

**USERS' PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC LEISURE SPACES IN THE CITY OF
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ABSTRACT: The objective of the study was to verify the perception of users of public leisure spaces in the city of Ilhéus (BA). To achieve this objective, a questionnaire was applied containing 10 closed and 8 semi-open questions, aiming to identify the profile, the characterization of use, satisfaction, motivations for visiting the place, as well as the factors preventing them from visiting them. Based on these analyses, it was possible to identify the need for improvements in the locations, offering support for other studies on the planning of public leisure spaces in Ilhéus. The results indicate that the sample was composed of men (64.91%), with completed high school (35.09%) and predominantly from the following age group: 18 to 24 years old (30.57%). The main reason for visiting the places was the proximity to the place of residence (20.00%) and the aspects (security, infrastructure, leisure facilities, cleanliness, lighting, and state of conservation) were generally well evaluated.

KEYWORDS: Leisure. Public place. Physical activity.

**PERCEPÇÃO DOS USUÁRIOS SOBRE OS ESPAÇOS PÚBLICOS DE LAZER
NA CIDADE DE ILHÉUS (BA)**

RESUMO: O objetivo do estudo foi verificar a percepção dos usuários de espaços

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públicos de lazer na cidade de Ilhéus (BA). Para atingir esse objetivo foi aplicado um questionário contendo 10 questões fechadas e 8 semiabertas, visando identificar o perfil, a caracterização da utilização, a satisfação, as motivações para frequentar o local, bem como os fatores impeditivos para frequentá-los. Com base nessas análises, foi possível identificar a necessidade de melhorias nos locais, oferecer suporte para outros estudos sobre o planejamento de espaços públicos de lazer em Ilhéus. Os resultados indicam que a amostra foi composta por homens (64,91%), com Ensino Médio Completo (35,09%) e predominantemente da seguinte faixa etária 18 a 24 anos (30,57%). O principal motivo para frequentar os locais foi a proximidade do local de residência (20,00%) e os aspectos (segurança, infraestrutura, oferta de lazer, limpeza, iluminação e estado de conservação) foram bem avaliados em geral.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Lazer. Espaço público. Atividade física.

Introduction

There is a consensus in the literature on the importance of public leisure spaces for people's quality of life (Torres *et al.*, 2020), as it is known that physical, sporting and leisure activities are associated with several health benefits.

There is growing awareness among the population about the importance of using public outdoor spaces for physical activities and leisure, to promote social coexistence and improve quality of life, especially in urban centers (Souza *et al.*, 2017).

Marcellino (2012) highlights that leisure requires a space to be experienced, and according to Pellegrin (2004), leisure spaces are formed by equipment, green areas and empty spaces in the city. These places play a crucial role, serving as meeting places, cultural expression and leisure. The author highlights the social importance of these spaces as places of transformation and creation.

However, IBGE data reveals that many Brazilian municipalities do not offer adequate leisure spaces and equipment. The poor distribution of resources is a problem, which especially affects peripheral areas (Abramovay *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, in many cases, existing equipment is deteriorated and poorly maintained, making it difficult to use.

Azevedo (2013) emphasizes that public leisure spaces must be designed to facilitate recreational, cultural and sporting activities. The infrastructure of these places must support these practices, as a lack of adequate facilities may discourage public use. Authors such as Silva *et al.* (2015) also state that the quality, maintenance, safety and accessibility of these spaces are crucial factors for their effective use.

With increasing urbanization, the importance of public spaces has intensified. However, urbanization has also brought challenges such as pollution and diseases related to the urban environment (Fajersztajn; Veras; Saldiva, 2016). The city, as Rechia (2017) points out, is a complex interweaving of natural and artificial spaces, encompassing dimensions such as politics, culture, leisure and work. The relationship between physical spaces and social relations is evident (Santos, 2002). Cities are stages for diverse social practices, where fixed and flowing objects interconnect. This synergy between the environment and human activities is vital to understanding the city as a way of life (Santos, 2006).

Furthermore, it is worth highlighting the importance of the concept of "place" and "public space" in this context. While public space refers to the physical dimension, such as squares and streets, the concept of "place" goes further, encompassing the relationships and meanings attributed to these spaces (Gomes, 2014). It is in this transformation of space into place that the pulse of urban life is perceived, where social practices unfold (Rechia, 2003).

In summary, the literature consistently highlights the importance of public leisure spaces for quality of life, social interactions and health. Urbanization brings challenges, but it also highlights the need for effective public policies.

The democratization of public policies is also an important topic. Democratic management, participatory budgeting and social control have been gaining ground in public administrations, seeking to involve the population in decisions that affect their lives (Castellani Filho, 2006). This reflects a shift in the way government and society interact, allowing for more active citizen participation.

Additionally, accessibility is also a fundamental issue, as public spaces must be designed inclusively, allowing all people, regardless of their differences and characteristics, to enjoy the benefits these environments offer. Lack of accessibility can exclude groups of the population and limit their participation in leisure activities (Silva et al., 2015).

Finally, it is important to highlight that studies of public leisure spaces are important for better understanding these places and their implications for society. Consequently, collaboration between academics, governments, and the general public remains critical to the continued development and improvement of these spaces for the benefit of all.

Thus, considering the relevance of these themes for society, the present study verified the users' perception of public leisure spaces in the city of Ilhéus (BA).

Materials and Methods

We carried out research with a qualitative-quantitative methodological approach, through an exploratory/descriptive study with the aim of providing greater familiarity with the problem, with a view to making it more explicit (Gil, 2010). The research was authorized by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Santa Cruz, under CAEE number: 46857421.2.0000.5526

The study was carried out in the municipality of Ilhéus, located in the state of Bahia - BR, which has an estimated population of 164,844 people, with a territorial area of 1,841 km², according to IBGE (2018). Specifically, in the first stage, data collection was carried out on site with users of public leisure spaces mapped as locations with the highest concentration of users by the MoveIlhéus Project.⁴ On Avenida Soares Lopes, the research was carried out in various spaces in the vicinity of Praça Castro Alves, in the leisure areas of the Sapetinga neighborhood and in the South Zone of Ilhéus, more specifically on the coastal strip and on the cycle path between Pousada Marinas (Rod. Ilhéus - Olivença, 1721 - São Francisco) and Assaí Atacadista (Estrada Una-Ilhéus, 222).

In the second stage, data collection was carried out with users of public leisure spaces in peripheral neighborhoods of Ilhéus. URBIS was selected because it is a planned neighborhood, which for this reason, in principle, should offer leisure spaces for the community. Salobrinho was chosen because it is close to the State University of Santa Cruz (UESC), and positive interventions may have occurred due to this proximity. The Teotônio Villela neighborhood was chosen because it is considered to be a location of greater social vulnerability and the Malhado neighborhood because it has a structure of equipment already installed.

Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used to collect the data (Levin, 1987). The research subjects were 265 users of the spaces, of both sexes, over 18 years old who expressed the desire to participate in the research, after having read and signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF).

⁴The MoveIlhéus Project is an initiative that seeks to understand the characteristics of a more active city and how citizens relate to it. It was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Santa Cruz, with protocol number CAAE: 02273118.8.0000.5526.

A questionnaire was applied in the aforementioned locations, containing 10 closed questions and 8 semi-open questions, aiming to identify the profile, characterization of use, satisfaction, motivations for attending the locations, as well as the factors that prevent them from attending them. The questionnaires were administered at flexible times and alternated in two shifts, aiming to reach the largest possible number of users who were attending, transiting through or carrying out some type of leisure and/or physical-sporting activity at the locations.

The main points covered in the questionnaire were: the main reasons for visiting that location, frequency, means of transport, security, infrastructure, leisure activities, cleanliness, lighting, state of conservation and factors that negatively interfered with the use of the location. The instrument is divided into four parts, the first contains six questions with general information to characterize the users, the second part addresses issues related to the characterization of the use of the space containing four questions, the third part with six specific questions evaluating the location and the last with two general evaluation questions.

In the first stage, the data collection process began on April 28, 2022 and ended on August 5, 2022. The second stage began on February 1, 2023 and ended on September 1, 2023.

Individuals were only able to participate in this research after reading and signing the TCLE. Subsequently, with the data collected and the collection completed, the last stage began: data analysis and processing.

Microsoft Office Excel 2019 was used to tabulate data. The analyses were supported by Content Analysis (Chizzotti, 2006) and at this stage the relationships between the theoretical basis, the variables and the results obtained were established,

that is, the analysis was supported by a reflective dialogue with the theoretical framework. Additionally, the descriptive method was used to “describe phenomena or establish relationships between variables” (Dencker, 1998, p. 124) and use of the explanatory method, with the purpose of “identifying the factors that determine or contribute to the occurrence of phenomena” (Dencker, 1998, p. 125).

Results and Discussions: Brief Description of the Analyzed Public Leisure Spaces

Soares Lopes Avenue

Avenida Soares Lopes is located in the city of Ilhéus-Ba, and runs from the Cathedral of São Sebastião to the Convention Center. This avenue and its surroundings are very popular with the population, given that along the road there are a variety of leisure facilities that can be enjoyed by visitors, such as squares, courts, playgrounds, gyms, theaters, cinemas, bars, restaurants and similar establishments, among others. In addition, it is possible to record the presence of regular and language schools, as well as a range of commercial and service establishments.

It is worth noting that Avenida Soares Lopes also hosts several events, in addition to enabling the practice of a wide variety of leisure and/or physical-sport activities, such as: beach tennis, soccer, footvolley, basketball, skateboarding, etc.

Sapetinga Neighborhood

The area analyzed in the Sapetinga neighborhood corresponds to the area around Avenida Nelson Moreira. The site underwent revitalization following a Conduct Adjustment Term (TAC) between the City Hall and Construtora Cicon (001/2015). The

place is a very attractive leisure spot for people of different ages, both for the practice of leisure and/or physical-sport activities, but also for being close to the Cachoeira River, being used for walks, rest and contemplation of the sunset.

Furthermore, the site offers leisure facilities for users, such as playgrounds, a sand court, and a walking track, in addition to natural spaces, making it a meeting point for different audiences and with different preferences. Another attractive element is the presence of night lighting, thus ensuring that users can move around even after the sun sets.

South Zone

The analysis site corresponds more specifically to the coastal strip and the cycle path between Pousada Marinas (Rod. Ilhéus - Olivença, 1721 - São Francisco) and Assaí Atacadista (Estrada Una-Ilhéus, 222). It is noted that the city of Ilhéus has undergone recent and important changes to its road system. The most significant was the inauguration of the Jorge Amado Bridge on July 1, 2020, whose entire project has 2.2 kilometers of road access, including a cycle path and an exclusive pedestrian lane, which represented greater safety for users, significantly expanding the spaces for walking, running, cycling and carrying out other leisure activities.

And more recently, the duplication of a 5.4-kilometer stretch of BA-001 was completed in May 2021, which connects the beaches in the south of Ilhéus to the junction with BR-251, passing over the new Ilhéus-Pontal Bridge, and this stretch also has a cycle path.

The Jorge Amado Bridge is a cable-stayed bridge located in the municipality of Ilhéus, which is part of the state highway BA-001, crossing the Pontal Bay, connecting the center to the south of the city.

The analyzed section is a region undergoing expansion and appreciation in the city, where it is possible to find a variety of spaces, equipment and services, such as bars, inns, beaches, squares, playgrounds, sports courts, cycle paths, as well as commercial establishments.

Salobrinho

Another neighborhood analyzed was Salobrinho, which is located on the Ilhéus-Itabuna Highway, close to the Santa Cruz State University - UESC, which supports almost 15 thousand students from various courses. The area boasts a square, church, gyms, schools, pharmacy, and more. However, it's still a neighborhood lacking spaces, amenities, and leisure options for residents. However, what mitigates this need is the proximity of UESC, as residents can participate in projects and use the university facilities.

Urbis Neighborhood

Located in the southern part of the city of Ilhéus, it is a neighborhood that has some leisure facilities and options, such as a sandpit, squares, playground, schools, a church, and a food court. Data collection took place specifically near the Residents' Association, which is located on the main Eixo Coletor street, due to its greater concentration of people.

Malhado Neighborhood (North Coast)

This neighborhood has a wide variety of facilities, spaces, and leisure options, such as the beach, restaurants, bars, snack bars, soccer fields, gym, sand court, multi-sport court, footvolley court, skate park, bike path, among others. These leisure and sports spaces have a large concentration of users of different age groups.

Teotônio Vilela Neighborhood

Located in the western part of the city of Ilhéus-Ba, it is one of the most populous neighborhoods in the municipality, considered to be highly socially vulnerable. It has a limited supply of spaces, equipment and leisure options, such as a square, soccer field, gyms, as well as schools and commercial establishments.

Users' Perception of Public Leisure Spaces in Ilhéus – BA

In this part of the results and discussions, we seek to verify the perception of users in public leisure spaces in the city of Ilhéus (BA), in addition to analyzing the level of user satisfaction with public leisure spaces in Ilhéus (BA). Additionally, the motivations and impediments indicated by users to attend them were identified.

Characterization of Subjects

In this research we sought to describe the profile of users (Table 1), and it can be observed that the majority of the sample was composed of men (64.91%). In a similar study, Rotta and Pires (2010) also found a greater number of males in public leisure spaces. A possible explanation may be related to the existing barriers to leisure activities among women, given that gender can be a hindering factor when it comes to

leisure activities and the use of leisure spaces, as some women have double work shifts (Marcellino, 2002), in addition to factors related to safety, which will be discussed later.

Table 1: Sample profile (N=265)

Variável	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	91	34.34
Male	172	64.91
Other	2	0.75
I prefer not to inform	0	0
Education		
Incomplete Elementary Education	14	5.28
Complete Elementary Education	16	6.04
Incomplete High School	16	6.04
Complete High School	93	35.09
Incomplete Higher Education	55	20.75
Complete Higher Education	60	22.64
Specialization	10	3.776
Master's Degree/Ph.D.	1	0.38
Age Range		
From 18 to 24 years old	81	30.57
From 25 to 30 years old	49	18.49
From 31 to 39 years old	49	18.49
From 40 to 49 years old	34	12.83
From 50 to 59 years old	28	10.57
60 years or older	24	9.06
Place of Residence		
Ilhéus	254	95.85
Itabuna	3	1.13
Vitoria da Conquista	1	0.38
Uruçuca	1	0.38
Ibirapitanga	1	0.38
Itacaré		
Camamu	1	0.38
Teófilo Otoni – MG	3	1.13
	1	0.38
Marital status		
Single	137	51.70
Married/Stable union/Lives with partner	104	39.25
Divorced / Separated	13	4.91
Widower	10	3.77
Other	1	0.38
Main Occupation		
Student	95	35.85
Civil servant	26	9.81

Private sector employee	35	13.21
Businessperson	23	8.68
Self-employed	42	15.85
Retiree	18	6.79
Unemployed	12	4.53
Other	14	5.28

Source: Study data.

Regarding the level of education, many attendees indicated the option of Complete High School, totaling 93 (35.09%) interviewees. Next, the option with the highest number of indications was Complete Higher Education with 60 (22.64%) people.

The predominant age groups were 18 to 24 years (30.57%), 25 to 30 years and 31 to 39 years with 18.49% each. Only 24 (9.06%) of the participants indicated that they were over 60 years old.

Regarding place of residence, as expected, the majority of attendees lived in Ilhéus (95.85%). Marcellino (2002) states that democratizing leisure implies democratizing space. In this sense, it is important to highlight the need to build and maintain public leisure spaces in different parts of the city, with the aim of expanding leisure opportunities for the population, especially in the outskirts.

In Table 2, the results indicated that among the main reasons for visiting these places are proximity to their place of residence (20.00%), practicing physical, sporting and recreational activities (19.65%) and contact with nature (18.42%).

Table 2: Characterization of site use (N=265)

Variable	Frequency	%
Main reason(s) for attending the place*		
Proximity to place of residence	114	20.00
Site infrastructure	59	10.35
Security	53	9.30
Contact with nature	105	18.42
Practice physical, sports and recreational activities	112	19.65

Existence of leisure, sports and cultural activities, programs and projects	65	11.40
Community living	49	8.60
Other:	13	2.28
Frequency of use of the site		
Always	113	42.64
Often	89	33.58
Occasionally	42	15.85
Rarely	17	6.42
Never	4	1.51
Frequent use of other public leisure spaces		
Yes	143	53.96
No	122	46.04
Means of transport used to get to the location		
Car	83	31.32
Motorcycle	29	10.94
Public transportation	42	15.85
Bicycle	43	16.23
Walking	68	25.66
Others:	0	0.00

Source: Study data.

* Participants could indicate a maximum of 3 reasons

A study by Reis (2001), carried out at the Botanical Garden in the city of Curitiba, identified that the proximity of parks to users' homes is an important factor in the use of this environment.

Similar results were found by Oliveira (2009), in which contact with nature was considered an important variable for the use of spaces.

The frequency of using the designated spaces is directly related to the leisure and physical-sporting options that the location offers. In other words, the more options and quality in spaces and equipment for leisure and physical activity, the greater the population's interest in frequenting these environments (Reis, 2001). Additionally, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), human beings are motivated by social interaction and motivation may be related to the interest in using spaces for leisure activities, aiming at well-being.

In fact, it is observed that public leisure spaces perform and enhance a function of social relations, offering a space capable of fostering encounters and social bonds. (Silva *et al.*, 2012).

In this regard, Rechia's study (2003) pointed out that parks enable sociability, providing new forms of relationships between individuals and themselves and others.

Still on this aspect, users were asked about their frequent use of other public leisure spaces. Thus, 143 people said they frequent other spaces and 122 said they do not use them.

When asked about the means of transport used to get to the location, the following responses were obtained: 83 used the car, 68 responded that they arrived at the location on foot and 43 by bicycle.

Therefore, the mere existence of public leisure spaces close to people's homes may not be sufficient to have an effect on promoting physical activity in the city. National and international studies have shown that the quantity, specificity/diversity and quality of existing structures are positively associated with the practice of physical activity in these locations (Silva *et al.*, 2015).

Public leisure spaces are considered important places for the practice of leisure and physical and sporting activities, to adopt a healthy lifestyle and improve quality of life (Fermino, Reis and Cassou, 2012), and when they are equipped with good infrastructure, such as accessibility, cleanliness and security, they encourage the practice of physical activity (Bedimo-Rung; Mowen and Cohen, 2005) and thus are associated with the use or not of these places. In this context, the aspects questioned were generally well evaluated. Most participants found the leisure offering to be excellent (38.11%), for example (Table 3).

Table 3: Site evaluation (N=265)

Variable	Frequency	%
Security		
Excellent	78	29.43
Good	110	41.51
Regular	40	15.09
Bad	17	6.42
Terrible	20	7.55
Infrastructure		
Excellent	80	28.99
Good	103	37.32
Regular	64	23.19
Bad	18	6.52
Terrible	11	3.99
Leisure offer		
Excellent	101	38.11
Good	68	25.66
Regular	59	22.26
Bad	21	7.92
Terrible	16	6.04
Cleaning		
Excellent	45	16.98
Good	114	43.02
Regular	67	25.28
Bad	27	10.19
Terrible	12	4.53
Lighting		
Excellent	84	31.70
Good	94	35.47
Regular	53	20.00
Bad	20	7.55
Terrible	14	5.28
Conservation status		
Excellent	66	24.91
Good	94	35.47
Regular	58	21.89
Bad	28	10.57
Terrible	19	7.17
Main factor(s) that negatively interfere with visiting the place*		
Insecurity.	56	14.78
Lack of leisure, sports and cultural activities/programs/projects.	63	16.62
Difficulty using public transport.	60	15.83
Inadequate infrastructure	43	11.35
Personal factors (Lack of time, motivation or financial resources, etc.).	140	36.94

Others	17	4.49
GENERAL EVALUATION of the public leisure space		
Excellent	81	30.57
Good	111	41.89
Regular	54	20.89
Bad	15	5.66
Terrible	4	1.51

Source: Study data.

* Participants could indicate a maximum of 3 reasons.

When asked about the main factors that negatively interfere with visiting the location, users indicated personal factors (36.94%), the lack of leisure, sport and culture activities/programs/projects (16.62%), followed by the difficulty in using public transport (15.83%).

From this perspective, in studies carried out by Santana and Araújo (2014), the results demonstrate that there is a limitation in the supply of programs and activities, due to the fact that most initiatives are directed towards the sports field, especially for students, which harms the other part of the community that feels the lack of actions in the field of leisure and recreation.

Another point, according to Marcellino (2002), the centralization of leisure facilities ends up further increasing existing barriers, especially among economically disadvantaged populations, as in addition to having to bear the financial cost of transportation from home to the locations, the journey is very exhausting.

Regarding the general evaluation, as a public leisure space, the following result was obtained: 111 people marked the “good” option, followed by excellent (81) and average (54), which demonstrates a positive assessment of the places evaluated.

Given these results, it is important to observe what Ziperovich (2007) says, as the author emphasizes that public spaces need to be supported by an organized infrastructure, which allows for an interest in use by visitors, such as the quality of

parking, sidewalks and access, the existence of restrooms, places to rest, such as benches and tables, the existence of spaces for socialization, accessibility, among others. All of these factors can influence the preservation and satisfaction of users regarding spaces, as well as participation in leisure and sports activities.

In fact, public space is society's space (Narciso, 2009), and it is important to raise awareness about the use of these areas, especially with regard to leisure spaces, as they are environments conducive to promoting health and socialization, as they have structures that enable healthy practices. It is clear that these spaces encourage people to practice physical activities. In this sense, for Bedimo-Rung, Mowen, Cohen (2005), public spaces are important for promoting health, in which environmental characteristics can influence the performance of physical activity.

For Florindo et al. (2017) suitable environments for practicing physical activities such as walking and cycling are capable of causing changes in behavior, favoring active travel, improving citizens' health and, consequently, quality of life.

Final Considerations

This research sought to verify the perception of users in public leisure spaces in the city of Ilhéus (BA), aiming to contribute to other studies, as well as support for the adoption of more appropriate public policies in the city.

It is considered that the research objective was achieved, as by carrying out this study it was possible to expand knowledge about the places analyzed, and also to learn about the profile of users and their perceptions.

Based on the results and analyses, it was possible to identify the need for improvements in the locations, offer support for other studies on the planning of public

leisure spaces in Ilhéus, describe the profile of users and verify how they perceive these spaces.

The main limitation of the study is related to the representativeness of the sample, which prevents the extrapolation of results. Additionally, the study was conducted with users. In this sense, it is suggested that studies be carried out with the resident population of the neighborhoods, which could identify the reasons for not attending the spaces, for example.

We recognize that there are challenges to creating and maintaining public leisure spaces in cities like Ilhéus, such as budget constraints, urban development pressures, and conflicts of interest. However, we also identified the need for further studies to analyze the differences between the center and the periphery, as well as the participation of various actors in a more participatory management model, including local governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector, to improve and expand these spaces.

Finally, it is important to highlight the relevance of these spaces for the well-being and quality of life of citizens. Thus, it is concluded that effective planning and management of public leisure spaces are essential to ensure their democratic and more accessible use, which includes a public management approach to access, security, maintenance, and entertainment, taking into account the needs and preferences of the local community.

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