

Is “*várzea*” football a “*várzea*”? Ethnography of organization in Porto Alegre’s municipal football tournament*

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Abstract: Winning and losing are integral parts of the sports drama. This study presents an analysis of the notion of organization when it is close to “*várzea*”. It was based on a multisite ethnographic study conducted between February 2009 and December 2011 in a football (soccer) circuit in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, known as “*Várzea Municipal*”. Distinct personal trajectories were described within that circuit in order to follow people, practices and artifacts related to processes of organizing competitions and teams. We sought to show how the “*várzea* organization” results from the tension between two models, understood here under the categories “closer to professional” and “this is the *várzea*”. Based on the exercise of analysis of the empirical field, we understood that the expression “a *várzea*” in the football organization universe studied cannot be understood simply as absence or lack of organization, but rather as local constructions susceptible not only to the logics of a symbolic universe, since they depend on acknowledging everyday life dynamics and mediations that go beyond the actual game.

Key words: Management. Football. *Várzea*. Ethnography. Organization.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the everyday life of sports management in Brazil, the term “*várzea*” is often used to refer to something less organized, requiring

*NT: *Várzea* is a lowland area, often alongside a watercourse. Therefore, *futebol de várzea* is amateur football usually played in that sort of land in the outskirts of Brazilian cities. By extension, the term is now used to refer to any sort of amateurish football. However, it can also be used in a derogatory way.

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more “professionalism”. When it refers to lack of organization, the notion of *várzea* contributes to a derogatory enunciative construction, often used beyond the sports dimension as well. We will present some arguments to debate precisely this view of *várzea* as a synonym for disorganization. Our reference will be the results of an ethnographic study¹ whose object of analysis was an important football (soccer) circuit in the city of Porto Alegre, often called the “*Várzea Municipal*”. That circuit was put in place as a *partnership* between Football Leagues (from neighborhoods, low-income suburbs, fields, squares or parks) and the Municipal Department of Sports, Recreation and Leisure’s (SME) Football Management Office. In the first half of the year, leagues registered² at the Football Management Office promoted so-called *Regionals* (tournaments) to select teams for the *Municipal*, held during the second half of the year under SME coordination.³

The focus of the research on that circuit was to follow football’s actors, practices and artifacts not only at fields, squares and parks, but also at meetings, parties, tours, bars, streets and homes; not only within the SME scope but also in Leagues and in groups-teams involved; not only during one stage of the tournament, but in several of its stages (preparatory friendlies, qualifying stages, playoffs and finals). Distinct trajectories were produced within those multiple football space-times, and challenges to the notion of organization were quite relevant in understanding the management of *várzea* football. In multi-site ethnographic trajectories developed, ‘the organization’ proved to be a privileged category for studying the meanings ascribed to football, but also to understanding the term *várzea*.

Therefore, we present some analysis around that category – organization – so common in the context of sports experiences but rarely studied from an anthropological point of view. Added to this

¹The study was conducted during 33 months, from February 2009 to December 2011.

²Twenty-five leagues in 2009, 26 in 2010 and 22 in 2011.

³Henceforth SME-Leagues tournament.

is the derogatory connotation it takes when related to *várzea*. The aim here is to discuss a frequent and arbitrary attitude: that of classifying and explaining “organization” based on a dichotomy that is very common in sports management literature, which tries to fit it into two models: “professional” and “amateur”. Under such evolutionary-biased logic, the “professional” model is normally assumed as the legitimate parameter; therefore, an “amateur” organization could/should advance (evolve) towards its “professionalization”. Differently, our purpose is to address “organization” as a construct that allowed us to move away from and challenge classifications and hierarchizations, and to understand that – when they are viewed “from within” – surprising nuances might be found.

This research stance derives from a sports study movement that criticizes the way “official”, “media-based” or “professional” models have marked academic debate and production at the expense of everyday practices. Therefore, there is a demand for research that escapes hegemonic narratives and challenges them.⁴ In this sense, and specifically in the scope of works on that – everyday – “other football”, several analyzes were produced that marking two interpretive actions: one denotes symbolic aspects of constitution of diversity with which groups-subjects ascribe different meanings to practices, according to particularities of sociocultural settings (STIGGER, 1997, 2002; GONÇALVES, 2002; DAMO, 2003, 2007; MAGNANI, 2003; SILVEIRA, 2008; SILVA, 2009; PIMENTA, 2009; RIGO; JAHNECKA; SILVA, 2010); the other one explores paths, lines, networks, urban plots and the polyphony of actors involved in forming teams and making meanings about football and its spaces (BAULER, 2005; HIRATA, 2005; SPAGGIARI, 2009).

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It is precisely at the interface of these two interpretive actions that the present study on “organization” finds its justification (and

⁴This debate is best contextualized in the works of Stigger (2005) and Marques, Almeida and Gutierrez (2007), despite the heterogeneity of the sports phenomenon.

its knowledge gap), superimposing analytical efforts to observe peculiarities of settings while dealing with urban trajectories, plots and dramas involved in actors' circulation. The relevance of such a stance was reinforced in the first months of the study, which began in 2009 at the headquarters of SME's Football Management Office by observing meetings of representatives of the Leagues held to organize their participation in the *várzea* municipal circuit. At such meetings, disputes often emerged between those who argued for a *closer-to-professional* organization and, in contrast, those who advocated that *the várzea is not professional*, as did Mendes⁵ – chairman of the Catanduvás Square League, speaking to about 200 people, most of them linked to the teams:

Of course, there is the issue of *várzea*, we are here *at várzea*, we cannot apply all rules that apply to professional football here *at várzea*, otherwise we'll kill *the várzea*; one thing has nothing to do with the other. (DC, August 4, 2009)

After making that statement, Mendes was strongly applauded by many of the audience members and that pointed out “organization” as a category to be studied. At that time, some questions were inevitable: Which “place” is that – *várzea* – which has nothing to do with “professional football”? Why was such complaint-like statement so strongly applauded? Would that complaint be a counterpoint to saying that “*várzea*” football is not a “*várzea*”? In order to answer these questions, we started to follow people, practices and artifacts related to the organization of the Leagues-SME circuit, understanding that they drove symbolic disputes in their urban trajectories. We will present some of those disputes in this paper, and our goal is to analyze the “*várzea* organization” as a construct to be understood based on the universes of meanings to which it belongs.

As mentioned above, this was an ethnographic study. The understanding and accomplishment of this way of knowledge-

⁵The names of speakers, squares, parks and suburbs have been changed.

making were in agreement with Magnani’s (2009) view. According to the author, in ethnographic practice (observation, participant observation, field diaries, interviews, document collection), the researcher comes in contact with interlocutors and their horizons, following them as far as possible. That exchange is aimed at comparing his or her (academic) theories with their (native) theories and thus obtaining an unexpected understanding. Moreover, this quest for understanding involved a multi-site approach, since meaning was produced and ascribed to “organization” as a function of what occurred in different places and was influenced by circulation. Such an approach, as postulated by Marcus (2001), aims to map connections, follow flows and resonances in people’s actions, in speeches, documents, etc. It is up to the ethnographer, beyond the limits of groups or places, to connect multiple sites and to analyze how their relationship and circulation between them also challenge symbolic disputes (in this case, about organization).

In view of this methodological construction, we now present the descriptions of some of those places in the circuit (Football Management Office, the *Exemplary* League, and the *Suburban* League), and the trajectories of plots and dramas that impact on the action of some interlocutors-leaders in charge of the organization (Madureira, Souza, Alencar and Miranda). Given the limits of an article, interpretations of those descriptions focus on presenting ‘native theories’— in the sense of making them intelligible — (demarcated by categories “*closer to professional*” and “this is the *várzea*”), considering the two actions we enunciated above whose analyzes point to theories, in order to underscore the relevance of tensions derived from the ethnographic exercise. Finally, we show exactly how superimposing those interpretive movements and the connections of multiple sites helps answering our questions.

2 AT THE FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT OFFICE, WITH MADUREIRA AND SOUZA

The estrangement detachment from and challenge of

the organization was gradually built mainly at meetings of representatives of the Leagues – called *arbitration councils*, which took place at the SME Football Management Office headquarters. At the end of February or early March, representatives of the city’s Leagues were invited to participate in meetings that preceded the start of the *Municipal* (tournament). The aim was to “discuss” and “approve” the general regulation that would guide the practices of all registered leagues, which held the *Regionals* and wanted to take part in the second stage. Those meetings served to adjust the rules under a fairly valid discourse demanding to “keep what was working well and address only the problems” found in previous editions. Such intentions posed one initial problem: *Who would define what was working well and how it would be defined? What constituted a problem?*

More than the result of public policy guidelines for sports, the first point to be considered in order to answer these questions was directly related to Football Managers’ life trajectories. Next, we present two short accounts of those trajectories and their relations with football: one tells the story of Madureira,⁶ a Manager observed in 2009-2010 (*closer to professional*); the other is Souza, observed in 2011 (*closer to várzea*). We do not consider one better than the other, but rather that they indicate differences and disputes. However, the fact is that distinct trajectories and dispositions clearly appeared as schemes generating evaluations and practices appropriate to the organization of the Leagues-SME circuit. This gained even more importance because the position of coordinator of *the Municipal* implied privileges in defining the direction taken by the circuit.

Madureira (2009-2010)

He played football as a child and as a young men, and was state amateur football champion playing in a team from another

⁶In the case of SME’s Football Managers, given the impossibility of guaranteeing anonymity, parts of the work where the two interlocutors were mentioned in the analysis were handed to them for examination. Both agreed with what was said and did not oppose its publication, since that content analysis would not create any problems for their daily activities.

town. He moved to the state capital Porto Alegre where he worked as a salesman and a bank clerk. He graduated in Physical Education and was trained as a football referee. He served many years as a pro football referee, becoming a candidate to FIFA's referee board, while he kept studying – he later graduated in Public Administration and Business Administration. After undergoing a public selection, he worked for the State Department of Education and later for Porto Alegre's Municipal Sports Department. He has always been connected to sports administration; he knew professional football and he had worked in football projects for the city. In 2005, after a change in municipal administrations, he took over the coordination of the Football Management Office, where he stayed until the end of 2010.

Souza (2011)

He played football as a child and as a young man in the suburbs of another town, and was eventually invited to play in the youth category of a professional team in his town. After coming to Porto Alegre, he played in school and then in the team of the School of Physical Education. At first, there were friendly matches, but the professors' team was reinforced with *várzea* players and began to take part in championships. This was how he started to like *várzea* football. He worked with swimming and then as a publicly selected State teacher, in schools. He was approved in a city selection and, given his links to the *várzea*, he was called to organize de *municipal circuit*. He did that for several years until there was a change in municipal administration. After that, he became a teacher in a city square and returned to the coordination of the *Municipal* in 2011.

Coordinators' privileges were not based only on Managers' trajectories. They also reflected different processes of legitimation engendered to sustain the authority of those who pointed out “problems” and turned them into “proposals”. At meetings, there was no doubt that Madureira's knowledge and dispositions, incorporated at the professional circuit and in higher education, operated as generating schemes that were acknowledged and

had strong impact on the *Municipal's* organization practices. His care with files, protocols and times, with the environment, with recording information on paper and databases, with (in)discipline, with controlling punishments, his concern to coordinate speeches at meetings, his clear mastery of sports' codes, laws, norms and rules were all easily noticed. Nobody could say he did not know what he was doing. It was perfectly possible to understand why Madureira, in order to explain the improvement in *Regionals*, proudly said the following: "I went to watch some finals, like that at Toledo Park, at Iguaçú Park. It didn't even seem that they were playing *várzea*" (DC, August 8, 2010).

Experience in professional football and administration provided a path whose credibility was sustained – as Madureira himself emphasized – on "enforcing" what was "approved" at meetings. The approval of those logics was not pointless. In addition to recognition by the Municipal Secretary, this course of action matched expectations of leaders of Leagues known at the circuit as *the exemplary Leagues*, i.e. those – usually of Parks and Squares located in the city center – serving as parameters for "good organization". In 2009 and 2010, speeches by representatives of *exemplary leagues* at *Council* meetings were decisive for approvals. Their arguments were valued, which ended up strengthening the Manager's position. That, however, did not mean a lack of disagreement, but rather acknowledgment of authority. Statements against the *closer-to-professional* view were often made, but given the context of power relations, most of them did not go beyond the more or less explicit murmurs among Leagues' representatives, particularly those called the *Suburb leagues*, often pointed out as problematic.

In 2011, when Souza took over the Football Management Office, that situation changed significantly. Differently, by basing his authority on coordinating meetings of Leagues' representatives and the *Municipal* itself, he showed his experience in communities, at squares, suburbs, especially at *várzea*, as a player, a teacher and a manager of competitions. At meetings, he always told his stories

and the way he did it made it clear that he was “cut out *at várzea*”. “Enforcing” made some sense, but “knowing how to carry on” was recognized as equally important and thus it could be made explicit without major consequences. That is, what had been agreed could be inappropriate and thus it had to be readjusted in some or many aspects. In 2011 *council* meetings, issues previously debated in murmurs appeared in open discussions with the coordinator’s participation. In the room, the arrangement of heads nodding to that new setting – good for the *suburb leagues* – was significantly different from those supporting Madureira, which made leaders of the *exemplary leagues* worry and point to a “move backwards”.

We do not see that change either as “progress” (as some people said, noting that there used to be too much *bureaucracy* before that) or as a “problem” (as others said, stressing that now there would be indiscipline and lack of commitment). What we try to show is that the organization comprised a process of disputes with distinct trajectories and arrangements. The two basic categories in such disputes were *closer to professional* and this is the *várzea*. But what did these categories mean for organization? In order to illustrate some learned responses to this question, we present Table 1, where we summarized the differences concerning three issues that were often on the agenda of discussions and tensions.

Table 1 – Summary of the main issues that differed in the two categories of organization.

	Closer to professional	The várzea is here
Institutionalization of the circuit	The football circuit should be organized based on the official constitution of Leagues (bylaws, boards, minutes, etc.) and these should be registered at the Football Management Office (institution in charge of registration, control and punishments). Leagues' practices in their <i>Regionals</i> should be aligned, which would be done by standardizing and circulating documents, as well as by participating in meetings. The leagues that did not fit in (<i>pirates, ghosts</i>) would not be entitled to take part in the <i>Municipal</i> .	The football circuit would work with Leagues operating independently when organizing their competitions, just declaring at the end which of "their teams" would take part in the <i>Municipal</i> . Leagues being guided by distinct norms, rules, codes – many of them were unwritten – would not be a problem.
Circulation of players	To participate in the circuit, players could be registered in only one League. In the chosen League, they could play in more than one category, but for the same <i>team</i> . An exception was made for the best players of teams that did not qualify, who then complemented the League's qualified teams. The goal was to prevent players from changing teams in face of difficulties or better opportunities to earn money, beer, barbecues, etc.	Circulation of players between Leagues would not be a problem, and each could participate in more than one <i>Regional</i> at the same time. In favor of this discourse were the arguments that <i>várzea</i> is a free-choice area or also (paradoxically) a place for work, since several players earned some <i>pocket money</i> from each match they played.
Authority and disciplining	Credibility of the organization would lie in its ability to enforce norms typical of football and competition and not allowing "other logics" to interfere in results or in the circuit's progress. To this end, a series of control and discipline artifacts were "established" (match reports, accounts, records, lists of people punished, database). These were intended to be references about people's <i>playing conditions</i> .	Organizers' credibility was not indifferent to the need to "enforce" what was approved at meetings, but they also recognized that it was necessary to "know how to escape" decisions approved to make games occur and finish. It would demand recognizing that "other logics" should be considered, including agendas of families, jobs and <i>communities</i> .

Source: Authors

Based on this table, we were able to assume that *closer to professional* refers to a category that includes efforts based on detachment from external pressures in order to consolidate the operation of the circuit based on logics typical of it, embedded in rules, in the general regulation and in many other artifacts that

linked and aligned practices. Note that organization based on this notion of football’s detachment from other spheres of ordinary life was precisely what supported the classification of amateurism and its distinctive function, typical of the *ethos* of an English elite class,⁷ but which in this case is related to *the professional*. That is, the sense of *professionalization* that was *closer to popular* in other historical junctures, approaches a notion of *exemplary elite* in the SME-leagues circuit, but sustained on work intended to make the particular demands be known, acknowledged and met.

The *exemplary, closer to professional* described more precisely what Bourdieu (1983) called a *sports field*, i.e., a particular reality irreducible to any other, which underwent a process of autonomization throughout its history. That process was characterized, among other aspects, by the formulation of rules, specific regulations that allow exchanges; formation and action of the body by specialized actors (players, clubs officials, referees, etc.); establishment of its own institutions, vested with the authority to set limits, to define what is proper and improper, to enforce and to confer titles. But if *closer to professional* would exemplarily mean the notion of a symbolic field in operation, which would be the place of the *várzea* organization? *Would its organization not be susceptible (only) to this gravitational field of immanent particular logics?* We sought to advance a little more on that, presenting descriptions and comparisons of ethnographic trajectories in both leagues – an *exemplary* one and a suburban one – highlighting the trajectories-actions of their officials.

3 WITH ALENCAR AT AN EXEMPLARY LEAGUE

At the first meeting of the 2009 *arbitration council*, representatives of the Leagues already debated for several minutes

⁷In the literature on the emergence/invention of sports, especially that of major theoretical impact (the notion of field in Bourdieu, 1983; configuration in Dunning, 1992; and the invention of traditions in Hobsbawm, 1997), it seems a common point that the categories “amateurism” and “professionalism”, especially in 18th- and 19th-century England, involve processes of social class distinction. On one side, aristocracy and its orientation to chivalry, to the character that, being detached from the things of ordinary life, is imposed over the will to win; on the other side, popular classes and orientation to results, to approximation, to interdependence of sports experiences with life’s serious things.

the regulation item regarding uniforms, after finding a “problem”: teams were not using full *uniforms* (shorts, jerseys and socks). This led Alencar – chairman of the League of Iguaçú Park, considered the most *exemplary* one – to make the following “proposal”: “I see only one solution for this if there are punishments [...]. Aesthetically, that ends football!” (DC, March 5, 2009). At Football Management meetings, Alencar was one of the strongest advocates of a *closer-to-professional* organization to his colleagues from other Leagues, but he recognized that it was not in the interest of all, as is clear in the explanation below:

Before the *arbitration council* meeting started, the leader of the League of Iguaçú Park (Alencar) approaches and we begin to talk about why those people would be at that meeting. Alencar was categorical in stating that “most chairmen of Leagues also *own football cups*”, so “decisions voted on here are not always for a good championship, but aim at the presence of public at the fields where *cups* are played”. (DC, March 12, 2009)

Alencar, a middle-aged man, was a software development businessman, but his ties with the city’s football were not recent. He had played at *varzea* since he was 14. However, he badly hurt his knee and became a coach and later an official for his team.⁸ Until a few years ago, he “owned the team” but he stopped that due to “expenses”. He maintained only the presidency of the League of Iguaçú Park, one of Porto Alegre’s main leisure areas, located in the city center, where he was present at meetings and competitions rounds. Like Alencar himself, most teams participating in the championships of “his league” were “outsiders”, that is, they came from other parts of the city, but went to that park for the quality of the teams and the organization.

As explained by the chairman of the League, with hard work and enforcement by public agencies, they achieved improvements in the field and greater independence to use the space. With the

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Interview conducted on November 12, 2011.

help of his “vice-chairman” Amadeu, Alencar used to promote four championships a year. To make the project viable, teams that did not comply with the regulation had to pay registration and referee fees as well as fines. Much of that revenue went to pay the referees and fourth officials who worked in matches and sometimes a person to help collect balls and clean changing rooms. As SME *partners*, Alencar and Amadeu did not pay for the field’s lighting and rent, but made sure it was a space-time of “orderly leisure” for people who liked football, and the facilities were taken care of and improved.

An analysis of observations undertaken in two competitions (2009 and 2010) for about four months made us understand that Alencar relied on a type of organization that was very intolerant regarding “indiscipline” and “disorganization”. And this was related not only to the expectation of getting closer to “professional” football. For the enterprise to be sustained at that Park, without major complaints from the many users and residents of the surroundings, the practices could not be seen as “confusion” or “disorder”. Those who were linked to the League’s championships should know that rules and regulations of “football” should be complied with there, otherwise they would be excluded. This was often argued by the *chairman* and the *vice-chairman*. To emphasize such dynamics, they mentioned the examples of teams of *drug trafficking bosses*, that is, people who were used to circumvent State laws, but who complied with competitions’ regulations and the rules of the game.

To assert that compliance, a great deal of objectivation and subjectivation of “organization” and “discipline” used to be engendered towards sacralizing the regulation, which had to be *known*, acknowledged and followed since it guaranteed the consolidation of boundaries of what was “typical of football”. That resulted in Alencar’s effort to advocate *closer-to-professional* football at *board* meetings (at the Football Management). If the League’s regulation and punishments were institutionalized within the SME, it would greatly consolidate local discourse, thus protecting the norms from “external pressure” – he would not be the one demanding, but rather “the Department”, “the City”.

Based on this understanding, it was easier to understand Alencar's support to Madureira (2009-2010) and his claims about Souza (2011). Thus, he consolidated his *partnership* within the Iguaçú Park and also gained strength to more easily convince people that his practices were a set of rules typical of the game and competitions. One effect of that was that behavioral problems did not require extensive acts of *trial*. Those who fought in the field or who *touché*d referees knew their punishments beforehand. Referees or fourth officials had only to record the fact on match reports. This record on the report represented both trial and punishment, which resulted in a significant strengthening of the referee's authority to manage matches *under the rules*.

Considering only the logics supporting the *exemplary League* of Iguaçú Park, we could say that a set of provisions were "missing" in other Leagues that could be easily classified as heretics. That was especially the case of those accused of not disciplining, whose interest was focused on Cups' profitability and where championships were conducted "recklessly" and things outside football were allowed to influence what happened *in the field*. That means that, when the *closer-to-professional* organization was being conceived, it could not be reduced to an imitation of the professional football circuit. It was necessary to see it as an exhaustive work to consolidate a particular and institutionalized symbolic universe with no interference from external pressures – a field.⁹ Much of this direction was consolidated for heretic Leagues. In order to discuss those classifications, particularly the notion of "lacking", we now describe some of the dynamics of those "other Leagues", taking as the main reference a *Suburban League* – *Miranda's League*.

4 IN A SUBURBAN LEAGUE WITH MIRANDA

Our first conversation with Miranda – chairman-official-owner of the Vila Paraná League – also took place in 2009 at

⁹According to Bourdieu's theory, a structured system of objective forces, a relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity that is able to impose (itself) to all objects and agents that penetrate it. A system that refracts external forces depending on its internal structure (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1995).

the meeting of the *arbitration council*. The *League of Miranda* could not be called *exemplary*, but it was recognized for enlisting many teams. That fact placed the official in a prominent position. However, it still had “problems” of football “disorganization” and “indiscipline”. The result was an interest in studying (in) that League. From January 2010 to December 2011, the official became a key interlocutor for this investigation, being observed during 22 months in six competitions, 65 rounds of matches, 35 meetings, 11 parties, 2 tours, and other trips around town to respond to demands of the League and teams, and for private matters.

An eclectic construction worker¹⁰ who favored informal ties, Miranda lived in Vila Paraná, in a brick house still under construction (like many others), with his wife and two children. He was recognized as a *local community* leader. A bar operated at his home, at night, also referred to as the League’s headquarters, where football meetings were held. Miranda’s relationship with the League began in mid-2000, when he went to live in Vila Paraná, at first helping Mr. Baltazar to coordinate championships. After Mr. Baltazar’ death, his daughter Elizangela “inherited the League”, but then she went to prison for involvement in drug trafficking and the League “went to Miranda”. It was then that he registered it at a notary’s office to meet SME requirements. It started as a 6-team veteran League and, in 2010 and 2011, it already held several annual championships in different age categories, with nearly 50 teams and over 800 players involved.

The football field most often used by the *Miranda League* was that at the adjoining Vila Ibema. In that field, the official was a partner in the Cup along with Borracha, a small local merchant who owned a grocery store. Not by chance, many weekend and holiday matches were played there, where a drug trafficking point also operated. Miranda was not involved, but he knew perfectly how to divide spaces following a logic based on coexistence. However, the Vila Ibema field was not the only one “used” by Miranda;

¹⁰Mason, painter, carpenter, plumber.

there were several others – in distinct regions, neighborhoods and suburbs – where teams were the “*home teams*” for their matches. In several weekends, a round of competitions involved more than ten fields, to the delight of other Cup owners who were often *team owners* as well.

In early 2011, Miranda closed the bar that operated at his residence and “became a partner” to Mr. Flores’s bar, located next to his house. Besides the bar, *little dances* were held there on Fridays and Saturdays, and *matinees* on Sundays, as well as birthday parties. Football folks boosted the clientele and helped to keep the bar busy. Weekly League meetings also began to occur at the place. Always on Tuesdays, after they left work and went home around 8 p.m., members of the teams began to arrive, eager to learn the news, results, scores, to comment on the last round of matches and the performance of players and referees, to know where and when they would play and who the referees would be. Some also went there for a *sip* or an *ice*¹¹ while following and/or taking part in conversations. The meetings were financially profitable, gathering more than 40 people sometimes, many of whom spent money at the bar. It was clear that football was a way for Miranda *to make money, improve the life* of his family, and that depended on his ability to create spaces for fun closely linked to an extensive network of “football acquaintances”.

Miranda, like other *suburb league* officials, occupied a “place” in the boardroom of SME’s Football Management and received Regulations, registration forms, lists of people punished and match reports. It begged the question: what was the importance of those artifacts – and the organization proposed by the SME – “at suburban fields”? The most promising answers to this question were derived from observation of the organization dynamics of six competitions held at Miranda’s League. At them, it could be noted that the notion of *closer-to-professional* football enjoyed legitimacy and nurtured, also in that context, a sense of “lack of organization”

¹¹Beer

and “lack of discipline”. Criticism by members of the *exemplary Leagues* made sense. The existence of regulations, forms, list of punishments and match reports symbolized organization and discipline – aspects cherished by members of the teams, which raised (best) the League’s value.

However, sticking only to this interpretation would be a very restricted exercise. The recognition of the regulation and the other artifacts did not put Miranda just as someone who passed on the provisions incorporated at SME Football Management meetings. While documents instituted the power of the institutionalized circuit and therefore conferred substance to Miranda’s directions, he used the same “acknowledged” documents to consolidate his authority in other ways. He used to repeat “it’s on the regulation, just read it”, adding some direction on what to do or not do. However, in many of those situations, the content was not even on the regulations, which did not mean it lacked plausibility. Such uses made sense under the logic of someone who took advantage of acknowledgment without knowledge (by members of the teams) to enforce other values or directions, usually related to what was called *deals*.

In fact, in the Vila Paraná league, efforts towards “enforcing” regulations were not the only grounds for the “organization’s credibility”. On top of those efforts or within their gaps – and sometimes, contrary to them – credibility was related to convenient negotiations with/among team *owners* or even with referees. Tuesday meetings were special moments to produce crucial *deals* on the progress of championships and participation of teams, even in disagreement with the regulation, as illustrated by field diary excerpts below.

Edenilson is one of those players involved with drug trafficking at the suburb, recognized for taking the *silverware* [weapons] with him to games. He plays as a lineman and, in one of the matches, a defender came over him. After the game he went to *ask for explanations*, trying to fight the defender. He managed to land a punch.

The referee, without knowing Ednilson's history, reported the incident on the match report – which Miranda ignored. Talking to the owner of the defender's team, he made a *deal*. To protect himself, the referee and the defender “applied only a one-game ban”, saying that the referee had sent the player after off the game, which did not occur. That card was written on the match report by Miranda to prove the punishment, which was accepted without problems (DC, May 10, 2011)

Miro is a referee for *Miranda's League* and the *Municipal*, but he was also the *coach* of a team that played a match at the other team's field. At this match, since he did not agree with a decision of referee Menezes, he assaulted him with a punch. This was written on the match report and it was sent to the Tuesday meeting. Menezes is Miranda's child's godfather, but it was common to hear claims at meetings that he “offended people during matches” and that he already “deserved” a few slaps to learn to “just be a referee”. Miro was one of the referees who worked for the League, even coordinating referees' work in 2010. Differently from what the regulation says – a two-year suspension for offenders – in order not to lose the referee or *look bad* with his child's godfather, a deal decided on a punishment for Miro until the end of the championship and not to send anything to the SME. (DC, May 10, 2011)

The *deals* mentioned above indicate not only breaks in institutionalized norms, but also that there were spaces for negotiations that preceded and overlapped what was “approved”. They were inventions that were not indifferent to local objective conditions, such as the dynamics of drug trafficking, partnerships and cronyism pointed out above. When organizing, Miranda could not be reduced to an *agent* of a particular field; he continued to have contact with his partner Miro, he would still be Menezes's child's godfather and he would need to keep good relations with drug dealer Ednilson. This, however, did not determine a complete abandonment of regulation, but perhaps its desacralization, which

pointed to a way of coexistence guided by a different, much more fluid and dynamic normalization logic: the *deals*. Not always what was “correct in the regulation” of SME was “correct for the *deal*” produced in conversations at the League, many of them private, without witnesses. Compliance with the regulation was important, but respecting *deals* after doing them was likewise appropriate. These were temporary unwritten definitions and therefore left no visible traces, as used to be the case with the documents that circulated and were filed at the Football Management Office.

The fact is that these *deals* left few traces, and that is precisely why they were very efficient. They opened gaps for vested interests that would be seen as “not of football” in other places but “were part” of how things worked. Organizing a competition in *Miranda’s suburban League* did not mean just “enforcing”; it required the insight into “knowing how to deal” with a series of mediations of everyday life in view of the continuity and the end of the championship or tournament. Intolerance towards convenient *deals* would soon make competitions unfeasible. Such organization, therefore, meant overlapping, sneaking among what had been institutionalized within the SME and the plurality of *deals* produced in and out of league meetings. Miranda, circulating around town, was an expert at it, representing well those of whom we could say they “knew how to carry on” – he was a mediator in terms of Bruno Latour’s (2008)¹² actor-network theory or an inventor of everyday life according to the logic of popular culture of Michel de Certeau (2002).¹³

Producing *deals* and “knowing how to carry on” did not meant lack of planning, producing match fixtures, holding meetings, attending meetings at the Football Management, filling out forms,

¹²Explaining his actor-network theory, Latour (2008) puts forward the notion of mediators as subjects who work with information – transforming, translating, distorting and modifying the elements it carry. Mediators are different from transporters – those who merely reproduce.

¹³In theories about everyday popular culture, Certeau (2002) deals with consumer practices as a secondary production, as “[...] an art of combining that is inseparable from the art of using” (p. 42), noting that we must look at popular, everyday, tiny fragments in order not to reduce society to a surveillance network, a structured-structuring structure (which does not mean denying it).

match reports and records, applying punishments. That is, it did not mean ignoring the existence of a particular field. However, it was a way to organize that demanded recognizing the polyphony of urgencies of urban life in the city's outskirt areas and working with them, without ignoring the structure of the *Municipal*, carrying out tiny and everyday procedures that played with the mechanisms of institutionalized discipline. Those ways were negotiated and changed according to temporalities, spatialities of the football circuit, as well as according to individuals, group-teams involved. Despite "enforcing" and "knowing how to carry on", organizing games in early competition stages in suburban fields was significantly different from doing it on *neutral fields* located in the squares in central areas of the city.

5 COHERENCES BETWEEN ENFORCING AND KNOWING HOW TO CARRY ON

Throughout this paper, we sought to show that the "várzea organization" results from the tension between two (native) models, here understood after two categories: *closer to professional* and *this is the várzea*. The first category is not exactly a reproduction of the professional circuit, but rather the construction of an organization grounded on an irreducible, singular configuration or field, which refracts external pressures or that which is not considered "of football" (which constituted that first interpretive action – a particular place with specific norms and values). Differently, the second category denotes a symbolic universe where imbrications with what "would not be of football" fail to be seen as heresies and instead become crucial in the very maintenance the football circuit investigated, to the extent that trajectories and dramas of urban life cannot be disregarded (which challenges the second interpretive action – polyphonic constructions marked by urban webs).

In line with this double reasoning and resuming our initial questions, we were able to understand that *várzea*, in the universe of football organization, especially in low-income suburbs, cannot

be understood simply from the idea of “lack” of procedures, techniques, people, specific artifacts recognized as appropriate (in a *field*). The “organization is a *várzea*” when constructions, actions and omissions are not susceptible only to the immanent logics of a field, but they rather depend on recognizing other dynamics and mediations of everyday life. If the derogatory tone is charged with the notion of the symbolic universe’s “lack” of limits, we shall point out that a *várzea* comprises one type of – not legitimate – organization that is quite complex, which triggers a plurality of *deals* as relevant as “football’s” regulations, codes and laws. But beyond that, as we tried to show throughout this text, rather than classifying the organization, it seems more promising to think of it from the idea of superimposed categories, after all, subjects (like Miranda) are circulating through the city, connecting the multiple sites of the circuit. While in some leagues, such as “Alencar’s” exemplary League, we observed *closer-to-professional* organization and in others, such as ‘Miranda’s’ suburban League, we noted the *várzea* organization, we were led to consider these categories as superimposed and interchangeable since they were not mutually exclusive; they rather coexisted and each stood out at a time. Thus, in trajectories of the organization of the SME-Leagues circuit, it was crucial to develop consistent practices, and agents were to act properly between “enforcing” and “knowing how to carry on”.

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