

THE BLOCÓDROMO IS OUT: THE MARKET TAKEOVER AND THE STREET PARADES IN RIO

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the proposal of Rio de Janeiro's City Hall to create an arena for the carnival parades in 2018 known as "Blocódromo", this work aims to identify which aspects of this venture – which remained aspirational – came to life in 2019's carnival. To do so, this carnival manifestation will be approached as an object of re-signification in contemporary society, which is evident in the varied reformulation stages of the Rio Carnival Arena project, both in 2018 (which includes structural and date changes) as in 2019, when it received another configuration, which involved new negotiation processes in order to be implemented. Henceforth, using street carnival parades as an example, this project will analyse the idea of appropriation of these groups as products of market interest, both by the private and public sectors, highlighting issues such as loss of control over cultural practices as well as the effects of commodification and growth of tourist flow in Rio's carnival. Through the tensions and debates between the various stakeholders this work aims to observe how this type of carnival organization challenges the event's organization as a whole, considering the power struggles on public roads while it proves to be an attractive source of revenue.

KEYWORDS

carnival; street carnival parades; appropriation; tourist flow

O BLOCÓDROMO ESTÁ NA RUA: A APROPRIAÇÃO MERCADOLÓGICA E OS BLOCOS DE CARNAVAL DA CIDADE DO RIO DE JANEIRO

RESUMO

A partir da proposta da Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro de criar uma arena para desfile de blocos carnavalescos, para o carnaval de 2018, projeto que ficou conhecido como "Blocódromo", visamos identificar que aspectos deste empreendimento – que não saiu do papel – ganharam vida no carnaval de 2019. Para tanto, abordaremos esta manifestação carnavalesca como objeto de ressignificações na sociedade contemporânea, o que se revela de modo evidente nos variados estágios de reformulação do projeto Arena Carnaval Rio, tanto em 2018 (o que inclui mudanças estruturais e de data) como em 2019, quando recebeu um outro formato, cuja implementação esbarrou em novos processos de negociação. A partir daí, utilizando alguns blocos de carnaval, analisaremos a ideia de apropriação destes grupos como produtos de interesse mercadológico, tanto por empresas privadas quanto pelo poder público, destacando questões como a perda de controle sobre práticas culturais assim como os efeitos da mercantilização e turistificação do carnaval carioca. Através das tensões e diálogos entre os diversos

atores envolvidos observaremos como este tipo de organização carnavalesca desafia o projeto de ordenação da festa, por meio das disputas de poder nas vias públicas, enquanto se revela uma atraente fonte de receita.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

carnaval; bloco de carnaval; apropriação; turistificação

INTRODUCTION

Street carnival parades, a century old carnival expression include various groups that since mid-19th century have mingled with the many other ways to celebrate the period before Lent, called almost indistinctly “groups”, “clubs”, “societies”, “chains” or “ranches” (Ferreira, 2004. p. 207). It is thus a difficult task to pinpoint the exact date of birth of each of these manifestations since these groups acquired their own characteristics over the years, differing from other carnival games through various influences and interests, remaining in a constant resignification process.

During the 20th century, the various carnival parades’ associations started to assemble and subdivide forming the different categories known today. Araújo (2003) points out that amongst these groups are: narrative parades (sets with structures similar to those of Samba Schools that parade in a competition at a defined venue), rock/lulling parades (created in resemblance to simpler street parade models without elaborated costumes, narratives or carnival allegories but that do also subdivide into other groups). Amongst the category’s representatives are Bafo da Onça, Cacique de Ramos and Boêmios de Irajá, performing *hors concours*) and the so-called “dirty” parades (with simpler, less elaborate costumes).

This present work’s object of study lies in the street parade category comprising carnival leagues of all sorts, each alluring to a different public, musical propositions, aesthetics and parade types that may also be called “chains” or “bands”. Whether through processions or staying still, using floats, music vehicles or no microphone structure, each adopt their own rhythm and indicate whether people should wear a costume to parade with or not. In conclusion, different groups within the street parade category share a flexible set of rules as to format, parade location and are opened to the public.

Rio de Janeiro’s 21st century street carnival parades (which do not partake in the annual Samba Schools’ competition) are an unquestionable success (Barros, 2013; Herschmann, 2013). It allures not only millions of revelers each year but also the interest in propaganda, considering it is broadcast both country wide and internationally and it also brings considerable worry from Rio’s City Hall. Pointed out as an important tourist attraction (Boschi, 2007), these carnival leagues have started to submit to norms and procedures dictated by Municipal Decree n° 30659 from May 7, 2009, which include restrictions regarding parading time, changes of procession locations and even rejection of parade authorization and clearance.

The proposition of creating a “blocódromo” (A sambodrome¹ for street parades) started to take form in this scenario. Rio’s Carnival Arena, idealized in 2017 as Rio City Hall’s initiative, desired to take the street carnival parades to the *Parque dos Atletas* [Athletes’ Park] – venue created as a leisure area to the 2016 Olympic athletes which also hosted music events over the years, including three Rock in Rio editions, located in the suburbs of the city. This project soon raised questions regarding public space disputes as well as the consequences of displacing street parades during carnival period and its marketing exploitation.

The Blocódromo’s ill-fated project, rejected for the second time in 2019, becomes a new paradigm of what Storey (2015, p. 30) defines as an exchange and negotiation ground defining popular culture. Thus regarding these complex social relations under the interaction of various social players (Canclini, 2008), this paper aims to evaluate how some of the Rio Carnival Arena’s premises have perpetuated and in what way the reformations the project went through reveal the grounds of power disputes in which the street carnival parades are inserted in.

Bibliographic research as well as books and articles, interviews with representatives of carnival parades and revelers’ observations, were used to back this project’s work. In addition to that, considering that the topic is recent, this paper outlines the relevance of web holdings, in particular *O Globo*, for its importance amongst the city’s tabloids and for its extensive coverage of previous carnival events, besides other journals consulted through Rio’s Nacional Digital Library in which all mentions of the term “Blocódromo” were object of prior consultation.

Henceforth, this article was structured in three parts, seeking to present the Blocódromo’s proposal (or Rio Carnival Arena) under three aspects or phases. Firstly, the projects’ premise, announced in December 2017 which translates the way the public authority views the parades; second, the proposal’s conflict regarding matters of public spaces dispute and the event’s commercialization; third, it reveals the negotiation skills between all players involved which were demonstrated during the projects reformations and discussions with parade organizers.

It is perceived that the commercial interest used by these organizations overlap with proposals such as the Blocódromo. At the same time they take ownership of the street parades’ strength it can serve them as something Ferreira (2012, p. 151) defines as survival strategy.

THE BLOCÓDROMO – THE PROPOSAL

In 2011 Zuenir Ventura declared that something should be done to organize the street carnival parades in order to prevent “vandalism and dirtying of the city” but at

¹ The Sambadrome was inaugurated in February 1984 and is located in Rio de Janeiro’s downtown area. It is a stationary walkway where Samba Schools from the city parade. Before its creation, the parades were held in other street and avenues of Rio (Araújo, 2003).

the same time stated that “only a fool would propose to confine the parades inside a blocódromo” (Ventura, 2011, p. 7). On December 26, 2017, a project called Rio Carnival Arena (Figure 1) was presented by Rio de Janeiro’s City Hall with the intention to host the parades (Bacelar, 2017, p. 5). The idea was soon called by the same name suggested by the journalist years before, that is: Blocódromo.



Figure 1: Rio Carnival Arena Project, at the Parque dos Atletas (Bacelar, 2017, p. 5)

According to the announcement published in the County’s Official Gazette on January 12, 2018 (p. 33), the proposition was to foment a five day samba and *pagode* concert on a fixed stage along with floats and DJs and 10 street carnival parades² – two per day – from Saturday to Ash Wednesday. Located at the Parque dos Atletas in Barra da Tijuca, Rio Carnival Arena would be a free event with its access controlled by electronic turnstiles for audience count purposes and daily capacity of 100 thousand people though Riotur (Secretaria Especial de Turismo do Rio de Janeiro [Rio de Janeiro’s Tourism Secretariat]) only estimated it would host 20 to 40 thousand revelers per day.

According to Boere and Magalhães (2018, p. 10) the arena would use a rope system to separate the public from the floats (similar to what is used in Salvador’s carnival) and would also have a VIP area with 20 bistro tables, 80 tall stools, 4 two-people sofas and 64 ottomans. There, hot and cold canapes would be served to the 300 people that would enter with access bracelets. It was estimated the project would cost over 1 million 400 thousand Brazilian “reais” in design setting and infrastructure and over 1 million 800 thousand in production, coordination and organization according to bidding documents. (Diário Oficial do Município do Rio de Janeiro [Rio de Janeiro’s Official Gazette], January 12, 2018, p. 90)³.

² According to Saconi (2018, p. 10) the Bangalafumenga and Sargento Pimenta parades had their presences confirmed in the schedule from the beginning.

³ Retrieved from <http://doweb.rio.rj.gov.br>

THE BLOCÓDROMO – THE CONFLICT

It did not take long for the Blocódromo's idea to create a flood of criticism. Even before officially publishing the news in the County's Gazette, for instance, the information was widely broadcast and criticized by the media. In a *Folha de São Paulo* (Rangel, 2017, p. B7) article a heated debate took place between Riotur's president, Marcelo Alves, who stated: "the city has to be prepared during carnival to please not only revelers but also people who want to enjoy their time without going to street parades" and the Street Carnival Parade Association's president, Rita Fernandes, who countered: "we have been [on the streets] for 30 years and nothing has ever gone wrong. Riotur's president cannot change the rules without any debate". Still according to the article, the initiative debated with other proposals of redefining street carnival, considering an embargo on parades in the Leblon neighborhood outside of the streets closest to the beach.

Soon the representatives of other parade leagues⁴ such as the Amigos do Zé Pereira (which gather 8 affiliations from Rio's downtown and southern areas) also spoke out against the Arena project. These leagues that represent big parades such as Simpatia é Quase Amor and Orquestra Voadora feared that the proposal would end the spontaneity of the city's street carnival. Riotur, on the other hand, guaranteed that their intention was to offer an extra leisure and recreational option with more comfort, structured bathroom areas as well containers with food and beverages (Bacelar, 2017, p. 5).

In order to better understand matters related to the Rio Carnival Arena it is paramount to note that the idea of confining the parades in an isolated area was not new, rather an already established interest that was to define a fixed location for street carnival. The mentor/promoter of Bloco da Preta, one of the biggest street parades in Rio, singer Preta Gil stated that during her parade's rehearsal in 2015 she had already suggested the idea of a Blocódromo to the city's former Mayor, Eduardo Paes (Caruso, 2018, p. 2). Even before, in 2011, the *O Globo's* Opinion section had printed the same idea as a suggestion from the reader Sylvio Pélico. This very section created a one page long issuance reporting complaints regarding the right of residents to freely come and go as well as criticism regarding alcohol abuse, public urination and suggested changes regarding location and limitation on the number of parades (Filho, 2011, p. 8).

According to the National Library's database, the idea of a Blocódromo was first mentioned in 2006 in a rather different way from the proposal here presented. The term was used to describe exclusive routes for the parades and not a fixed location for them. The suggestion came from Ana Maria Maia who occupied the role of the County's Events Subsecretary and promised to discuss the matter with former Mayor César Maia (Marta, 2006, p. A14). Nevertheless not being possible to state with absolute certainty that this was the first idea regarding a Blocódromo – since another similar proposal could have emerged before with a different name – it is interesting to note that only 20 years after

⁴ The so called carnival parade leagues are groups of street carnival parades formed by associations with common interests and/or with geographical proximity to their affiliates, which come together in order to achieve greater influence and participation in the decisions related to carnival events.

the creation of Rio's Sambodrome the term Blocódromo is mentioned. On the other hand, according to Motta (2011, p. 13), the first decade of the 21st century is responsible for the street carnival parade's rebirth.

The search for the origin of the term Blocódromo allows us to state that the idea of a controlled space for carnival parades has not emerged overnight. For such, an interesting approach from authors such as Barros (2013, pp. 10-11) who associate this type of carnival manifestation marked by a multitude of different leagues and proposals with an image of liberty and freedom of the rules adopted by Rio's classic Samba Schools. Correspondingly, Leopoldi (2010, p. 27) points out that the number of parades performing during Rio's carnival "accelerated growth" is seen as the "rebirth of carnalization", serving as a countercurrent to the straggling away of the classic Samba Schools performance to the "original carnivalesque spirit of the bakhtinian parties".

Although objectionable, the idea of retaking street carnival relates to projects of street party assortment. According to Ferreira (2018, p. 51), the restoring of this feasting is backed by a decrease on references of the festivities from the media on the 20th century, hiding its spreading effects to the city's suburbs, incentivized by bandstand contests as well as confetti battles (Guimarães, 2011, p. 260). Again, in consonance with Ferreira (2012) the "death" and "rebirth" of carnival narrative exist since the beginning of the party because of a strong intent to regulate carnival. Pursuant to that idea, it is paramount to keep an eye on the disputes for the richest areas of the city as a determining factor for the development of projects such as the Blocódromo.

In her studies of the different ways to experience carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Queiroz (1999, p. 106) approached the established belief of Rio's South Zone as an "orderly area" and the North Zone as territory of "dangerous people". She highlights that the Samba School's spectacle discipline is the result of the interaction between these two social divides being it a proof of the hegemony of the higher layers of society over the lower ones (p. 107), a domestication of the urban mass (p. 71). Hence, the belief that the increased number and participation of street parades in the richer area of the city, which has always been related to safety and better organization, would create conflict and search for solutions.

It is worthy to realize that the dispute for public space is already part of Rio's carnival. During colonial times, for instance, the streets occupied by slaves and avoided by the elites already highlighted the divide between the types of popular and family Shrovetide games⁵. With the changes brought by the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family in Brazil in 1808, Rio's urban spaces started to be challenged by members of Portuguese nobility, Brazilian elite, freemen and slaves. They all began to use and signify public spaces in different manners, which led the bourgeoisie to occupy the downtown area with a new carnival in order to disqualify the old Shrovetide celebrations (Ferreira, 2012, pp. 55-56).

⁵ While the elite would play inside their houses with little wax balls filled with perfume or wine, the slave and freemen would play much more aggressive games on the street, in which lemons or oranges were used alongside all sorts of filthy projectiles and liquids (Ferreira, 2012, p. 55).

Again, in line with Ferreira (2004, p. 165), an article from the *Jornal do Commercio* from February 23, 1857, suggested that “a specific number of streets for pedestrians” should be determined since “the need to take some kind of action in order to ensure a minimum level of organization to the confusion that was Rio’s carnival became clearer each day for the party had attained unimaginable proportions”. All the attempts to coordinate the festivities reveals what the dominant classes understood as being the “true carnival”.

In this case, in addition to the “problematic” rise of street carnival in the South Zone where order “should” reign, other issues may also have influenced. In consonance with Amar (2018, p. 114), already in the late 1990s, there was a change in the way of perceiving Rio’s revelry, when a new coalition of parastatal interest groups withdrew tourism dollars from Carnival spectacles:

a new, revanchist, obsessed with respectability view of what would be “appropriate” tourism and national identity for Rio de Janeiro emerged and judged in an ashamed way the 20th century utopian populist and nationalist project for Lapa neighborhood and Carnival because of its focus on racial miscegenation and sensuality. The elites (...), embarrassed and in meaningful dialogue with evangelical-Pentecostal Christian groups began to see Brazil’s tropical and sensual image as fake, dirty and vulgar. They thought it perverted and prostituted the nation’s image in the global economy.

In this sense, carnival parades could fall into what Amar (2018, p. 97) calls “cultural enemies”:

certain portions of society have been stigmatized as cultural enemies of the nation undergoing a modernization process and as harmful consequences of globalized development. This agenda shed light on certain groups and individuals and held them responsible for urban insecurities associated with globalization.

Approaches such as these, dialogue with the changes triggered after the Municipal Decree number 30659 of May 7, 2009⁶, in which the City Hall of Rio de Janeiro implemented new rules and procedures for the municipality’s street carnival, restricting times and places for the parades. Although this is not the first such initiative – in the 1950s, for instance, on Carnival Saturdays, the newspaper *O Globo* illustrated what the city’s police allowed or not during holidays, which included guidelines on the parades. The new decree coincided with the time Rio started to become⁷ an international spotlight because of

⁶ Comprising 16 articles, the document stipulated beginning and ending times for bands and parades, upon request in the year prior to its realization. These authorizations would depend on the Rio de Janeiro Traffic Engineering Company (CET RIO) and on the Planning Area Coordination’s report as well as on the regularization of sponsors brand exposure. In addition, it was established that each parade would be responsible for collecting the copyright from the Central Collection Office – ECAD. Failure to comply with the rules would result in the rejection of the request for parades to participate the following year.

⁷ In addition to the works carried out (which improved areas such as downtown Rio, where street parades usually took

the events to come such as the 2014 Fifa World Cup⁸ and 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games⁹. Thus, the idea of a Blocódromo in Barra da Tijuca (newly built rich area) with electronic turnstiles controlling its access and a VIP area proved to be another step in this process.

Rita Fernandes, president of Sebastiana, stated at the time that Rio's carnival profile was different and did not believe that it should be confined to any kind of arena: "we understand that groups that perform in concerts are interested in going there. This type of initiative, however, could never replace street carnival. We are against transforming the Arena into the new carnival model". Following the same line of thought, Rodrigo Rezende, president of the Amigos do Zé Pereira league viewed the initiative with distrust: "we are very afraid City Hall intends to segregate carnival in some way" (Bacelar, 2017, p. 5).

This would not be the first time Barra da Tijuca neighborhood became a desired destination for carnival. In 1981, for instance, according to *Jornal do Brasil* (JB Bulletin, 1981, p. 6), João Roberto Kelly, former Riotur president, even proposed to move the Samba School's contest from Marquês de Sapucaí to the old Jacarepaguá Race Track where the Olympic Park is located today and where the Blocódromo would be ideally installed. Likewise, Anísio Abraão David, Beija-Flor's president of honor, never concealed his desire to take the Samba Schools to Barra (Prestes Filho, 2015, p. 20). It is noteworthy that these proposals sought to "unburden" Rio's downtown area, choosing a hitherto unoccupied neighborhood with wider and better-planned streets.

This time, regarding Barra da Tijuca as an option to host the Rio Carnival Arena, Riotur declared to seek a new attraction to the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro for the neighborhood provided better public transport alternatives with connections to the entire city and also offered extensive hospitality structure (away from most of the carnival events) in addition to the Parque dos Atletas which became an idle area during most part of the year after the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Diário Oficial do Município do Rio de Janeiro, January 12, 2018, p. 33¹⁰). This idea, as well as the one seeking to move the Sambodrome to Barra da Tijuca, ignored the cultural transformations entailed by this displacement.

In the case of Rio Carnival Arena, Rio's City Hall denied that its intention was to relocate the parades to the new space, but rather to create a second spectacle (Bacelar, 2017, p. 5). However, one must assume that the event would only be partly fulfilled since it would take place during Carnival. It suffices to deduce that many revelers who chose to attend the Blocódromo would no longer be present in other regions' parades, which would decrease their audience. In addition, bringing these revelers to Barra da Tijuca

place), the preparation for these major events also brought about changes in the public safety program, notably the implementation of the UPPs program (Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora [Unit of Pacifying Police]), started in 2008 that presented the idea of policing based on the "quality of life" as pointed out by Amar (2018).

⁸ The announcement of Brazil as World Cup host was made on October 30, 2007.

⁹ The announcement of Rio de Janeiro as host to the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games was made on October 2, 2009.

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://doweb.rio.rj.gov.br>

indicated a way to alter the party's geography. That is because the West Zone part, which houses the neighborhood, would be the area with the fewest official carnival parades in 2018 as reported by Riotur's own listing¹¹.

Furthermore, there are other issues involved in this change of venue, moving from everyday public space to an area prepared exclusively for an event. Schechner (2012, pp. 157-180), in his work about the streets as being a stage, points out that "allowing people to gather on the street is to constantly flirt with the possibility of improvisation since the unexpected can happen". Aware of this and fearing chaos, the authorities seek to tame the party by turning what was an inversion of social order into a mirror of itself (p. 159). In this way, street revelry occupancy of places that "reflect history" and "radiate power" is an affirmation of something the *statu quo* intends to avoid.

The current carnival parades as a kind of "contemporary string" bring new tensions and meanings to the street carnival where the disputes take place and characterize Rio's carnival, according to Ferreira (2018):

enjoying carnival does not mean to simply play music, wear costumes and to sing. It means to claim the public space for the revelry and to transform daily streets through which traffic passes into a festive avenue with the songs, costumes and other forms of symbolic transgressions we associate with carnival. For some time our revelers understood the value of this battle that has been filling the arteries of the city since colonial times with Shrovetides games as well as carnival societies, "cucumbis", "zé pereiras", "cordões", "ranchos", parades and Samba Schools. The current phenomenon of the new parades is only the latest chapter in this long carnival history. (Ferreira, 2018, p. 19)

Following the same line of thought, architect Sérgio Magalhães reveals the importance of public space vitality through its disputes:

where does the incredible parade phenomenon take place? In the street, in public spaces. A public square, as we all know, is a public area surrounded by buildings. However, if it only consisted of buildings and a free area, it would just be a big scale model. It is the way one uses it that qualifies it, that is, urban spaces embody not only the material but also a spiritual side that builds collective memory and identity. Citizens recognize themselves as partners by sharing images and memories. Collective identity underpins values and allows daily struggle to settle on mutually accepted grounds. It is a true social agreement promoted by the enjoyment of cultural goods, spaces and collective signs. (...) Urban space is life and stability, involving ourselves and the experience built in these spaces, which we add to previous generations in the construction of common identity and memory. (Magalhães, 2011, p. 7)

¹¹ In the 2018 official street parade list, released by Rio's City Hall, the West Zone would be home to 122 street parades, against 127 to be hosted in the downtown area, 147 from the South Zone and 200 from the North Zone.

In this sense, according to Ferreira, the Blocódromo's creation barely hides the attempt to empty the transgressive political power of resignifying public spaces, proposing a sanitized, organized and bounded territory, turning what was revelry into a now controlled and demarcated spectacle. In his words:

the parades need to mark their diversity on the street asphalt, one at the top of the other, just as imaginary graffiti that overlap in a collective work of art (...) The attempt to corner and control this momentum is doomed to false good intentions that only seem to please those who perceive carnival as a good opportunity to sleep in. Nevertheless, if the idea is to bound the parades into one specific place – an idea never indorsed by revelers – why not to turn the Blocódromo into a silent resting space built for those who wish to stay as far away as possible from carnival festivities and leave the streets to revelers? (Ferreira, 2018, p. 19)

It is, therefore, a dispute that consists of creating meaning to public spaces, of what it represents now and what it could represent in the future – a strife that sometimes seem to be stable but that fizzes back during carnival. As Storey (2015, p. 421) points out, this process reveals culture not as something “authentic” or imposed, but rather as a “balance of adjustments”, a contradictory mix of forces that come from all directions, both locally and globally and marked by “resistance” and “incorporation”. In this scenario, it is paramount to highlight the various players involved and to view them as subjects coming from diverse backgrounds, influenced by several sides, which allow us to look at these issues in a broader and less Manichean way. An example would be the parade's representatives who are well aware of the disorders the festivities can cause.

During a debate about changing the script for carnival parades proposed by *O Globo* (Fernandes, 2014, p. 12), Rita Fernandes, Sebastiana's president, does not deny that in recent years, parades with “no geographical ties to their surroundings” have emerged and that some have enlarged considerably. However, she notes that traditional parades with over 20 years of history cannot be punished on the “vain claim that the city cannot accommodate them anymore”. She also says:

how to take the parades Simpatia é Quase Amor and the Banda de Ipanema from the neighborhood they were born in and that still inspires them? How to picture Suvaco do Cristo performing outside of the Botanical Garden neighborhood? Banda do Leme without Leme neighborhood? How to separate Escravos da Mauá from Rio's Port Zone? These parades have a close, intrinsic and deep relationship with their performing spaces. Their scripts have a reason to exist; they were not created out of nowhere. There is information everyone should know about since we are talking about the history of the areas we live in.

Speeches such as this one point out to the problem of viewing carnival parades as a homogeneous category, since, when confronted with tensions such as the clash with the public authorities, they end up showing the rivalries between parade's associations. Should the parade's place of birth or its longevity be the determining factor to authorize them to perform in the streets, as Rita Fernandes points out? To some groups as the Cordão do Boi Tolo the answer is no. According to one of its founders, Luís Almeida¹², parades have the right to be on the street under Brazilian Constitution, which clearly states: "it is permitted for groups to meet peacefully, without weapons, in places open to the public, regardless of authorization". Likewise, while Boi Tolo prefers not to monetize their performances in private places, other groups such as Minha Luz é de Led, composed of professional musicians, monetize through parties promoted throughout the year in order to strengthen its brand, according to founder Arthur Ferreira¹³.

The various formats and carnival parade proposals are also reflected in the different postures adopted by leagues in the face of issues such as performance merchandising, sponsorship and the Blocódromo itself. Thus, one realizes that this does not consist of a binary clash: parades on one side and Rio Carnival Arena on the other. Beyond what has already been discussed here, it is important to understand that the Blocódromo idea is not just about how Rio's City Hall views the party, but also about how parades perceive their activities and capacity of resilience and incorporation.

In this scenario Storey (2015, p. 178), citing Stuart Hall, classifies culture as a terrain of ideological struggles whose results occur through articulation. The contrast between millionaire figures that would be invested in the Rio Carnival Arena and the lack of financial support for street parades are also noteworthy, as pointed out by Sebastiana and Amigos do Zé Pereira leagues' representatives. While, according to City Hall, the project's resources would come from private sponsors, government-bidding documents reported that the money would come from City Hall's own depleted treasury, in consonance with *O Globo* (Boere & Magalhães, 2018, p. 10).

Towards this scenario, in order to identify Rio's City Hall's intentions regarding the Blocódromo, one is faced with another government decision regarding carnival: the subsidy reduction for Samba Schools¹⁴ announced months prior to their performance, in July 2017. Even though Rio Carnival Arena ended up not costing anything to public treasury, the idea of this event revealed the municipality's preference for street parades over Samba Schools' performance since the traditional carnival float's rehearsals did not take place that year nor was there any project from the City Hall to organize them. This apparent preference for street parades is even more curious, given the articulation that

¹² In an interview with this paper's author, by email, on December 19, 2018.

¹³ In an interview with this paper's author, by email, on December 18, 2018.

¹⁴ The *O Globo* journal (Marinatto, 2018, p. 9) pointed out that the nearly 3.3 million to be invested in the Rio Carnival Arena exceeded the amount destined to the city's kindergarten units. The article's intention to compare was to use the same argument Mayor Marcelo Crivella used when he decreased subsidy destined to Samba Schools in July 2017, claiming the need to redirect these amounts to day-care centers.

took place during the city's political campaign in 2016. Seen as important social mobilizers, most Samba Schools chose to declare their support for the candidate Marcelo Crivella, who ended up being the governor elect, while street parade members chose the opposition candidate, Marcelo Freixo, who ended up second on the election race (Alfano, Nunes & Lins, 2016, p. 15).

Marcelo Crivella, target of street parade's criticism, was decorated in the *Simpatia é Quase Amor* samba lyrics¹⁵, in 2018. Although not directly mentioned, the lines suggested through its verses and references of actions taken by the mayor (who is also bishop of a Brazilian Evangelical Church): "Samba School rehearsals? He cancels / Samba performances? He destroys / African based cults? He does not tolerate / He only likes Nutella¹⁶ parades / He does not care nor helps / Jongo's house? He forbids / In the name of God? He pleads / What is his name?" Following the same premise, Fernandes and Barroso (2018, p. 116) saw the parade's proposal as one of the attempts from the municipal authorities to "discourage consolidated cultural street activities".

According to Fernandes and Barroso (2018, pp. 115-116) one of these still to be implemented projects was that of Cultural Districts, which anticipated the separation of specific locations for street cultural activities, where free public events could take place without the need for an authorization from City Hall. In consonance to Nilcemar Nogueira, former Secretary of Culture, examples of sites comprised in the idea would be: Álvaro Alvim Street – where Rivalzinho, an opened music bar recently banned by City Hall is located (Guimarães, 2017, p. 2), Pedra do Sal – samba's place of birth where its performances are often object of retaliation by public agents¹⁷, Ponto Chic at Padre Miguel neighborhood in the West Zone, Tiradentes Square – home to Pede Teresa samba performance which was vetoed by the Military Police (Gois, 2017, p. 10), and Aterro do Flamengo – where the Tambores de Olokun parade was stopped by a South Zone agent (Boere, 2017, p. 16):

there is, in fact, no intention to foster such activities, but rather an attempt to control and monitor. In addition, other areas of effervescent street culture were not considered. The North Zone region that answers to 42% of Rio de Janeiro's population (...) was not considered in the Cultural Districts project. (...) Government agents predetermine viable public sectors in order to better control cultural activities through the justification that they have the street carnival festivities' interest at heart. One makes it possible for other activities to be legitimately suppressed by restricting street cultural production to selected locations. Thus, the undisguised retaliation

¹⁵ The composition from *Manu da Cuíca*, Luiz Carlos Máximo, Belle Lopes and Bil-Rait Buchecha is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1JoGPiEahE>

¹⁶ The word "Nutella" is a slang in Brazilian Portuguese commonly used to define an "excess" of refinement added to an activity or object.

¹⁷ The newspaper article from *Extra* entitled "Pedra do Sal cancels samba performances and blames Rio's municipal guard who denies intervention". Retrieved from <https://glo.bo/2PljxnC>

from public agents such as Military Police and City Hall's Guard give way to political decisions that weaken carnival's geographical reach. (Fernandes & Barroso, 2018, pp. 116-117)

In this context, Rio Carnival Arena as a City Hall project (and not one coming from the parades themselves) can be understood as a form of market appropriation since the authorities did not stand by their own proposal to alter the festivities location (Rangel, 2017, p. B7). This hypothesis makes even more sense as of Riotur's announcement that the participating parades would not be paid for their performances¹⁸ (Boere, 2017, p. 5). For Cássio Novo, space management and structuring specialist, projects such as Rio Carnival Arena reveal hidden interests of groups eager to profit from the privatization of public spaces. In his words:

[the interest of these groups] highlights the strategies of ownership of culturally built ways of celebration, turning them (even more so) into merchandise, throwing at the city yet another rational enterprise and monetizing on culture and the population's daily life. (Novo, 2018, p. 8)

In this regard, it is interesting to view the Rio Carnival Arena as a paradox in which the festivities that propose an inversion of social order are being articulated in order to benefit economic interests of those who seek to maintain public power. Similarly, according to Rita Fernandes (Frydberg, 2014, p. 10), newly created commercially targeted parades are a current tendency, "it consists of taking what is trendy, the type of music that sells the most, where one can fit the most people, where one can get better sponsorships and more money".

It is paramount to note that it would be frivolous to limit the process of carnival commercialization to sponsors, public agencies and new parades. Starting from Rio de Janeiro's successful street carnival in the beginning of the 21st century, many of the traditional parades were invited to perform at private events, as pointed out by Herschmann (2013). These approaches – including parties created by parades themselves¹⁹ – reveal how the divide between carnival parades and partying has been narrowing. Thus, it is relevant to question beliefs viewing commercially targeted parades on one side and "culturally aware" parades on the other, since these definitions are mutable and only characterize the views of the groups that perform the critique.

¹⁸ Afterwards, according to *O Globo* Journal, the Project started to provide artistic allowances (*O Globo*, January 10, 2018, page 10)

¹⁹ The idea of introducing eclectic party-like street parades at night to the city's revelry such as "Minha Luz é de Led", assembled by Biltre Band, is introduced at <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/carnaval/2018/noticia/musa-do-minha-luz-e-de-led-diz-que-bloco-representa-nova-tendencia-do-carnaval-do-rio.ghtml>

On the one hand, in line with Rita Fernandes' criticisms, some parties have created their own street parades, such as Treta Bloco²⁰, Candybloco²¹ and Bloco da Mug²², generating new debates over the term "parade" since the events aforementioned are closed, paid and employ DJs rather than bands or orchestras. On the other hand, according to *O Globo*, at the same year of the Blocódromo project there was an event at the France-Brazil House called CasaBloco which promoted carnival dances, including the Sebastiana Dance – league presided by Rita Fernandes herself – with concerts from the Quizomba and Suvaco do Cristo parades (Sem sair do quadrado, 2018, p. 7).

In this regard, one can suggest that the condemnation of the party's commodification has more to do about who created the initiative than about the proposal itself. Therefore, it proves to be essential to analyze the criticism towards parades not only within the project's structural characteristics but also to take into consideration its creators. Thus, the lack of dialogue with those responsible to make the party happen – street parades – turns out to be a decisive factor to the failure of the proposal.

THE BLOCÓDROMO – THE NEGOTIATION

Surrounded by criticism, the dismissal of the Rio Carnival Arena project would be announced almost a month after its first press release. According to the official version, after talking with sponsors and the Brazilian Hotel Industry Association (ABIH), and pursuant to *O Globo*, the proposal would be reformulated and its implementation postponed to July, turning the occasion into an off season event in order to allure more tourists (Prefeitura fará do Blocódromo uma festa julina, 2018, p. 10). In consonance with Helaide Teixeira, president of Banda da Barra, the league of parades from Barra da Tijuca neighborhood (SamBare) would promote off season events in the Rio Carnival Arena allegedly approved by Riotur (Callegari, 2018, p. 12). The project gained undeniable marketing character, therefore, aiming to stimulate tourism.

Months later, instead of coming to life in Barra da Tijuca, the Blocódromo would be once more mentioned in the newspapers. The newly reformulated project was again deliberating on carnival parades. A little more cautious about the geography of the festivities, 11 mega street parades with over 200 thousand revelers each would be granted a sole parade location this time, Primeiro de Março Street, downtown of Rio. The structure would not have turnstiles or stands nor would it use grids or concrete bars along the 3 kilometers area between Candelária Church and Presidente Antônio Carlos Avenue. Revelers would be thoroughly checked and searched and there would be no entry with bladed

²⁰ Created in 2014, "Treta" party premiered its Treta Bloco in 2018, announcing that even though it was not mentioned on the City Hall's Official List, it would "officially" be a participant in the Rio Carnival Street Parade program, as seen at www.facebook.com/events/1973097796288365/

²¹ Presented as Sapucaí's "one and only" gay box, candybox created its own street parade in 2017 (Guimarães, November 10, 2017, page 2).

²² The Brazilian music party called "MUG" started holding balls entitled "MUG's party street parade), as seen in *O Globo* (Bailes e ensaios, 2018, page 16).

weapons or glass bottles allowed. The expectation was to receive a public of one million and host one megaparade per day (Caruso, 2018, p. 2).

It is noteworthy that, this time, the new Blocódromo arises as a result of extensive debate which considered Praia de Botafogo area (dismissed because of the need to block traffic in expressways) and Presidente Vargas Avenue in the downtown area (also dismissed because of the carnival floats in Marquês de Sapucaí). Unlike the former proposal, the debate regarding the new project lasted three months and was attended by parade representatives (Prefeitura fará ‘blocódromo’ no Centro para tirar desfiles da orla, 2018, p. 7).

Nevertheless, days later, the proposal would go through a setback. The city’s heritage organisms (Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage – IPHAN and Rio Institute of World Heritage – IRPH) as well as the State Institute of Cultural Heritage (Inepac) showed concern about the one million people estimated flow and its impact on buildings and risk of vandalism in parade route comprising at least nine protected cultural assets. Among them one can mention the Nossa Senhora do Carmo Church (former metropolitan cathedral), the Imperial Palace, Bank of Brazil’s Cultural Center (CCBB) and the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Oliveira, 2018, p. 6).

“They are not street parades with ground drums. They are carnival floats”, pointed out Monica da Costa, Iphan’s superintendent. As a solution, the heritage bodies proposed Presidente Antônio Carlos Avenue as a viable site since it has wider roads (Caruso, 2018, p. 6). During the dispute, Inepac director Marcus Monteiro threatened to sue Federal and State Prosecutors (Oliveira, 2018, p. 6).

In the end, once again, the Blocódromo did not come to life. Iphan settled an agreement with Rio’s City Hall that consisted of putting up 2.2 meters aluminum grids around historic buildings and to restrict some megaparades to Antonio Carlos Avenue. Primeiro de Março Street worked only as a support area with Fire Department ambulance parking (Couto, 2019, p. 10). What is interesting about this decision is that the oldest carnival parade in activity, the Cordão da Bola Preta has been parading in Primeiro de Março Street for years and in 2018 reached a public of approximately one and a half million of revelers (Cardoso, 2018, p. 10). Thus, the new setback suffered by the Blocódromo shows how decisions related to Rio’s carnival can expose new players’ involvement as well as the complexity of these relationships.

Although the Blocódromo may look like a failure it is relevant to note that the process did not end there. Apart from the possibility of a similar new proposal, which cannot be ruled out, since the conflicts that motivated the project are still ongoing, it is important to realize how this idea could have influenced other events. In 2019, for instance, open rehearsals for the Agytoê parade were held at Passeio Ernesto Nazareth²³, an open-air area in the port region and required ticket withdrawal via internet in order to better regulate the area’s occupancy. A long access control and search line was formed at the

²³ Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/events/310429579579678/>

entrance²⁴. Although the proposal was more democratic than the previous year's open rehearsal²⁵, which was held indoors with admission charges, would this not be an example of an adapted Rio Carnival Arena?

This account serves, once again, as a reminder of the negotiation capacity of players involved in cultural processes. It seems ironic, but it is possible to note that a project such as Rio Carnival Arena, accused of appropriating carnival demonstrations, could serve as inspiration for parades themselves. Through these alleged contradictions, Storey (2015) argues that objective here is not to attempt to measure and evaluate the coherence of one activity, but rather to break with the idea that it should contain a harmonious unity. The author prefers to suggest the explanation of these disparities through a conflict of meaning. That is, instead of just highlighting these inconsistencies, one could seek its motivations and influences.

In this respect, as noted throughout this article, similarities among projects that bring together street parades' performances outside public space helps one evaluate speeches related to them as well as to analyze factors such as: performance location and its relation to the festivities, the authorship of the initiative, their influence on not ending street revelry, etc.

Carnival parades, being a diverse set of carnival leagues, whether interested on capitalizing or not, are well aware of their value to the city. Whether through proposals such as Rio Carnival Arena or through the misuse of their brands²⁶, but mainly through the sponsorship obtained by the City Hall to enable parade performance, carnival parades have realized that the festivities' related speeches are often mistaken. Considering that parades are bolstered by constitutional right to freely come, go and assemble in public spaces it is not Rio's City Hall that raise sponsorships but rather the parades themselves who arouse the sponsors' interest, forcing the authorities to negotiate and profit from carnival related entities. Therefore, for projects like the Blocódromo to succeed it is paramount to include all interested players on the debate.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The succession of tensions and clashes in this article help demonstrate that the idea of a Blocódromo emerges as another stage of the "ordering" of carnival in which one can also mention the implementation of the 2009 municipal decree, which was implemented to define new norms for street carnival that prevails to this day. Therefore, it is not an isolated fact, but a way for a certain portion of society to reaffirm their way

²⁴ Details noted by this paper's author when attending the event on January 20, 2019.

²⁵ Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/events/216636892228205/>

²⁶ On March 5, 2019, the Cordão do Boitatá parade published a statement on its Facebook page regarding the improper use of its brand by the Antarctica brewery. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/cordaoboitata/posts/2546402015430299?hc_location=ufi. The "Salve Guanabara" party promoted the vent using images from the Boi Tolo street parade. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/SalveGuanabara/videos/2352826818074465/>

of creating meaning to public spaces. Through the Rio Carnival Arena, one can note the criticism from residents bothered by street revelry, the ordering view of the City Hall and the street parades' market potential. By observing the countless attempts to create a Blocódromo, even the ones that did not come to life, one can also see how these initiatives articulate tensions involving various players. Similarly, the reformulations of the project, as well as the use of part of its concepts – even by parades themselves – show how this relationship is dialogical, non-binary and open to exchanges.

Analyzing the different ways of signifying public space from colonial times at the same time as to observe the influences of facts such as the transformations that took place in the city of Rio de Janeiro, both to welcome the royal family's arrival in 1808, such as the 2014 Fifa World Cup and the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games, helps one understand the motivations behind social changes by regarding the way in which people relate to and experience the city's spaces (Barroso & Gonçalves, 2016).

Through these space and meaning disputes, even in seemingly ill-fated projects, Rio's revelry develops, reconfigures and resignifies itself, in a process that catalyzes interests as diverse as those of groups that have to be known as street carnival parades. A movement that is justified through its own vitality.

Translation: Marco Antônio Junqueira Bersani

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Submitted: 14.05.2019

Accepted: 07.10.2019