

  <https://doi.org/10.56238/alookdevelopv1-105>

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ABSTRACT

Report of how the musical and performative structures of the groups of Traditional Blocks of Maranhão (BTMs) are developed on the island of

São Luís, an area considered a metropolitan region of the capital of Maranhão. Each instrument used by the manifestation is related as well as the characters that are used in the performative act by the groups of the category are described, as well as innovation actions practiced today. In this perspective, concepts of popular culture, tradition and how these cultural groups of the carnival field were adapted are discussed.

Keywords: Carnival, traditional blocks of Maranhão, popular culture, St. Louis, invented tradition.

1 INTRODUCTION

The drumming practice of a group of Bloco Tradicional do Maranhão (BTM)¹ is composed of large drum rhythmists who play with their hand, with the exception of one to three rhythmists who play their drum with drumsticks, as ²well as gourds, reco-reco and retinta. The percussionists who play the big drum with drumstick make the sharp marking in the group, standing out from the others, because they give rhythm and cadence to the performative moment.

The reink is also played with drumsticks, only they are thin and longer than those used by the marker of the large drums, because these are shorter and thicker and at the ends usually have cloths tied (or fixed with adhesive tapes) to give consistency to the sound, as well as to prevent the skin of the instrument from being torn / pierced prematurely in view of the violent contacts of the drumsticks on the skin, through beats performed by the percussionists who play them.

In the body of rhythmists, in addition to the members of the drums who play and dance performatively according to the cadence and rhythm of the music, there are the instruments that are coupled to the sound apparatus, such as guitar, cavaquinho and wind instruments, especially in official presentations. Musicians who play string instruments typically make up the "harmony wing" of the BTM group.

¹ The BTMs are cultural groups of the carnival cycle active in the city of São Luís, capital of the State of Maranhão (Brazil).

² Drumsticks are auxiliary pieces that rhythmists use to get a more vehement sound out of the instrument. In the case of the large drum, it uses one or two drumsticks (one in each hand) and, depending on the cadence of the rhythm, can play with both drumsticks or only with one. This rhythm is called a marker because it gives the rhythm to the other components of the drums. Because it is played very hard, eventually the drumstick escapes from his hand and flies through the rhythmists, sometimes causing accidents that can hurt, but that, in general, are highlighted due to the intensity of the presentation.

During the barter performances, as eventually occurs in the courts of samba schools or other BTM groups or other cultural manifestation of the locality, the essential equipment is the guitar or cavaquinho to give harmonic basis to the³ percussive set of the drums. The stringed instruments were introduced in a timid way in the presentations of the percussive drums of the BTMs to enhance their harmony, considering that this manifestation performs musical pieces of various styles in spontaneous or previously contracted presentations.

One current argues that the introduction of stringed instruments was also to win the sympathy of young people as adepts, mainly by the emergence of new musical rhythms, such as afoxé and Bahian axé, which quickly fell into massive taste. In BTMs, it was implemented from the 1970s, constituting an innovative practice. Initially there was much criticism of this innovation on the grounds that the tradition was being assaulted by interference or imposition of the cultural industry⁴.

In the Ludovian cultural environment, the traditional blocos are groups of people who stand out for the musical sonority produced by their percussionists and the bouncing choreographies of their beacons. Percussionists (who in this thesis are called rhythmists) and beacons are part of the group ensemble, highlighting that the rhythmists make up the drums, in a singular unity among its participants. In summary, a drum of a BTM group uses the following musical instruments: contratempo (large drum), retinta, gourd, reco-reco, agogô (or rattle), ganzá, roca, afoxé, whistle.

2 ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP THE BATTERY OF BTMs

Below is a conceptualization of each instrument that makes up the drums of a BTM, illustrating through photography (see annex) how each one is positioned in the body of the rhythmist, or how part of it is played to obtain the characteristic sound that it emits. It is worth remembering that this conceptualization is based, above all, on the empirical knowledge of the investigator and on the testimonies collected throughout the investigation.

Setbacks: They are drums made of 4mm plywood, measuring 1 meter and 10 centimeters long by 80 centimeters wide, covered with animal skin (goat, sheep or deer), and an iron support for tuning, containing a rim and a semi-rim, support links of the tarraxas, nuts and screws. Each block holds the average of 20 drums. For the researcher Silva (2009, p. 27), the instrument contratempo "in fact, is more a singular instrument of the momesco folguedo: it is played with the hands". This instrument can be played by adult men and teenagers who have the ability to control the musical harmonic ensemble,

³ Usually, in São Luís, the harmonic base is made possible by stringed instruments, such as the guitar, banjo or cavaquinho. Wind instruments are only used when the theme calls for some kind of intervention (e.g., bugles have already been used to announce that the block was entering the catwalk, as the theme was related to medieval stories). Outside of this context, they are rarely used.

⁴ At this time, too, the skins of percussion instruments, which were animal skins, began to be replaced by skins of synthetic material (nylon) manufactured by the recording industry, which was also seen with much suspicion and resistance, provoking, among those most passionate about traditional cultural practice, intense debate.

as the large drums (setbacks) next to the retintas command all the other instruments of the drums of a BTM.

Retintas: They are instruments made of aluminum, iron, stainless steel or plastic pipe, measuring 14 centimeters long by 15 centimeters wide, covered with nylon skin, with support of a semi-rim and tarraxas for tuning. Each block maintains an average of 08 retintas. According to Silva (2009, p. 25) "versa the orality that in the samba classes, when the first touches were given, this instrument served to exquisite the samba, hence the origin of the name retinta".⁵

Cabaças: Percussion instruments made with a gourd (fruit similar to gourd) covered in colored plastic beads or the seed of a vine called Santa Maria. Each group maintains an average of 03 gourds. Usually, this instrument is made by the rhythmist who plays it, so it has a very handmade characteristic.

Reco-recos: Percussion instruments made of iron, stainless steel, pipe, measuring one meter, all shredded on one side, which is played by a small iron to give the cadenced rhythm. Each block maintains the average of 02 reco-recos. This instrument may have a diverse variation in shape, but the sound it emits resembles the pressure made on the teeth of a saw by means of the back-and-forth of the small iron when it is triggered by the rhythmist.

Agogôs: Percussion instruments made of iron, stainless steel, with the shape of a double-sided rattle, which are played with a small iron to give harmony to the rhythm. Each block maintains an average of 02 agogôs. The agogô instrument also has a very large variation of formats, but the sound it emits resembles the rattle that is placed on the neck of cattle and goats, worth, above all, the way in which the rhythmist can produce this original and characteristic sound.

Ganzás: Percussion instruments made of stainless iron, stuffed inside by seeds or nail heads (taxinhas). Each block maintains an average of 10 ganzás, which are played by men or women in a fast movement, according to the musical cadence of the samba theme. This instrument is held by both hands, and by making the rapid movement back and forth, or up and down, interspersing trepidations, makes the seeds (or taxinhas) that are inside produce a high-pitched sound, emphasizing the musical harmony of BTM.

Rocas or Rattles: Industrialized percussion instruments, made of wood, measuring 70 centimeters in length, with several caps (or circles) of stainless steel. Each block maintains an average of 10 rocks. This instrument is also held by both hands and perform the rapid movement back and forth, up and down, shakes, makes the rounded caps produce a high-pitched sound, emphasizing the musical harmony of the group.

⁵ Another curiosity about the repainted instrument lies in the fact that until the 70s of the last centuries, more precisely until the year 1975, the retintas were made of iron, with the same measures; Except that they were covered with animal skin (goat, goat, sheep, snake, cat, chameleon, etc.). From the year 1976, there was a change, to industrialized instruments, that is, retintas manufactured by the sound industry, because they were also used by the batteries of samba schools.

Afoxés: Industrialized cylindrical percussion instruments, made of plastic materials, covered with plastic beads. Each block maintains the average of 02 afoxés. This instrument is held by one hand, while the other serves as support by marking the sound with rhythmic stops according to the musical cadence. The movements are fast, circling the rounded shape of the small drum back and forth, producing a soft sound, punctuating the musical harmony of the group.

Whistle: Industrialized instrument made of stainless steel (extended whistle) that has the purpose of giving the commands for the evolution of the drums, in general with the stops (breques, harmony), exclusive of the drum director (or drum master). This instrument is attached by a cord, which is around the neck of the drum director, who takes it to his mouth every time he needs to use it to give coordinates to the other members of the group. The whistle produces a very high-pitched hiss, which stands out from the other instruments that make up BTM's drums.

From the 1980s, some blocks, aiming to become better accepted by the young public, began to program the introduction of new elements in their performative act – begun in the previous decade – as occurred with the change from handmade iron retintas to industrialized retintas. Among the changes that occurred, one of the most significant was the introduction of string and wind elements, giving the rhythm a more flexible sound, facilitating the accompaniment of songs from other musical genres, such as hits parades, *hits* of soap operas, romantic songs, Bahian axé, boleros, among others.

These changes were also seen as innovations that occurred with the praxis of BTMs, because they opened up the possibilities of interacting with other socio-cultural segments and part of the young public felt represented with this type of practice. In addition, the care of artistic production also signaled that entrepreneurial measures were necessary to make groups grow as social and community agents, reinforcing the thesis that BTM is an invented practice, as thought by Hobsbawm & Ranger (1997), Hall (2005) and Geertz (2013).

There is one character who has a vital role in maintaining the group's order and discipline while in recreation, entertainment, or fulfilling contractual commitments – the Drum Master. This Battery Master (or Commander) is the ⁶person responsible for the rhythmic direction of the block, also called the drum director, who has the responsibility of maintaining the group interaction of the set, so that, on the street, who is in charge is the commander of the group, and not the board.

About this group interaction exercised with the components of the BTM battery, from the leadership of the Drummer Master, it is perceived that there is a similarity in the analysis developed by Piaget (2005) when investigating the group interaction of children with external learning, because there the learning of the members of the battery is done through the processes of abstraction that reflect

⁶ The term commander, formally based on the militaristic hierarchy, can still be symbolically understood and used in BTMs, because the commanders of the groups are led to follow a character who imposes rigid discipline, in order to achieve the desired results during the performance of the performances.

the experiences of the subject with the environment, whereas rhythmists, like children, gradually internalize notions and appropriate culturally constituted concepts.

According to Piaget himself (2005), this practice becomes learning, and *therefore skill* (emphasis added), because "the encounter of the external object will trigger the need to manipulate it, its use for practical purposes will raise a question or a theoretical problem" (PIAGET, 2005, p. 16). Thus, in a similar way, children, adults, men or women, in the exercise of their function within a battery, are social agents in a state of permanent learning, ready to obey the guidelines of the Battery Master⁷.

The internalization of notions is made explicit by Piaget (2005) through the different levels of intellectual development that each rhythmist goes through in the course of knowledge construction. Therefore, a percussive BTM drum, the more integrated, will produce a better result in terms of quality, sound, instrumental tuning and involvement among its peers, thus constituting constructive conceptions.

It is also noticed, according to Piaget (1972b), that they are constructive conceptions precisely because they consist of structurations that allow conceptual advances in the appropriation of the knowledge elaborated by humanity, which means, that it is up to the Master of Drums of the BTM to exercise the function of commander with his commanded, passing the multiplicity of own rules and internal rules of the group so that a result of musical excellence is obtained.

The Drum Master has the responsibility of doing all the direction of the show, having control of all the personnel of the group, and is the one who makes the changes of rhythm, such as: commands with the whistle the changes, starting cadencedly, pulling to the accelerated, always beeping and returning to the slow, without letting the rhythm fall, performing improvised parades (breques), being the person responsible for the traditional greeting⁸ that usually occurs in the spontaneous performances of BTM groups.

This greeting works as a trademark in the samba classes of the capital of Maranhão, which include the BTMs. It is almost a theatrical performance pulled by the commander of the group, at the time of their presentations, and that occurs almost always at the end of the auditions. This greeting has a standardized text of questions and answers that BTMs fulfill, modifying little but adapting the standard text to fit some aspect of the group's presentation, as shown in the example below:

⁷ The vast majority of members of a BTM drum kit did not attend music schools to practice as a profession or participate in a cultural group. Their skills are apprehended in the group itself with the guidance of the Drum Master.

⁸ This greeting was also developed by other cultural manifestations – such as the Samba Classes and Samba Schools – during their individual presentations. This performative act of the commander is/was interpreted as a symbolic way of granting and gaining prestige, reinforcing the need to guarantee future supporters (godfathers) within the context of the theory of local dependence.

Question (commander) - **Will you want to, will you?!**

Answer (all participants in the group) - **Go!**

Question (commander) - **Will you want to, will you?!**

Answer (all participants in the group) - **Go!**

Question (commander) - **For our bloc?** (*Usually the block name is used*)

Answer (all participants in the group) - **Nothing!**

Question (commander) - **For the audience present?** (*Usually, the name of the owner of the house, or of who invited the group, or of some authority that is present or arrived suddenly, or to value some sponsor, politician, artists, athletes, etc.*)

Answer (all participants in the group) - **Everything!**

Final salute from the commander - **A round of applause.** (*All the pranksters give a round of applause, playing their instruments, prompting a warm instrumental greeting. Those who do not have an instrument, such as the goals, clap their hands*).

It deserves to be emphasized that until the year 1974, the commander of the traditional block also stood out before everyone, presenting his costume in a different way, because it had to have some detail or characteristic different from that of the other members of the group, having as main highlights: a special hat, a greater amount of feathers or the costume itself – in its entirety – was of different color, but with the same style of the clothes of the other participants, that is, the pattern of the costume that was presented during each carnival season was maintained.

This differentiation of the group commander in relation to the other participants of the "game" or of the BTM can be referred to the analyses of Bourdieu (1989, p. 154) when he interpreted that capital can be conceptualized as "resources that are or can become operative, efficient, like the trump cards in a game" in the competition for the appropriation of the rare goods existing in a given field. In the game of BTMs, the party commander is more powerful as he has knowledge of all the shortcuts and ways to lead his group.

3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPONTANEOUS AND OFFICIAL PRESENTATIONS

During the presentations of the BTMs, one can perceive several performative actions in the group: in the individual presentations or to fulfill contracts, it is verified that the group stands in an imaginary circle, in which everyone turns to the central point where the commander is normally positioned, followed by other imaginary lines in which the rhythmists who play retintas are positioned, markings and the secondary rhythmists.

In the borderline imaginary lines, the rhythmists who play the big drums are positioned – usually these characters are in a state of ecstasy when they are playing, as if they were in a trance to emit a unique and exclusive sonority at the moment of the performative act – and finally, circling around the big drums, the beacons, in a kind of "zig-zag", in which one passes by the other bouncily and gracefully.

Still during the presentations, the rhythmists who play the minor instruments such as roca, cabaça, reco-reco, ganzá, rattle, agogô, etc., also develop a bouncy choreography and circulating among themselves, without disturbing the performance of the rhythmists who conduct the large drums, which are responsible for the high point of the sound alongside the rhythmists who make the markings (especially the setbacks played with drumsticks and the retintas).

To avoid accidents, many members of the groups reinforce their fingers, part of the palm and/or wrists, with a pharmaceutical product called tape or other material that can help prevent injuries with violent contact between the skin of the instruments and these parts of the body. However, even with these precautions, rhythmists containing several calluses on fingers and hands are observed at the end of the presentations. Many of these rhythmists see these calluses as trophies (compensatory awards) for their dedication, in giving themselves to the maximum, in favor of group performance.

There are also scenic markings that occur during the presentations of the group's repertoire. For example, during the XVII Festival of Traditional Blocks, promoted by the group "Os Brasinhas", on November 7, 2015, in the square of the Chapel of St. Peter, in the Madre Deus neighborhood, the BTM "Os Apaixonados", in the middle of its presentation, when starting a certain musical piece (which was not any of its official sambas) interpreted "a cappella" half of the music (only with the voices of the official interpreters) accompanied by a drum marking Large, who made a paused mark, while the other rhythmists raised their instruments in the air (above their heads) throughout this initial moment.

This performance was an original and different moment, which caught the attention of connoisseurs and, with its constancy, ended up being copied by other groups. It is also worth remembering that during the official presentations of the groups in the contests that take place on the samba catwalk, the group positioning obeys this same hierarchy, however, the competitive parade occurs with the block always walking forward and its beacons circulating among themselves and the other components of the group. Elegance, smile, subtlety are individual characteristics that each component must demonstrate during its personal performance.

In this case, the large drum rhythmists are distributed on the sides and in the middle, but obeying a predetermined positioning by the Drum Master, while the other components play their instruments circulating, according to the samba cadence among the large drum rhythmists, avoiding physical contact with each other so as not to impair the sound performance. The members are

positioned in front and perform their bouncy choreography also among the other members, without leaving holes, taking special care with the front part.

Depending on the theme chosen by the group, the use of allegorical elements is allowed, but this practice is quite questioned by the most conservative, however, those more open to this type of behavior, see this action as a choreographic innovation that attracts the attention of the public and makes the parade more pleasant and mysterious. Thus, some groups may present novelties such as scenographic elements, mystical or folkloric characters (as BTM did "The Kings of Freedom", in the carnival of 2016, when it presented the characters Pai Francisco and Catirina – from the Bumba Meu Boi demonstration, from the June cycle), etc.

4 CONTEMPORARY INNOVATIONS OF BTMs

Other groups have also introduced a kind of beacon forming a front commission, carrying allegorical elements such as balloons or fireworks, or other pieces suggested by the chosen theme. But in the end, what weighs and collaborates decisively in these judgments are the sound and the fantasies, which, every year, become more extravagant and exquisite. Everyone knows this, so managers strive to fulfill these steps with a redoubled effort. It is worth mentioning that some innovations that have been emerging in BTMs over time, receive criticism from traditionalists, such as the criticism transcribed below by the Maranhão popular culture researcher Henrique Machado, who highlights:

What bothers me in the traditional blocks is the inclusion of what they call in the samba schools the Front Commissions. If it comes with violin, tambourine, matraca, flute, or cymbal for me whatever, it is even more beautiful. The worst they have already done when they left the batucada. First slowing down the pace of setbacks and then speeding up the pace too much. Today you only hear reink and the strings, as well as these singers letting out little screams on the catwalk. It would be so good if they sang the way they record their songs (MACHADO, testimonial published on Facebook, 14.02.2018).

As for the fantasy element, this is a case in point, as luxury, which is seen as "sumptuous consumption," has characterized nearly one hundred percent of the groups in this category⁹. Of course, this fantasy has to be in accordance with the theme chosen by the direction of BTM or that it has been chosen through a selection process that involves the board and the participants of the group, as occurs in the practice developed by many popular culture groups active in the metropolitan region of São

⁹ The researcher Eugênio Araújo (2014), analyzing the high costs of carnival groups, points out that this "is an anthropological category called "sumptuous consumption" – this act of spending everything, as much as possible, in the shortest space of time and showing that you have spent! Here the puritanical Western logic of "economics", of austerity, does not work" Says this researcher who spends "It is really pure exhibitionism, to demonstrate wealth and power, to impress. It's not for those who want it, it's for those who can! But eventually, even those who can't overstep their limits, consume beyond account. (...) But collective sumptuous consumption is recurrent in various cultures, especially on feast days. Good party is plentiful, exaggerated, rich. And among us, the carnival is the one that best embodies this spirit, which goes back to good materialism (yes, it exists!), the one in which things are made available to people, and not the other way around – as happens in evil materialism, when people live for the sake of things." (ARAÚJO, 2014, p. 125).

Luís. In some cases, even eventual collaborators and / or sponsors opine on the theme to be developed in the next carnival season. The festive act of producing luxurious costumes – as has occurred with the making of BTM costumes in recent decades – or collective parties with the tactic of "sumptuous consumption", which is seen as an attempt at seduction and demonstration of power, receives from Canclini (1998) the following considerations:

[...] In every society there have been "free and inferior" practices such as painting the body or holding feasts in which a community spends all the surplus of an entire year and much labor time to prepare ornaments that will be destroyed in one day. Men have always made art by worrying about something more than their pragmatic value; for example, for the pleasure it provides, when it seduces or communicates something of us (CANCLINI, 1998, p. 113).

For Araújo (2014, p. 125), "kept the proper proportions, anyone, individually, can have their day of sumptuous consumption, when they buy that very expensive thing, outside the consumption patterns". This author explains that eventually the person spends what he does not have, or "bursts his credit card, gets into debt for the pleasure of the moment and spends the whole year paying – if this is occasionally, it is even good for the psychic health. Every once in a while, overspending lifts morale." Based on this reflection, it is perceived that most managers of BTM groups are sumptuous consumers, which leads many to fit into the "theory of dependence", as analyzed by the anthropologist José de Ribamar Caldeira (1976), establishing a dialectical game of negotiation between groups and public and private agents.

Still on the fantasy item, two elements are observed as mandatory practice, in the case of official contest, which are related to a cloak positioned on the back of the players (element also called coastal) and the boot that wears the feet and legs of each participant. The first item – mantle –¹⁰ according to the concept that is empirically reported by practitioners, is related to the royal clothing worshipped by European kings, because, in the imaginary world of King Momo's revelry, the subjects also want to feel part of this imaginary kingdom, even if it is in an action of pretending, in which the subalterns feel, even if deceptively, holders of this symbolic power granted by the oppressive elite, in those three days before Lent, as occurs in the carnival period.

Meanwhile, the second item also relates to the boot, which will wear all the members of the group. Usually, this boot is made from the punctuation of each player's foot and according to the style of the costume. Considering that the use of boots is not very common in the region where the city of São Luís is located, because it has a very hot climate, this element is also not easily found in local commerce, as well as there are not many professionals trained to carry out its confection. Thus, the

¹⁰ The robes used in BTM costumes are an almost mandatory practice in official parades and gala performances, without being described in any kind of edict or regulation. It is, therefore, a naturalized practice and apprehended by the practitioners and managers of the BTMs, as well as the wing of baiana is a must of the parades of the samba schools. Thus, the mantle is an indispensable piece in the fantasy structure of BTMs.

boot is an allegorical element considered quite costly for the production of the participant's costume, and because it is almost always used in special presentations such as official contests.

Thus, the cloak and the boot are essential elements for the complement of the fantasy of the group, except in cases where the theme dispenses with these elements. There have been some times when the BTM group has not paraded with the mantle element – the real coastal – but when this happens, the groups suffer many unfavorable criticisms, related, above all, to the violation of the tradition practiced by the groups of this category. Despite not counting points specifically, the groups have maintained this way of parading in the competitive contests of the carnival of São Luís.

It is also observed that the choice of theme has allowed a flexibility in the visual conception of contemporary fantasies, because, depending on what was idealized by the costume designer, there are insertions or deletions of visual elements, as well as the readjustment of elements for the fulfillment of items considered traditional, such as, for example, if the fantasy is inspired by elements of nature, like the butterfly of the group "The Lovers", in the carnival of 2016, the mantle of the costume was adapted as if it were the body of a butterfly made of PVC plates painted white, escaping, therefore, from the characteristic of the royal mantle of the European nobility, but, fulfilling this item considered traditional in the structure of the fantasy.

This issue has already been addressed in the edicts that regulate the official parades promoted by the City of São Luís. On the other hand, the Secretary of State for Culture of Maranhão was the first to charge cultural groups for the presence of their costumes in the presentations contracted by that folder. Thus, SECMA entered into this discussion, forcing the contracted groups to parade with the fantasy of the year in which the said contract occurred, penalizing the groups that did not meet this requirement with discounts on the amount of the fee to be paid to the offending groups.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As seen the BTM cultural manifestation has been adapted over time developing in practice hybridizations, innovations and at the same time trying to conserve its essential characteristic, within the Ludovic cultural field: tradition. This praxis that gives the groups of this manifestation the recognition, prestige and legitimacy of a unique manifestation in a scenario of extremely complex and sensitive cultural diversity, which, forces practitioners, appreciators and scholars, to classify them as an identity phenomenon of the Maranhão region, especially the part geographically covered by the so-called Brazilian Pre-Amazon, which is loaded with mysteries that need in-depth studies.

In the individual presentations held in the pre-season, in the season and at other times of the year, the BTM groups try to standardize an outfit for this type of presentation, which gives them a certain degree of performative quality, since there is a visual unity and, above all, behavioral discipline,

because in these presentations, usually, the groups do not use the official costumes used in the competitive parades and, When they use it, they do it only with part of the costumes, considering that elements such as feathers are removed for future reuse.

This standardization, with an alternative dress, gives BTM groups a level of responsible organization, leaving good reference with the appreciative public and the contractors of this cultural manifestation, in contrast to those groups that consider this behavior irrelevant. This type of providence, a priori, can be seen as unnecessary, but, in the end, there is an informal evaluation that is positively perceived for the social environment. The charge on this quality item is considered as a way to impose itself as a phenomenon capable of attracting the attention of local connoisseurs and strangers to generate, create, conquer and expand spaces in the productive chain of culture and tourism, becoming generators of employment and income for the related population.

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