


The role of society in public leisure spaces: An experience report

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ABSTRACT

Public leisure spaces are favorable places for health promotion, enabling people to acquire healthy habits. Squares, parks, cultural centers, streets, are examples of public spaces that provide opportunities for the practice of physical activities, leisure, sports, cultural development, conviviality and exchanges between the most diverse groups that make up the community. Objective: To describe how educational actions developed with the community contributed to the revitalization of a public leisure space. Methods: This report was based on the experiences of a group of community members from the Coroado III neighborhood, East Zone, in the city of Manaus-AM, who used a public space for the practice of physical activities, sports and leisure. Conversation circles, environmental education, cleaning actions with the active participation of the visitors of the place, photographic record and bibliographic survey of the literature related to the theme were carried out. Results: The actions resulted in the revitalization of the place, with improvements in the structure, elimination of garbage sources and awareness of environmental conservation, and contributed to promote the increase of individuals who started to frequent the neighborhood's leisure space. Conclusion: The collaboration and engagement of the community were essential to ensure the revitalization of the neighborhood's public leisure space, a place so significant to its regulars, the buracão field.

Keywords: Public spaces, Physical activities, Leisure, Community, Health promotion.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an evident increase in the demand for public leisure spaces in cities, as communities seek to balance the fast pace of urban life and the need for relaxation and leisure.

And what are public leisure spaces? They are spaces for citizenship, places of encounters, relationships, conviviality and exchanges between the most diverse groups that make up the community, they are also places conducive to boosting collective forces, as they allow the encounter between subjects with common interests (Araújo, 2019; Oliveira, 2010; Tschoke *et al.*, 2011). It is also a favorable environment for health promotion, due to the function of revitalizing and promoting well-being in the urban environment, enabling people to acquire healthy habits, as they enable physical activity, sports practice, play and cultural development (Rechia *et al.*, 2006, *apud* Tschoke *et al.*, 2011; Silva *et al.*, 2013). Squares, parks, forests, cultural centers and streets are examples of public leisure spaces, and constitute the central setting for these activities.

For several authors, the inadequacy and/or non-existence of public spaces for leisure contributes to the enclosure of people, who end up spending their available time in the domestic environment, and makes the inhabitants of the city increasingly distant from the right to the city as a place for the reproduction of life (Isayama *et al.*, 2006; Oliveira, 2010).

Considering the importance of these spaces, this experience report aims to describe how educational actions developed with the community contributed to the revitalization of a public leisure space in the Coroado III neighborhood.

METHODOLOGY

This report was based on the experiences lived in 2019, with a group of community members from the Coroado III neighborhood, East Zone, in the municipality of Manaus-AM, who used a public space for the practice of physical activities and leisure.

To achieve the objectives of this report, the following methodological steps were followed: (1) active participation of the community members in the cleaning and awareness activities developed; (2) photographic record of the cleaning actions; (3) bibliographic survey of the literature related to the theme of public leisure spaces and; (4) analysis of the facts described.

The space delimited for the activity was the soccer field better known by the residents of the Coroado neighborhood as the "buracão field".

The methodological procedures mentioned took place simultaneously with the development of conversation circles, environmental education and the practice of physical activities with the visitors of the place, with meetings held every Monday and Wednesday, except holidays, lasting about 15 minutes, prior to the practice of physical activities.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In recent decades, there has been a growing appreciation of public leisure spaces, and the recognition of their importance in playing a fundamental role in individual and community development, contributing to quality of life and well-being, improving social relations and often becoming a space for expression and involvement. This is understandable, since, "the space for leisure is the urban space. Cities are the great spaces and leisure facilities " (Marcelino, 2006, p.66). And yet, according to the same author, "in a peripheral country like Brazil, the vast majority of the population does not have the financial conditions to enjoy paid leisure spaces" (Marcellino, 2006, p.78). Thus, many individuals seek in public spaces the opportunity for leisure and physical activity, as they are free places, easily accessible and highly valued by the community, and, according to Baroni (2024), they are fundamental for social integration and urban balance.

According to Leonella et al. (2020, p. 2) "public space offers the possibility for people to interact with each other, to bring diversity together, to be able to cross paths with neighbors on a street or square, to be enjoyed by children and young people".

And based on these considerations, Mota presents his analysis of leisure outside the domestic environment:

The small but important portion of leisure time spent outside the domestic environment is occupied with a multiplicity of gestures and displacements in the daily life of the city, summarized in the interest of enjoying the city itself. Here are some examples: walking through the streets (including the new version of the streets, the *shopping malls*), squares and parks, the look of the shop windows; o Stopping at bars, restaurants; going to the cinema, the theatre, the bookstore, the museum, the art gallery, the record store, the course or study group of your choice, the *concert*, the ball, the party, the club (or the beach), the cultural centre, the sports centre, the gym, dance, music [...] (Mota, 2012, p.43).

Coroado is a neighborhood located in the East Zone of the city of Manaus, capital of the state of Amazonas, has an area of 1,142.23 hectares, distributed in three areas: Coroado I, II, III. It arose from a popular invasion of the lands of the Federal University of Amazonas in the 1970s (Pessoa, 2014), and, according to estimates by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), its population in 2021 was 64289 people, most of whom are: entrepreneurs, workers in the Manaus Industrial District or owners of their own business. It was the first neighborhood established in the East Zone of Manaus, and since its foundation, it has sought economic and social improvements (Soares *et al.*, 2021). It presents diverse realities in its social and economic context, and from the commitment of its founders, the process of modernization of the area began. Thus, the first schools, churches, covered market, supermarkets, health centers, sports court, police station and a bus line to serve the community emerged. Urban infrastructure is scarce, with unpaved streets and poor sanitation services. As for the free public spaces (such as squares and parks) in the neighborhood, they are notably scarce, and the few that do exist are abandoned and unmaintained.

It's a challenging situation when public spaces don't get the proper attention and upkeep. Thus, understanding the public space, the "buracão field", as the most frequented leisure space in the Coroado III neighborhood, the initiative was to motivate the community to revitalize the place.

The "hole field" is a soccer field with uncovered dirt soil, a grandstand with five flights of stairs, surrounded by a fence, with two soccer goalposts, without demarcation, without drainage system, measuring approximately 30 meters wide and 60 meters long, used daily by residents of the neighborhood for walking, racing, leisure, football championships, and eventually for festive events.

When starting the practice of physical activities for the community of Coroado III, it was found that the place had inadequate conditions for safe practice. What was seen was a scenario of degradation, with a lot of garbage scattered in the stands and on the field. Disposable cups, animal feces, plastic and glass bottles, cardboard, food packaging, as well as a specific place at one end of the field with a large amount of accumulated garbage, called by the community the "junk dump", which housed (household waste, construction debris, local business disposal, furniture, plastics, cardboard and dead animal carcasses), generating a bad smell and the appearance of urban pests (insects and rodents), which in general carry disease-transmitting microorganisms, especially because they are in constant contact with garbage. It is worth noting that garbage accumulated in a careless and carefree way causes impacts on human health itself, "bringing a series of problems not only to the ecosystem, but also to society" (TODA MATÉRIA, 2013).

And knowing that the public space "is a place of representation of the social life and quality of life of its inhabitants" (Rosa, 2017 *apud* Lionella, 2020, p.2), it was necessary that some premises were respected to promote the health of visitors, such as: a cleaner and more enjoyable environment.

Figure 1. Recycle bin next to the Figure 2 field. Field Grandstand



Source: The author (2019) Source: The author (2019)

The main challenge was to eliminate the source of pollution and empower the population to adapt the space. Then, the development of strategies to improve the conditions of the place began,

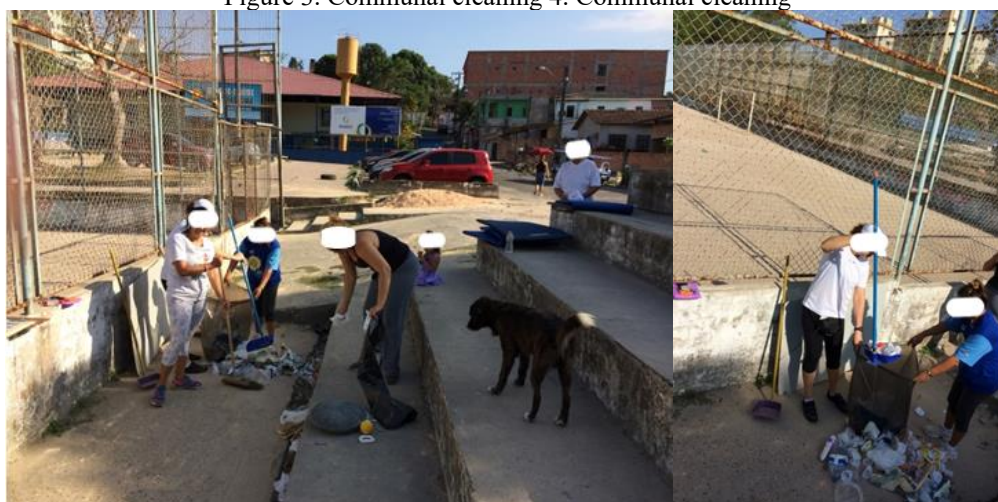
involving the community members in a joint work of awareness to transform the "field of the hole" into a healthy and minimally conducive space for the realization of physical, sports and leisure activities of the community, because a planned place is synonymous with comfort, salubrity and integration. Based on this view, it's safe to say that the better the location, the better the chances it has of attracting people.

The search for and maintenance of these public spaces suitable for the practice of physical activities are essential to encourage an active and healthy lifestyle in the community, in this regard Moraes Filho *et al.*, (2021, p.5) report that "urban public spaces, being intended for the community, require constant investments in infrastructure, safety, and quality". Arana and Xavier (2017) point out that the provision of urban public spaces would be associated with health benefits for the local population, encouraging, for example, the regularity of bodily practices, and that living in more natural environments has positively influenced people's perception of health.

The participation of the community is essential to stimulate a behavior of revitalization and preservation of the place, so action was needed. According to Isayama *et al.* (2006, p.88) "Actions grounded, in a critical way, but in action, making it happen, without needing life to stop, or major structural changes happening, so that only in this way can change begin".

An awareness work was then initiated with the community about the importance of cleaning the place for a safe practice. Daily, prior to the practice of physical activities, the site was cleaned with the collaboration of the community members, sweeping and gathering all the garbage found. Subsequently, dialoguing and seeking support with the leadership of the neighborhood soccer league, with the surrounding merchants, and with the municipal government for the removal of the "junk dump" and conservation of the site.

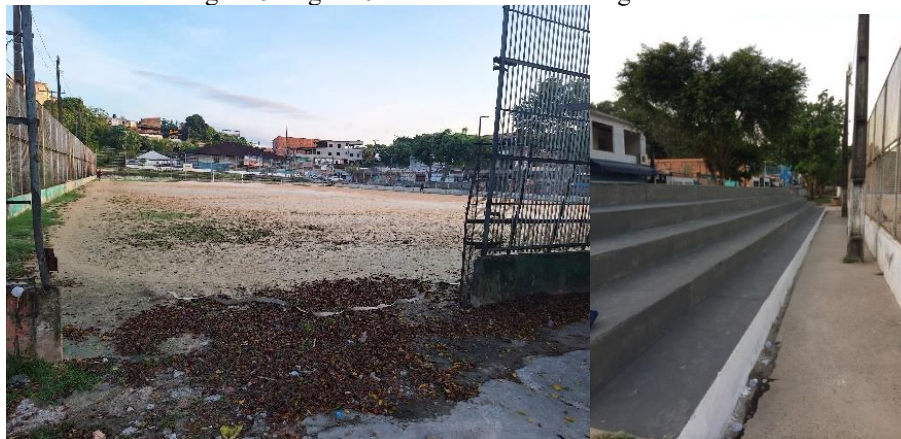
Figure 3. Communal cleaning 4. Communal cleaning



Source: The author (2019)

As a result, it was possible to keep the place clean, definitively eliminate the "junk bin", trash cans were installed around the football field, the bleachers were renovated and painted. Based on observations, it was found that the subjects were able to analyze and criticize issues related to society and their own conduct. The search for the right to an appropriate place was also part of the discussion, improving the environment of the countryside, seeking means in the community itself and also resorting to the public power through the elaboration of a claim document, which resulted in improvements. "When there are quality public spaces, they interfere positively for good urban development and for the quality of life of the population" (Leonella et al., 2020, p.2). The studies by Hino *et al.*, (2019) indicate that the availability and proximity of public leisure spaces to homes are associated with higher levels of physical activity of moderate and vigorous intensities performed by adults.

Figure 5. Figure 6. Renovated and clean grandstand



Source: The author (2019)

Figure 7. Installed trash cans



Source: The author (2019)

One of the great challenges of today is to create and maintain healthy spaces, enabling its visitors to regularly practice physical activity and leisure. Thus, it is necessary to consider that the more options and quality in the spaces, the greater the interest of the population in frequenting these



environments. According to Silva (2016, p. 252) "the quality of these places can interfere with use and enable or prevent individuals from acquiring healthy habits".

Mota and Zacarias (2008, p.109) say, "we pass so quickly through the things of nature and society that we do not notice how beautiful are the works of the people who transform the environment [...]".

FINAL THOUGHTS

Public leisure spaces play an essential role in improving the physical and mental well-being of citizens, while also contributing to strengthening social bonds and a sense of belonging.

The present report shows that there is a great demand for these spaces as facilitators of the practice of physical and leisure activities, especially a safe, healthy environment close to the home.

Another important point to be highlighted was the performance of the community, which united demonstrated all its transformative power, managing to revitalize such a significant place for its visitors. And so to point out that improving the structure of the place and conserving the environment can be one of the factors that has helped to encourage the increase of individuals who started to frequent the neighborhood's leisure space.

It is then up to the government to implement effective strategies to offer the population quality public spaces, aimed at leisure and the practice of physical activities, keeping them clean and free of damage, so that they can be used to promote the health and quality of life of the population.



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