

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY AND THE BEACHES IN RIO DE JANEIRO: DOES THE BEACH BELONG TO EVERYONE?

*SOCIOLOGIA PÚBLICA E AS PRAIAS CARIOCAS:
A PRAIA É DE TODOS?*

*LA SOCIOLOGIA PÚBLICA Y LAS PLAYAS DE RÍO:
LAS PLAYAS SON DE TODOS?*

Carlos Henrique de Vasconcellos Ribeiro*, **Erik Pereira****, **Vanessa Pontes*****,
Jorge Moreira ****

Keywords

Sports.
Leisure activities.
Public Policies.
Sociology.

Abstract: This article analyzes concessions for use of sport and leisure public spaces. The object of analysis is public facilities and the stretch of sand in Rio de Janeiro's beaches. The qualitative methodology employed is descriptive and uses document analysis as its strategy. We focus our analysis on official documents issued by Rio de Janeiro's municipal agencies. In conclusion, we demonstrate that there is increasing commodification of sport and leisure practices in the city's beaches, with the consent of government sectors; and that the control and regulation of business activities involving sport is not on the City Government's political agenda.

Palavras-chave

Esportes.
Atividades de Lazer;
Políticas Públicas;
Sociologia

Resumo: Analizamos neste artigo como tem ocorrido a concessão de uso dos espaços públicos esportivos e de lazer, tendo como objeto de análise os equipamentos públicos e a faixa de areia das praias cariocas. A metodologia é de natureza qualitativa, do tipo descritivo, utilizando como estratégia a análise documental. Centramos nossa análise em documentos oficiais emitidos pelos órgãos públicos municipais da cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Como conclusão, demonstramos que há uma crescente mercantilização das práticas esportivas e de lazer das areias cariocas sob o consentimento dos setores públicos governamentais e que a questão das atividades de controle e fiscalização das atividades comerciais envolvendo o esporte não está na agenda política desta esfera de poder.

Palabras clave

Deportes.
Actividades recreativas;
Políticas Públicas;
Sociología.

Resumen: Analizamos en este artículo cómo ha ocurrido la concesión de uso de los espacios públicos deportivos y de ocio, teniendo como objeto de análisis los equipamientos públicos y la franja de arena de las playas cariocas. La metodología es de naturaleza cualitativa, del tipo descriptiva, utilizando como estrategia el análisis documental. Centramos nuestro análisis en documentos oficiales emitidos por los organismos públicos municipales de la ciudad de Rio de Janeiro. Como conclusión, demostramos que ocurre una creciente mercantilización de las prácticas deportivas y de ocio de las arenas cariocas bajo el consentimiento de los sectores públicos gubernamentales y que la cuestión de las actividades de control y fiscalización de las actividades comerciales relacionadas al deporte no está en la agenda política de esa esfera de poder.

* Foundation for Support to Vocational Schools (FAETEC). Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.
E-mail: c.henriqueribeiro@ig.com.br

** School of Physical Education. Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.
E-mail: egjuseppe@eefd.ufrj.br

*** School of Physical Education. Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.
E-mail: vanessaflu@hotmail.com

**** FFoundation for Support to Vocational Schools (FAETEC). Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.
E-mail: jorgecoluma@ig.com.br

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“Do Leme ao Pontal,
Não há nada igual”
Tim Maia¹

1 INTRODUCTION

Urged to discuss matters raised by Burawoy (2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007) and Braga and Burawoy (2009) regarding public sociology, we aim at understanding the issues surrounding occupation of public space for leisure and its consequences. Our reference is the occupation of Rio de Janeiro’s beaches regarding the use of public facilities and its stretch of sand. We raise public sociology issues regarding discussions on everyday matters – public space for sport and leisure – but which have been routinely neglected and thus prevented actions to improve people’s lives (BRAGA; BURAWOY, 2009).

We discuss the use of public spaces in an area that can be occupied by anyone – the beach – but that has been enjoyed by few. As suggested by Bonacich (2005), we look at the big picture, i. e., the social setting where that is happening, so that new forms of planning and acting can be offered later to those involved.

We intend to raise theoretical discussions about the occupation of areas of the city that are associated with sports and leisure in the public space. We reflect on government power that becomes the guardian of business enterprises and sometimes opposes the population that has the right to enjoy those areas. Debating those issues means offering theoretical elements that can be used to pressure government agencies to include the right to sport and leisure in public areas in their political agendas, without interference by the private sector – that is, without business exploitation that ends up limiting the use of public goods by the population.

Public sociology is the reference for our reflections. In the words of Burawoy (2006), this becomes relevant when: “The interest in a public sociology is, in part, a reaction and a response to the privatization of everything. Its vitality depends on the resuscitation of the very idea of ‘public’, another casualty of the storm of progress” (BURAWOY, 2006, p. 14).

But what is this public sphere we want to address here?

It is a sphere for persons attending Rio’s beaches in their moments of leisure and free time while no government initiative guarantees them the right to use sports equipment and activities taking place in those areas. We understand that business activities in those spaces are concessions with little or no return to society. In this respect, public sociology offers us tools to discuss the invisibility of the topic. This knowledge area reinforces the need to question the invisible aspect of social relations, with a feedback to the groups studied (BURAWOY, 2006).

The model of occupation and use of public spaces in Brazil has followed the logic of legitimation by the State (REIS, 2003). Brazilian society is socially developing, and control agencies have played the role of legitimizing those who have access to bureaucracy devices and their operation rather than preserving and extending the rights of a majority that is often excluded and only later has access to improvements. Examples include the so-called mobility and security construction works under way in the city of Rio de Janeiro for the mega sporting events, which are challenged by Souza et al (2013).

¹ Tim Maia in Concert, 2007. Sony Music.

In addition, public places with high circulation of people in the city of Rio de Janeiro include beaches as a unique leisure space for its residents. From a port city to a resort destination, it has undergone centuries of changes, from colony to republic, through the medical baths recommended to members of João VI's court to the occupation of their surroundings by wealthier classes. Later urban changes have made the surroundings of Rio's beaches the target of real estate speculation, and its most perverse consequence was the removal of the poor from those areas (ARAÚJO, 1993; BRENNAN, 1985).

Government planning and action priorities are understandably turned into public policies. Therefore, they become part of a political agenda that requires decisions to be made in the short, medium and long terms and be carried out by those who run planning, control and inspection agencies (SOUZA, 2006; MEAD, 1995; LYNN, 1980).

Public policies for sports and leisure in Brazil follow the tortuous path of concentration in a public agenda aimed at providing financial and symbolic support to those who already have access to resources, making those activities centralized, bureaucratic and clientelistic. (CASTELLANI FILHO, 1999; LINHALES, 1997; BETTI, 1991; BRACHT, 1997; MANHÃES, 2002; TUBINO, 1987; 1996).

Overlapping role in government tend to benefit those who *de facto* occupy those public areas, because, as we argue below, they receive little attention. In addition, Brazilian society is based on relational characteristics, excluding those who have no personal connections or relations to the decision-making spheres of power (DaMatta, 1997).

Therefore, we ask:

How have authorities acted regarding occupation of public spaces in Rio's beaches?

The aim of this article is to discuss authorities' actions regarding operational concession over and control of sports and leisure areas in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

2 METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

Our references were official documents about the actions related to the use and resulting financial exploitation of those spaces. We examined the occupation of leisure spaces by private interests, particularly physical activity-oriented businesses working with fitness and sports learning. Immediate consequence is the exclusion of a vast majority of the population who also has the right to use those spaces without paying fees.

This research is qualitative, descriptive, and uses document analysis as its strategy. The analysis includes the following steps, according to Ruiz (1996): 1- recording important passages on sheets; 2- developing a personal critical synthesis of the documents and discussing possible deficiencies; 3- reviewing those records to further discuss the problem, and comparing texts and criticisms; 4- rereading the material collected and written in order to reflect and start putting together the sheets that will be part of discussions. As additional data, note that the analysis of documents and other research data was also conducted in the light of the theoretical framework that guided our literature review, particularly with regard to issues raised by Burawoy (2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007) and Braga and Burawoy (2009).

We used official documents issued by local government agencies in the city of Rio de Janeiro about occupation and legalization of public spaces in Rio's beaches as our main material for analysis.² The choice of documents was based on the city's official website, because information on actions by the municipal government is constantly updated and actions become official propaganda of what is being done by the government. Such content is a way to understand how municipal authorities want to disclose their policies for the general population and lead the media to publicize their activities of control and inspection.

We conducted a comprehensive and careful reading of that website from February to April, 2014. We read the pages of municipal departments and obtained three documents related to the occupation of public spaces in Rio's beaches. They are: a) the current Municipal Code of Postures (RIO DE JANEIRO..., 2008); b) Municipal Plan for Public Order; c) High Performance Management of the City of Rio de Janeiro.

The Code of Postures regulates all economic activities endorsed by the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro. No business activity can operate without a license, including one of the objects of our research – children's sports schools. Therefore, we chose them as a reference for business activities conducted in public spaces, especially beaches.

The other document selected for analysis is the Municipal Plan for Public Order. It is used by the Municipal Government as a reference for inspecting activities (with clear emphasis on repression) that use the public environment, including beaches.

High Performance Management is the document used by municipal authorities as a reference in strategic actions to be developed. As a plan for government management, it includes targets, defines goals and demonstrates how public affairs are handled as well as their agenda and interests.

3 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The interconnection of authority spheres has consequences such as increasing bureaucratization for using those spaces. Over time, it excludes those who have no systematic interest in using them or, more perversely, are far from the agencies that enable the right to that use.

We understand that the increasing concession of those spaces for business purposes has negative consequences, e. g. restricting the use of public equipment such as buoys, poles, the stretch of sand and even sea areas. These are used by groups and individuals who have been enjoying business benefits by providing sports services in spaces that could be used by any person circulating there.

Social policies in Brazil seem to have chosen sport as one of the catalysts for the inclusion of an entire population. But while "sport can do it all" according to Vitor Marinho (2010), it is also used as a justification for a series of government actions, such as a political agenda oriented toward organizing and receiving mega sporting events in our territory. That could be seen, for example, in Rio de Janeiro's government's document on public policy for the actions of control and inspection, which it calls "Public Order".

There are similarities with the zero tolerance policy implemented in New York City in the 1980s, and not by chance. In the last two documents reviewed, it is possible to find a line of ac-

² Available at: www.rio.rj.gov.br.

tion whose reference is what became known as “zero-tolerance and broken windows policy” of Wilson and Kelling (1982). Addressing issues of violence and crime by importing a public policy that resonates positively in Brazil becomes a priority while spheres such as sport and leisure become areas of lesser interest.

3.1 The City Postures Code

Next, we present the document with for economic activities in the city of Rio de Janeiro – the “Postures Code” in force since 2008. Children’s sports schools were defined as economic activities carried out in public areas, i. e., fees can be charged in spaces under municipal concession.

On Children’s Sport schools

Art. 67. Educational services for sports and recreational activities known as children’s sports schools can only be provided by individuals.

Art. 68. Children’s sports schools will only be authorized:

I - in beaches’ stretch of sand;

II - in parks and squares as long as convenience, opportunity and public interest for their location are observed.

Art. 69. The Coordinator of Licensing and Inspection will be in charge of granting authorization for children’s sports schools to be established. That authorization will be effected through the issuance of Transitional Permit Certificates.

Sole paragraph. Requests will be granted after approval by the Municipal Department of Sports and Leisure (SMEL), which will define the time for the activity and other relevant conditions.

Art. 70. The activity may only be exercised after payment of the License Fee for Establishment, as provided for in the Municipal Tax Code. (RIO DE JANEIRO..., 2008, p. 35)

By limiting children’s sports schools in Rio’s beaches to individuals and excluding legal entities, the document is concerned not to allow those spaces be taken by groups of businesses. The idea is that individual initiatives to exploit those public spaces should prevail over sports businesses. It seems that there are several ways to place individual entrepreneurs associated with sports consultancy companies and gyms, which in general end up excluding those who would like to enjoy such equipment and spaces. The question is not who will explore those areas, but what guarantees those who just want to enjoy them will be offered.

The Code also delegates the issue of schedules and “other relevant parameters” to another agency – the Municipal Department of Sports and Leisure. That shows how vague that document’s regulation is when it comes to guaranteeing the right to use public space.

Only one municipal tax applies and there is no mention of concession periods. The result is restriction of use, since children’s sports schools are not seen as dynamic economic activities dealing with monthly values that guarantee the income of many professionals, especially in warmer times of the year. A space that belongs to everyone cannot be used, but regulation legitimates that situation. The Code, by being comprehensive, treats schools as business activities of lesser value to the municipal treasury.

There is also no mention of the use of space needed to store materials, possibilities for sponsorship, marketing of products resulting from sports activities, technical responsibility for the activity and, last but not least, a possible counterpart contribution on the use of public space.

As can be observed, the Code does not provide for a number of consequences of business exploitation of sports activities that occupy public areas. We infer that it reflects the invisibility of the topic, reinforcing what Burawoy (2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007) and Braga and Burawoy (2009) discuss under public sociology: the need to debate issues that are internalized in our daily lives but impact everyone's lives.

Therefore, the beaches have been occupied by different groups that, with government's consent, end up holding special areas for sports and leisure as opposed to a large majority that only has the right to occupy their small stretch of sand. We write about issues related to public policies made by lenient governments that give up their power to prevent areas of sports and leisure from being often managed by those who have business interests and end up leasing their working areas to third parties. A city like Rio de Janeiro suffers with commodification of public spaces. If we also consider the large number of tourists for whom the beach has a strong visitation and consumption appeal, we will have spaces where it is virtually impossible for a resident to play sports such as soccer, volleyball or footvolley without being part of an already organized and established group or without a government permit. Those areas are used as if they had owners. Ultimately, a person who wants to use those spaces must pay, as with sports schools and physical training advisors operating in the beaches.

Next, we present the official documents of the municipality of Rio de Janeiro which are designed to develop the theme of control of public spaces in beaches.

3.2 The Municipal Plan for Public Order

In general terms, the document says that the occupation of public areas in Rio de Janeiro has been chaotic and based on private interests for financial and – why not – political gains. The municipal government's control actions focus on repression, believing that it will protect the community. However, the areas studied do not even received due attention from the government. As for sports, the Plan only mentions the relevance of mega sporting events. About that, the municipal document entitled Rio de Janeiro's "Municipal Plan for Public Order" states that

The issue of public order has become even more prominent because of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, of which Rio de Janeiro will be one of the main host cites, as well as the host the 2016 Olympics. Because of the international visibility of such events, an organized and safe urban environment is essential for their success and for our city. (RIO DE JANEIRO..., 2010, p. 11) (emphasis added)

In recent years, public policies for sport have been based on the belief that mega-events will benefit the entire population, regardless of the social layer they belong to, as shown by Souza and Pappous (2013). Public policies for the occupation of public spaces for leisure run in a different direction. The way of thinking about occupation of those areas as well as their way of concession, control and inspection are not relevant, and result in increasing privatization, commodification and marketing of sports activities in public spaces through government-granted licenses.

The perception is that actions are primarily aimed at preparing those spaces for tourists arriving in Rio de Janeiro, with mega events as their justification. As a result, city residents would benefit. That is, locals come second. There is concern to create conditions to receive those who come from other places, since they would bring financial resources to be spent in the city and thus generate benefits for all. There is a recurring practice that favors the areas where

the movement of tourists is higher. The order to be imposed is linked not only to the question of the organization of spaces, but also to public safety, essential for tourism in these areas.

Wilson and Kelling's (1982) approach to repression to petty crime is related to ways of thinking and acting in control. Transferring public policies that seem to have worked in other cities and countries is a common practice in Brazilian political agenda and the attempt to organize those spaces excludes sporting activities (BELLI, 2000).

That – repressive – inspection activity is conducted to ensure privileges for those who already have the beach close to home and those who have business interests in their use and, last but not least, to guarantee the safety of tourists who circulate in those areas. That is, the Brazilian State has served more to legitimize the rights of a minority than to facilitate the majority's access to public goods and services (CASTELLANI FILHO, 1999; LINHALES, 1997; BETTI, 1991; BRACHT, 1997; MANHÃES, 2002; TUBINO, 1987; 1996).

3.3 The High Performance Management document

Another document that guides public policy for government action at municipal level in Rio de Janeiro is “High Performance Management”, published in 2012. The document mentions how that sphere comprises organization, actions to be carried out and results expected from all municipal spheres of authority. Regarding Rio's beaches, the document states:

An important milestone in changing this scenario was the creation of the Public Order Department (SEOP) in early 2009. The agency is in charge of regulating and controlling economic activity, municipal ordinances and the use of public space [...] the main project of the new SEOP and the synthesis of the measures to be taken in the area **was the Shock of Order program**. [...] In the summer of 2010, **that ordering reached the beaches**. In addition to standard requirements to discipline street vendors, **the City increased monitoring of sports activities, with about 400 municipal guards and urban control inspectors**. [...] **Sports Practices such as beach tennis and “altinha” were allowed only in delimited areas**, while pets were banned from the stretch of sand for hygiene reasons. (RIO DE JANEIRO..., 2012, p. 82-83) (emphasis added)

Public policy directed to those areas focuses primarily on issues of control, but there is no mention of regular sporting practices unless such voluntary practices are likely to disturb those who are close to the water. In other words, the government chooses to regulate unregulated recreational activities that may bother swimmers. Regular practices that are already taking place remain unmentioned and therefore do not create a public agenda to direct actions (SOUZA, 2006; LYNN, 1980).

We understand that the document's lack of discussion about those leisure and sport spaces is a way to ascribe little importance to common resources. Sports and leisure practices are sometimes considered invisible in terms of social relations and the latter are reflected in government documents. Public debate about everyday issues that have been internalized by subjects as “natural” social practices and that may reflect in improvement of everyone's lives is a central issue for public sociology (BURAWOY, 2006).

The word that guides the work in these spaces is ordering. The association between disorder and crime ends up excluding from the latter the sports activities carried out by business purposes, because they happen with the consent of the City, i. e. they are considered already

ordained. In addition, these activities arouse less interest than the sale of a number of foods, clothes and other products by street vendors throughout the year. In this context, sports practices for leisure are considered less important and those spaces are privatized.

The situation allows equipment designed for leisure to be used for business activities performed by people who, in many ways, act as true owners of the rights to use and exploit certain beach areas. Remaining blurred between leisure and business activity may be of interest to those who commercially exploit those areas and also the government.

4 FINAL REMARKS

Rio de Janeiro's residents, who go to the beach for their leisure time not only on weekends, but also during weekdays, have limited access to public spaces. There is pressure by companies, groups or individuals who tend to divide those areas among themselves, setting them apart from public use. Doing some sports activity or just sitting on the sand now depends on a number of factors, including that spaces are not taken by any group using and enjoying what is supposed to belong to everyone. We infer that what is happening on the beaches also tends to occur in other public places such as football fields, courts and other areas of the city.

We oppose the use of those spaces by few people. Many children, adolescents and adults who have the right to enjoy these spaces are excluded during several days, weeks and months of the year, and especially when circulation of people is higher – summer. Of course it is not just at the beaches that the occupation of public leisure spaces has been used to provide sports services. Try, say, using a public tennis court in Rio de Janeiro (there are eight of them): it will be at least very difficult.³ There are groups regularly exploring the area for teaching and learning that sport, during the whole day, seven days a week. One of the researchers unsuccessfully tried to use those courts several times. The same occurs with the use of volleyball poles. Where there are no groups playing, the person in charge of the space is often represented by the nearest kiosk, located in the sidewalk area. That makes free access and use difficult because business interests are exploring the area. Beach sand and sea become more of an extension of businesses that takes place at the “boardwalk”.

While not everyone may use such equipment, a common misconception sees the beach as one of the most democratic spaces in Rio de Janeiro. The right of access – as heterogeneous and complex as it can be – is confused with the use of equipment installed there, reinforcing the general and mistaken idea that circulation of people from different social classes on the beaches demonstrates the kindness, freedom and other qualities of locals, and why not, of Brazil's people.

As a way of thinking of alternatives for using those areas, we believe that a social counterpart contribution could be required from all those who wish to obtain public concessions over these spaces. Having as parameter Rio de Janeiro's Municipal Law 3006 of 2000 – which establishes social counterpart contributions for sporting events funded by the City – a committee could be created with the participation of neighborhood associations, business groups and individuals interested in those areas, in order to ensure the right to practice those sports based on a minimum percentage of openings. The social counterpart contribution could benefit all who wanted to learn sports or just enjoy leisure time without paying.

³ Available at: <http://tenisbrasil.uol.com.br/quadrapublicas>. Accessed on May 7, 2014.

We stress the vast possibility for theoretical use of public sociology in Brazil. In the sphere of sports practice and leisure, the issues raised by Burawoy (2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007) and Braga and Burawoy (2009) can be used to create a public agenda for action by groups of people who, when attending public equipment, find themselves in the position of mere spectators.

There are plenty of studies on this area of sociology in Brazil. We focused on Braga and Santana (2009), who claim that “Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world and therefore offers a huge amount of historical material for critical, reflective and engaged sociology with extra-academic publics to address” (BRAGA; SANTANA, 2009, p. 7).

Thinking of a less privatizing policy for public spaces and creating alternatives to business pressure can allow those who live and visit the city of Rio de Janeiro to use goods that belong to everyone.

The question left to the end of this text is: when will public areas of sports and leisure ceased to be second-order goods?

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Correspondence address:

Carlos Henrique de Vasconcellos Ribeiro
Rua João Pessoa, 153. Apt. 1102 - Icaraí. Niterói, RJ
CEP: 24220-330