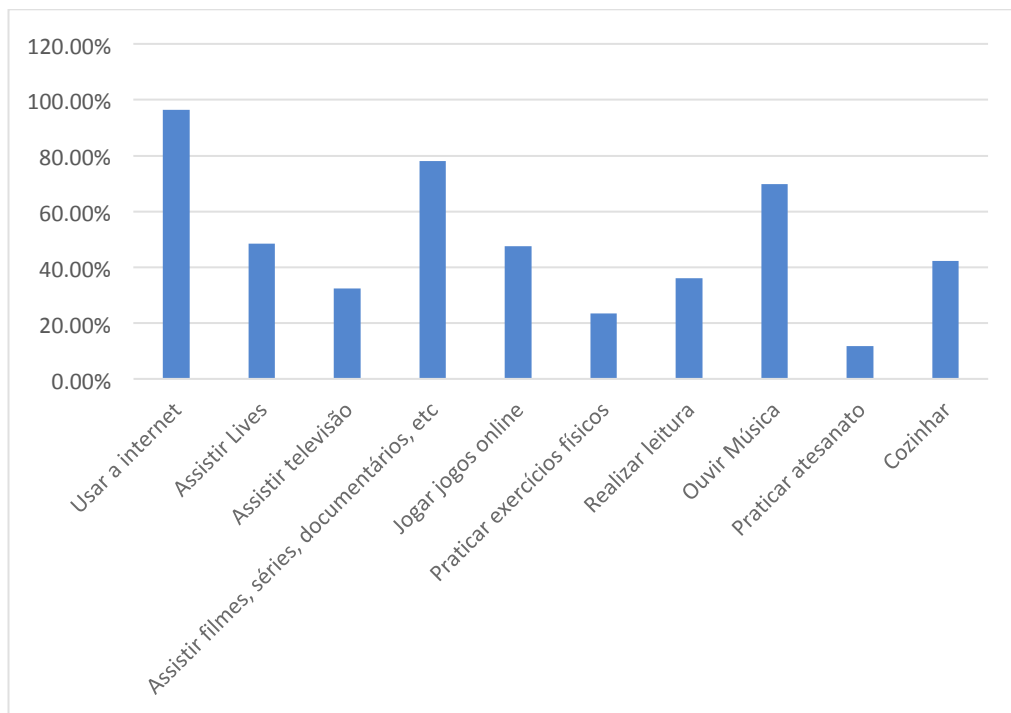
Furthermore, we sought to understand the practices carried out by these young people during the pandemic period. As a result, 96.4% of those interviewed stated that they used the internet as a leisure activity, 78% watched films, series and documentaries, 69.9% listened to music, 48.4% watched live broadcasts, 47.5% played online games, 42.2% cooked, 36% read, 32.5% watched television, 23.4% practiced physical activities, a significantly low number when compared to previous practices which totaled 60.6%. The result found reveals that the majority of young people used the internet as a form of leisure during the pandemic period. This can be attributed to the fact that mobility restrictions and social distancing have significantly affected traditional entertainment options, such as going out with friends or going to public spaces.

It is interesting to note that watching films, series and documentaries was one of the most common activities among those interviewed, indicating that streaming content became a popular form of entertainment during this period. Not to mention that the practice of listening to music was also frequently mentioned, which can be attributed to the fact that music can be a form of escape and comfort in difficult times.

On the other hand, it is surprising that only a small percentage of young people engaged in physical activity during this period. Although it is understandable that the lack of access to sports spaces and gyms may have limited this practice, it is important to highlight the importance of physical activity for mental and physical health during periods of stress and isolation.

These results highlight the need to offer leisure and entertainment alternatives during crises such as the pandemic, encouraging young people to engage in healthy activities that are beneficial to their well-being. In addition, they highlight the importance of ensuring equal access to resources and means of entertainment, so that young people of all socioeconomic conditions can enjoy a variety of leisure practices during challenging times.

Graph 7: Leisure activities of participants during the PBH decrees



Source: The authors, 2022.

Final Considerations

This paper aimed to investigate the leisure practices adopted by young people in Belo Horizonte during the period in which Belo Horizonte City Hall (PBH) adopted restrictive lockdown measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impacts of these measures on lives of these young people. The results obtained reflect the importance of leisure in the lives of the interviewees, since the vast majority of them consider leisure as a very important part of their lives.

Before the restrictions imposed by municipal decrees, young people from Belo Horizonte enjoyed a variety of leisure activities, including meetings with family and friends, going to public places, participating in parties and events, playing sports and reading. These activities were essential for the expression of creativity, the construction of identities and the promotion of sociability among young people.

The pandemic, however, brought significant changes to leisure practices. With the closure of gathering places and the need for social distancing, young people looked for alternatives that would allow them to continue enjoying leisure time safely. Using the internet stood out as a popular option, with the majority of young people turning to online platforms for entertainment, such as watching films, series and documentaries. Music also played an important role in this context, providing comfort and escapism.

It is notable, however, that the practice of physical activities decreased significantly during the pandemic period, reflecting the challenges of staying active in a context of mobility restrictions and the closure of gyms and sports spaces. This result highlights the importance of promoting alternatives and incentives for physical exercise, especially during public health crises.

It is essential to recognize that the pandemic has affected young people unequally. The diversity of answers reflects the different social and economic realities of those interviewed, corroborating the idea that youth is not homogeneous. Those who already faced socioeconomic inequalities before the pandemic were even more affected, highlighting the importance of inclusive policies that take these disparities into account.

In this regard, it is essential that authorities and institutions promote accessible and safe leisure alternatives for young people, even in challenging times. The pandemic highlighted the need to adapt leisure practices to the reality of restrictions, ensuring that young people can continue to enjoy moments of relaxation, creativity and social interaction.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that this study contributes to the enrichment of the field of leisure studies by highlighting how young people's leisure practices are influenced by socioeconomic, cultural and contextual factors, and how these practices play a fundamental role in the formation of identities and in social interactions.

Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for public policies and strategies that promote inclusive and safe leisure for young people, especially during health crises.

It is important to recognize that this study has some limitations. The main one is that the research was based on answers from an online questionnaire, which may have led to self-perception bias on the part of those interviewed. Not to mention that the sample may not be representative of the entire population of young people in Belo Horizonte, since the research focused on those who had access to the internet and who voluntarily chose to participate. Therefore, the results may not fully reflect the diversity of young people's experiences in the city. Despite this, the research provides valuable insights into the changes in young people's leisure practices during the pandemic, as well as the different realities they have faced.

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