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Transformation of Public Spaces into Emancipated Spaces by Consumers: a Longitudinal Study on the Belo Horizonte Street Carnival

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to understand how public spaces are transformed into emancipated spaces by consumers. To do so, we used the context of the Belo Horizonte street carnival, a collective moment that occupies the city's public spaces, in order to question the uses commonly associated with them. A longitudinal investigation was conducted using newspaper articles, the internet, public documents, interviews, and participant observation. As a result, the research presents a theorization on the process of transformation of public spaces into emancipated spaces. In each phase of the process, the contestations regarding the forms of use and consumption of the public space among the social movements of consumers, market players, and the public authority give rise to disputes and tensions that configure the new emancipated space.

Keywords: social movements, public space, street carnival.

Introduction

Initially, the field work researching consumer culture (Casotti & Suarez, 2016) portrayed spaces as a places of consumption relationships, as the theoretical focus was primarily on producers and consumers, perceived there as main agents of change (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Giesler, 2008; Martin & Schouten, 2014; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). However, recent studies have disseminated the understanding that spaces act as central agents in market building (Castilhos, Dolbec, & Veresiu, 2017). At the same time as they can be places where consumption practices occur, as well as being the products themselves, spaces are also places of contestation, negotiation (Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, & Anderson, 2010), and subversion (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012).

The public space should primarily be accessible to all individuals in society, independently of their social origin, sexual orientation, race, or culture (Castilhos & Dolbec, 2017), thus being a heterogeneous and diverse space. However, the market logic of privatization, competition, commercialization, individualization, and inclusion/exclusion crystalizes in the dynamic of the subjugation of consumers in the use of spaces, establishing tensions and disputes in society for defining the way public spaces should be consumed. However, as a form of social criticism and temporary liberation of the social order, consumers voluntarily and inclusively use public spaces as a place of subversion of the order and for challenging hegemonic forces, transforming them into emancipated spaces (Bradford & Sherry, 2015; Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012).

Field studies researching consumption explain the characteristics, possibilities, and limits of the use of public and emancipated spaces, but we do not yet understand the contestations and negotiations that emerge among public actors, the market, and society in the transformation of public spaces into emancipated spaces by consumers. Thus, our research seeks to understand the following: how do consumers transform public spaces into emancipated spaces? What tensions and disputes are involved in the conquest of the emancipated space by consumers? To answer these questions, a qualitative longitudinal study was conducted from 2005 to 2018 on the street carnival, a social practice that has grown considerably in recent years in various cities in the country, such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Recife, and Salvador, as a form of appropriation of the streets and public squares by revelers in response to the growing commercialization of the carnival party (Machado, 2020). Among the cities, we chose Belo Horizonte as the locus of research with the aim of theoretically advancing the understanding of the transformations of public spaces into emancipated ones in light of new usage and consumption practices.

Our research explains the process of transformation of public spaces into emancipated spaces as being constituted of four phases: (1) emancipatory occupation of the public space, (2) public authority intervention, (3) conquest of the emancipated space, and (4) attempts to commercialize the emancipated space. This process is characterized by various disputes and negotiations concerning the use and form of consumption of the public space that is transformed. Government and market forces try to appropriate the space, envisaging its transformation, but, on the other hand, mobilized consumers develop actions to address the threats and mobilize the greatest number of people to participate in the movement.

First, we present the concept of public space and its characteristics and we explain social and consumer movements as agents of change and transformation of society and spaces. The context

of the Belo Horizonte street carnival is explained by focusing on its emergence and the dispute with the public authorities to hold it in the city's streets. Next, we present the research methods adopted and the data collection. In the results, we explain the disputes, tensions, and interests involved in the process of occupation and transformation the public space of Belo Horizonte into an emancipated space by the social movements belonging to the carnival party in the city. In the concluding remarks, we present the contributions of the paper, its implications, and the proposals for future research.

Public spaces and emancipated spaces

The public space is a good that is found everywhere, which means that its consumption is inevitable (Visconti et al., 2010). A good becomes public from the moment a collectivity of citizens understands there is shared ownership over it. As Visconti et al. state, all environments where social interactions, a sense of belonging, collective memories, and shared identities occur can be considered "urban places."

According to Castilhos and Dolbec (2017), the public space, such as streets, squares, parks, beaches, and neighborhoods, is managed by an authority in the name of all of society. Therefore, the public space would be an environment accessible to all individuals belonging to society, independently of social origin, gender, sexual orientation, race, or culture. This heterogeneity present in public spaces favors the authors' understanding that this type of space is strongly involved in contestation and negotiation dynamics, since the existence of multiple agents belonging to distinct social groups in the same environment, for example public spaces, ultimately means that they constantly negotiate and contest the use and consumption of that space according to their own understandings and interests.

In the study of Visconti et al. (2010), the authors chose to address the context of the street arts that compose the public spaces of urban cities. Based on the views and practices of artists and residents in relation to the artistic manifestations, they pointed to two dominant ideologies in the conception of the public space – individualist versus collectivist – and they observed that, whenever one of the parties assumes an individualistic position on the public good, there is the occurrence of conflict. In the study of Chatzidakis, Maclaran, and Bradshaw (2012), the context chosen to discuss consumption experiences was that of Exárchia, a neighborhood in Athens. The authors identified that it can be addressed as a heterotypical space of resistance, which directly influences the consumption behavior of the individuals who frequent it, indicated not as "consumers," but as political activists and/or residents.

In turn, according to Castilhos and Dolbec (2017), emancipated spaces emerge as spaces of subversion of movements of non-hegemonic communities aimed at challenging sovereign norms and customs. Emancipated spaces generally have a temporary existence and vary a lot in their physical manifestation. The temporary creation of emancipated spaces, such as carnivals and organized protests, enables the hierarchy of the spatial domain to be destabilized, as they cannot be organized with diligence, since they are events that have a large number of people, are uncontrollable and unpredictable, and, as such, they question the façade of normality.

Weinberger and Wallendorf (2011) examine the context of the Mardi Gras carnival, a community celebration that occurs in New Orleans. Although the main objective of the research

was to observe the structural components of the act of attending among the individuals of the New Orleans community in the Mardi Gras period, it is also possible to observe in it the temporary character and community spirit involved in emancipated spaces. Kozinets (2002), in turn, presented the context of Burning Man, a festival that occurs in the Nevada desert, in the United States. Also of a temporary nature – the festival last six days – and with a community spirit, Burning Man resembles the description of Castilhos and Dolbec (2017) even more due to its subversive temperament in relation to market logics, which are increasingly present in modern societies, seeking, at least in that period, to practice alternative modes of exchange.

Social movements

Social movements are intentional collective efforts made by activists to transform the social order (Meyer, 2007). In consumption studies, the concept of social movements offers support for understanding consumer movements, a type of social movement that calls for the transformation of certain consumption and market practices. According to Kozinets and Handelman (2004), as consumption has come to perform a central role in contemporary society, consumer movements have emerged to challenge and transform its aspects through the propagation of consumer ideologies that radicalize conventional opinions.

Schneiberg and Lounsbury (2008) developed an investigation about the main contributions of the existing institutional studies that have considered the effects of social movements on organizational fields. Based on it, they affirm that the movements represent agents and infrastructures of changes in two perspectives: a first, in which the movements were portrayed as forces against institutions, that is, as forces that operate outside the established channels for affirming new views and directly disrupting or contesting the existing arrangements, evoking crises of legitimacy, of meaning, and of other institutional processes within the fields; and a second, in which the actions of the movements within the fields were addressed, considering them as institutional forces.

Regarding the analysis of the movements as forces outside institutions, it is interesting to highlight that, for Schneiberg and Lounsbury (2008), challenging movements provoke crises of legitimacy and of institutional politics because they stimulate the emergence of multiple logics and evoke controversies by highlighting problems that exist there. Also according to them, as agents of exogenous changes, challenging movements, through the mobilization of actors in the field, can pressure the public authorities and other centers of power toward new agencies, laws, and policies that prohibit or impose practices, creating opportunities for the execution of movements.

Movements can derive from the institutional field itself, acting as institutional forces or infrastructures for institutional processes. Schneiberg and Lounsbury (2008) comment that movements can emerge and operate within the established channels and power structures, based on existing institutions and accepted understandings for theorizing, connecting, and combining new projects or practices with prevailing models and arrangements. According to the authors, the movements ultimately become vehicles or channels for institutional processes or the institutional forces themselves. Within this perspective, the conceptions of changes as interruption, conflict, and settlement were contemplated with conceptions of movements that transform, reconfigure, recombine, and overlay the existing practices.

The Belo Horizonte street carnival

The Belo Horizonte carnival setting has undergone major transformations since 2009. For some time, some of Belo Horizonte's citizens had been questioning the way the city's public spaces were managed and how the cultural manifestations that occurred in these environments were treated (Andrés, 2015; Pereira Filho, 2006). Influenced by the re-emergence of the street carnival in the city of Rio de Janeiro and seeking "a rich and plural [carnival] festivity," these reluctant citizens went out onto the streets of the Minas state capital in the 2009 carnival organized in three amateur *blocos* (or carnival groups), something that was new in the city in recent times (Andrés, 2015). However, after municipal decree n. 13,798, of December 9th of 2009, which enacted the prohibition of any type of event in the public space in the region of Estação Square, there was a displacement of the carnival festivities precisely to that location. This occurred due to the *Praia da Estação* (or "Estação Beach") mobilization, a collective that proposed new uses of the public space in the state capital (Cunha & Silva, 2016; Migliano, 2016).

Praia da Estação, as the name itself suggests, ironically summoned the population of the state capital to occupy Estação Square in beachwear and accessories so they could "bathe" in the fountains there (Cunha & Silva, 2016; Migliano, 2016). Although not initially a movement linked to the 2009 street carnival movement, the *Praia da Estação* mobilization, started in December of the same year, gained adhesion and strength from the *carnavalescos* (or carnival members) due to the proximity of the 2010 carnival festivities. Moreover, the sharing of ideologies and the discourse of free use and occupation of public spaces between the movements led to them mixing: the *Praia da Estação* movement ended up transforming into a carnival *bloco*, the *Bloco da Praia da Estação*, which had its first procession in the 2011 carnival, on carnival Saturday. As a result, both movements grew, were strengthened, and drove new political and identity movements that also came to raise the flag of occupation of public spaces in the city (Migliano, 2016).

Since then, the city of Belo Horizonte has seen – and continues to see – a growing carnival experience that, as Andrés (2015) puts it, is "at the same time festive, activist, and errant" (p. 2). The adjective "activist" given by the author aims to highlight the political character of the Belo Horizonte party, organized under the discourse of appropriation of public spaces. According to Andrés, over the years, the city has systematically undermined the occupation of its public spaces, but the BH street carnival movement has resumed the occupation and appropriation of these spaces by the city's residents themselves, being a movement of unimagined urban expeditions to the city's public spaces. When historically investigating the Belo Horizonte street carnivals, Pereira Filho (2006) states that the similarity between the contemporary and old events lies in the confrontational character of the occupations of the city's public spaces to hold the events. There are many and various resistances faced by *carnavalescos* to be able to use the streets of cities during carnival festivities.

The research method and data collection

To understand how consumers transform public spaces into emancipated spaces, we conducted a longitudinal investigation (Giesler & Thompson, 2016) from 2005 to 2018 on the Belo Horizonte street carnival, seeking to identify the practices, tensions, and disputes involved in the occupation of the public space and in the conquest of the emancipated space by consumers. At the

end of 2016, we started our observation of the social media of the main street *blocos* in the state capital. We collected photos, videos, publications, and messages exchanged with the social media users. In 2017, we intensified our engagement with the context. The first author conducted initial interviews with professionals involved with the Belo Horizonte street carnival, she attended events that aimed to discuss that new movement in the city, and she observed *bloco* rehearsals and processions occurring in the 2017 carnival.

After this initial investigation, which was needed to build a knowledge base on the recent carnival festivity in Belo Horizonte, we collected and analyzed the articles published between 2005 and 2018 in two mass-circulation newspapers in the city, *Estado de Minas* and *O Tempo*; public documents available on the internet, such as decrees issued by the municipal executive, minutes of public hearings held by the Municipal Chamber of Belo Horizonte, technical notes issued by the public authorities, and legal orders. We also collected audio recordings of the carnival tunes presented in the city competition, *Mestre Jonas*, as a source for understanding the city's popular street expression. This search resulted in the following data volume related with the Belo Horizonte street carnival: 1,379 newspaper articles, four public documents, and 77 carnival tunes.

The first author accompanied the online interactions of the participants in *Praia da Estação* and the New Belo Horizonte Street Carnival. *Praia da Estação* uses two main blogs to divulge and communicate with interested parties: *Vá de Branco* and *Movimento Praça Livre BH*. We chose 119 publications posted in these spaces, including texts, photos, and comments from the users. The New Belo Horizonte Street Carnival, in turn, uses its Facebook profile to communicate with the party public, *Carnaval de rua BH*. Thirty-four publications that were relevant for the research were chosen and transposed to a text file, resulting in a 200-page document, also composed of texts, photos, and debates among the users.

After roughly a year of immersion in the field, the first author started the participant observation in the context. She attended the rehearsals of various *blocos* occurring at Estação Square and its surroundings in the months of November and December of 2017 and, especially, in the month of January of 2018, when the rehearsals were more intense. Throughout that period, the first author also conducted interviews with twelve informants. Four groups of individuals were chosen for the interviews: (1) people directly related to the new street carnival movement, called *carnavalescos*; (2) people who carry out the activity of street vendor in the period of the festivities; (3) local traders; and (4) residents from around Estação Square. The informants were men and women, aged between 26 and 58, with different types of educational and professional backgrounds (Table 1). All the interviews were recorded and textually transcribed. The names of the informants are fictitious, thus preserving their identities.

Table 1

List of informants

Name	Gender	Age	Training	Type of actor
João	Male	26	Architect and urbanist	<i>Carnavalesco</i>
Armando	Male	37	Journalist	<i>Carnavalesco</i>
Felipe	Male	44	Communicologist	<i>Carnavalesco</i>
Raul	Male	34	Anthropologist	<i>Carnavalesco</i>
Débora	Female	33	Environmental engineer	<i>Carnavalesco</i>
Ronaldo	Male	37	Architect and urbanist	<i>Carnavalesco</i>
Elena	Female	34	Communicologist /Architect	<i>Carnavalesco</i>
Elber	Male	54	Elementary school	Street vendor
Ângelo	Male	58	Mine engineer	Local trader
Bernard	Male	57	(Not reported)	Local trader
Amanda	Female	37	Administrator	Resident
Rivaldo	Male	54	Computer scientist	Resident

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The second author participated in the elaboration and structuring of the data collection process. The data collected were read in detail by the authors in order to highlight passages related with the research problem being worked on. The analysis and interpretation of the data followed a hermeneutic approach (Thompson, 1997). Next, the parties chosen were codified (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and related to the actions of the main actors involved with the Belo Horizonte street carnival: *carnavalescos*, street vendors, local traders, residents from around Estação Square, and the public authorities. The specific practices of the informants throughout the years were identified and listed, seeking to understand the relationships between the actions and reactions of the various market actors over the years in response to the rise in occupation of the streets by the social *carnavalesco* movements in the city.

Results

The years that followed the revival of the Minas state capital street carnival – from 2009 to the present date – were divided into four distinct periods: (1) emancipatory occupation of the public space, in 2009, characterized by the experience of the organization of carnival *blocos* by a small group of Belo Horizonte’s citizens; (2) public authority intervention, from 2010 to 2012, beginning after the issuance of Decree n. 13,798, which prohibited holding any type of event at Estação Square, primarily characterized by the frequent occurrence of clashes between the public authorities and the *carnavalesco* citizens; (3) conquest of the emancipated space, from 2013 to 2014, determined by the increase in the number of social movements – for example, *Tarifa Zero* (or “Zero Fare”), which questions public transport policies in the city – and identified as a period of expansion and strengthening of the *carnavalesco* movement; and, finally, (4) attempts at commercialization of the emancipated space, from 2015 to 2018, whose beginning was marked by the strategy of a large

brewery to use, in its own campaigns, graphic materials produced by the *blocos*, and taken as attempts at commercializing the street party by large companies (with approval by the public authorities). Each period is explained in the topics below.

Emancipatory occupation of the public space (2009)

The city of Belo Horizonte was developed under the idea of public spaces as places of transit for people, vehicles, goods, and services, ensuring few spaces meant for the citizens' entertainment and leisure. This conception, which prevailed in the municipal public administrations since the beginnings of the state capital, triggered a generalized belief among the residents that the city's public spaces should not be used for leisure, but rather only as circulation and access routes to fulfill the citizens' social role of worker and student (Pereira Filho, 2006). Moreover, throughout the whole of the 20th century, private interests predominated over the public interests: the collective train was over time substituted by individual cars, the public squares were covered by fast road traffic lanes, and the public railway station was transformed into a private restricted-access museum (Rivero, 2015).

This scenario was expressed in the city's *carnavalesco* manifestations, as reported by Armando, a current member of some of Belo Horizonte's carnival *blocos*:

I always suffered a lot because there was no BH carnival. Since I was very young I went to the interior and had... I always felt a huge void at the idea of having to be somewhere else to have fun and not staying in the city. (Armando, 2017)

However, this "ghost town" context in the carnival period started to change in 2009 when a group of friends residing in the state capital decided to take to the streets with small carnival *blocos*. The movement occurred because some Belo Horizonte residents, unhappy with the fact that there were no spaces in the city for entertainment and for collectively practicing leisure activities, began to question the city's cultural and spatial configuration. Ronaldo was one of those people:

We... coming from the interior, whoever spent their childhoods in the interior... I had a childhood where we spent time in the streets, we played in the streets, we walked, we hung out in the public space. And when I came to live in Belo Horizonte, aged 15, one of the things that really shocked me... you feel a lack of public space, you know? I traveled from home, the apartment, to college... I came back to the apartment, and, very rarely, the use of a square, in a more collective way. (Ronaldo, 2018)

As one of the main organizers of one of those *blocos*, Ronaldo explains the experience lived that year:

I remember us in the middle of the bloco amazed to be walking in the middle of the street, forty people, thinking it was incredible and being able to reinvent, walk through the city,

get lost... We had no idea that bloco was going to happen, you know? I thought I'd arrive at the place and there'd be no bloco, there'd be nobody. We had butterflies in our stomachs at the idea of calling the thing and arriving there and there being four people. (Ronaldo, 2018)

The year 2009 was marked by the occupation of the public spaces through the revival of the city's street carnival. If on one hand there were positions in favor of the appropriation of the public spaces by the citizens, the public authorities assumed the opposite stance. At the end of that year, the Belo Horizonte city hall, represented by the mayor at the time, Marcio Araujo de Lacerda, issued Decree n. 13,798, of December 9th of 2009, which explicitly prohibited holding any type of event at one of the most symbolic points in the state capital, the recently-revitalized Estação Square. This act of the municipal executive power marked the beginning of a new phase in the Belo Horizonte street carnival.

Public Authority intervention in the occupation of the public space (2010-2012)

Considering the difficulty in limiting the number of people and guaranteeing public safety as a result of the concentration and, also, the depredation of the public patrimony verified as a result of the latest events held in Estação Square, in Belo Horizonte, IT IS DECREED THAT:

Art. 1 – Holding any type of event in Estação Square, in this Capital, is prohibited. (Belo Horizonte, 2009)

This position assumed by the city hall was not well received by a portion of Belo Horizonte's citizens. Dissatisfied, they began a series of protests against the restrictive act, which in January of 2010 received the name of *Praia da Estação*. *Praia da Estação* was a way found by the activists to express, ironically and ludically, their discontent with the decree issued by the municipal executive. However, if *Praia* initially had that single objective, the act organized by them quickly transformed into a form of scheduled and frequent protest in the state capital, politically motivated or not. The action consisted of occupying the square – which, after the revitalization, gained numerous water fountains – like a beach, with the right to swimwear, beach chairs, surf boards, and floats.

Although it had not been planned and organized by those same citizens that promoted the revival of the Belo Horizonte street carnival in 2009, this movement discussed the same ideologies and concerns of that initial group; of a free city, of public spaces produced for the citizens and occupied by them. For that reason, *Praia da Estação* immediately received the support and participation of those pioneering *carnavalescos*, which in the same way was incentivized and added to by the “beach-goer” activists. This combination strengthened both movements. If the Belo Horizonte street carnival was initially organized by a small group of friends, in 2010, it expanded with the presence of the participants of *Praia da Estação*, including with the formation of the *Bloco da Praia da Estação*, with the first parade occurring on carnival Saturday of 2011. Ronaldo's report explains how the joining of the two movements occurred:

But things [the street carnival and Praia da Estação] came together afterwards... They were two different gestures, promoted by two different groups. Next, a little later, the following year, the Bloco da Praia emerged, and things converged, and the people there in Tico Tico [name of a Belo Horizonte carnival bloco] super identified with Praia. And... the people from Peixoto, Tcha Tcha, Manjeriçã [names of Belo Horizonte carnival blocos]. So everyone got very close. But they were born from those two different geneses. (Ronaldo, 2018)

Integrated, the Belo Horizonte street carnival therefore assumed many of the characteristics of the *Praia da Estação* movement: it came to be seen as a collective movement intentionally engaged in transforming the management practices of the city's public spaces. Thus, the street carnival ended up transforming into a powerful action collectively organized by the activist citizens with the aim of reconfiguring the public spaces of the state capital. Through this important festivity of Brazilian culture, they evoked in the field different logics of use and occupation of public spaces, highlighting reiterated problems of municipal public management. This new movement is well summarized by João, one of the city's *carnavalescos*:

The carnival of... in Belo Horizonte is a carnival of political resistance, a carnival that emerged in opposition to Marcio Lacerda's government, and it has a well-established political agenda, which is the use and occupation of the urban space, that the city is not only a place of commerce, and of transit, that the city is a place of permanence, and it has to be used in other ways. (João, 2017)

In the 2011 carnival festivity, the new Belo Horizonte street carnival was already showing signs of growth and popularity. In that year, the first articles relating to the recent movement started to emerge in the mass media. A relevant source of perception of general public opinion, many newspaper articles focused on presenting the revival of the party, highlighting the motivations and growing adhesion. However, if over time the street carnival was increasingly gaining more public and voice, the attempts by the public authorities to mitigate the activist movement were increasing to the same extent. According to the reports of various interviewees, throughout all of those first years of the movement for occupying the streets of Belo Horizonte, the activists repeatedly suffered various forms of repression. One of these came from public security agents. Raul describes the repressive actions he witnessed, which as he argues, solely aim to reduce the intensity of that "visible, impactful, and extremely potent political content":

In the first years, there were very intense situations of political confrontation... In 2012, there was a confrontation in the Bloco da Praia da Estação, at the door of the City Hall, throwing gas canisters [and] and a moral effect, throwing grenades at a load of people dressed up who were jumping and singing and playing around at the door of the City Hall. (Raul, 2018)

But besides the repression by the security agents, another strategy found by the public authorities to contain the activist movement consisted of pursuing the informal workers who accompanied and supplied the carnival *blocos*. In practice, if there are no street vendors, there is no *bloco*, and if there is no *bloco*, there are no street vendors. Aware of this, the city hall began an intense process of combatting these workers. As the informant João observes: “[Once] we were able to convince the public authorities and the police that we weren’t doing anything wrong, they started to repress the street vendors.”

Conquest of the emancipated space (2013-2014)

Under the conception of a legitimate and fair movement, the activists not only resisted the adversities, but also managed to increase both the number of public spaces occupied by carnival festivals, and the number of agendas claimed. If initially the activists’ first objective was to overturn the restrictive decrees regarding Estação Square, increasingly more reflexive concerning the numerous commercial and exclusivist public policies on the part of the municipal executive, they perceived that the claims, carried out through the occupation of the public space with the carnival party, could (and should) transcend the debate on the use of the square.

Thus, in 2013, a carnival *bloco* was created in the Belo Horizonte festivity, called the *Bloco Pula Catraca* (of “Jump over the Turnstile”). Emerging from a recently-established movement with the aim of questioning urban mobility conditions in the state capital, *Tarifa Zero*, the *Bloco Pula Catraca* arrived in the street carnival setting loaded with new discussions. According to João, one of its founders, they decided to create the *bloco* after perceiving the potential transformative size of the carnival festivity when occupying the city’s public spaces. They understood that, through the street carnival, it would be possible to ludically promote the awareness of an expressive number of people regarding policies concerning public transport in the state capital.

The social cause movements were finding in the carnival support to be able to involve more people, leave that bubble and involve more people, in what we wanted to happen for people, you know? The political fight in the party. (João, 2017)

Therefore, that activist movement of appropriation of public spaces in the state capital inspired various other social movements to occupy the streets to fight for their causes. At the same time, along with the *Bloco Pula Catraca*, there emerged the *Blocomum Luiz Estrela*, formed of people who defend the occupation of a historic mansion that became a common space for artistic, political, and cultural creation and sharing, open and self-managed; the *Bloco Angola Janga*, an African *axé* music *bloco* dedicated to black empowerment; the *Bloco da Bicletinha*, which fights for a new logic of managing public road space; the *Bloco ClandesTinas*, a *bloco* of confrontation and resistance of the Tina Martins Women’s House of Reference, which calls for the establishment of services for vulnerable women and/or those facing violence; the *Bloco Parque Jardim América*, which emerges to give visibility to and strengthen the fight in defense of the only green area located in the heart of the Belo Horizonte neighborhood called Jardim América; and the *Bloco Garotas Solteiras*, which discusses feminist and LGBTQIA+ causes, among many other *blocos* with a variety of social agendas.

Attempts to commercialize the emancipated space (2015-2018)

The first attempt at appropriation of the Belo Horizonte street carnival by the commercial logic occurred in 2015, when a company from the drinks segment posted on its social media, without prior authorization, photos of members of the carnival *blocos* with logos printed on their faces. This practice violated the image rights of the people involved. This business attitude provoked an enormous negative reaction among the activists, since in that initial period of attempts at co-option by large companies, among the *carnavalescos* there prevailed the conception of a carnival party that was totally independent from sponsorship, whether public or private, or from any connection with company brands. The *carnavalescos* resist sponsorship of the street carnival “so as not to become hostages to sponsorship” (Felipe, 2017).

We are quite resistant to sponsorship... because, if sponsorship comes to dictate the heart of my bloco, where I have to go, who'll play, what I have to say, and to veto street vendors, say what I have to drink, we don't want that, you see? (João, 2017)

Since the start of the movement, the *carnavalescos* have proudly stressed the capacity of the population itself to promote a democratic party totally free from major sponsorship:

[The carnival] is held by the people for the people, as it should be. And the people are able to hold the party even when they aren't supported by the State – and without needing to resort to the support of private mega businesses to make dreams come true (BH Street Carnival Facebook page, February 24th of 2015)

In 2016, the same drinks company tried again to appropriate the carnival party without duly negotiating and conversing with the *carnavalescos* carrying out the event. In 2014, the *carnavalescos* called on the public authorities for universally free collective municipal transport during the carnival period, under the argument that the population could more easily travel to enjoy the street festivities. When they received a refusal from the municipal authority responsible for public bus concessions, the activists themselves arranged and financed a free bus that would circulate around the city's streets. In 2016, however, in the hope of meeting this desire of the revelers, the same large drinks company decided to provide free collective transport circulating around the state capital in the carnival period. This strategy was also harshly criticized by the activists. Besides questioning the neglectful position of the public authorities regarding the public transport policies, they also criticized the strategy itself: a bus covered in the company's logos running a route that, according to the *carnavalescos*, only served the resident population of the central-south region of the city (a predominantly upper-middle class region) and neglected the main people in need, the residents of the peripheral areas.

The strategy adopted in 2017 was, perhaps, the most controversial of all. In that year, the Belo Horizonte city hall, possibly under pressure from that same company officially sponsoring the event, decided to follow to the letter one of the clauses in the public notice calling for parties interested in acting as street vendors in the city carnival: those authorized to work in the party via accreditation by Belotur – the official agency responsible for promoting tourism in the municipality

– could only sell products of the official sponsor. Although it was a clause that existed in all the public notices published in previous years, it had never been truly required by the city hall, which always had a significant number of inspectors working in the carnival period. When it was firmly presented to the street vendors in an alignment meeting days before the 2017 carnival period, the news of the requirement immediately sent shockwaves among the activists.

Outraged, the *carnavalescos* took the decision, together with the street vendors, to file an *actio popularis*, under the argument of defending consumers and street vendors, flatly requiring the suspension of any restriction on the part of the municipality in relation to the sale of other beer brands that were not produced by the company specified in the clause of the public notice. The state judicial authority's judgement favored the carnival movement's request, requiring the immediate suspension of the act.

The problems experienced in 2017 led to the large drinks sector company adopting another strategy for the 2018 carnival:

I was at Estação Square then, in the area beside the Center of Reference for Young People, to accompany the rehearsals of some blocos that would happen there, such as the Bloco Juventude Bronzeada and a celebration of blocos exclusively formed of female drummers. To my surprise, from very far, I saw various yellow dots in that area. "What was that?" I wondered. When I got closer, I realized it was street vendors dressed in a vest sponsored by Ambev. That wasn't there in previous carnivals. I got closer to one of the street vendors and asked if it was obligatory to use that vest and she answered that it wasn't. And when I asked how she got the vest, she told me that every street vendor had got one the same day the accreditations were collected in Belotur. I insisted: "And why did you decide to use it? And she said: "I don't know, the yellow's such a strong color and they can see me from far and know I'm here to sell." (field notes of the first author, January 27th of 2018)

Concluding remarks

Our research explains the transformation process of public spaces into emancipated spaces by the consumer as being constituted of four phases: (1) emancipatory occupation of the public space, (2) public authority intervention, (3) conquest of the emancipated space, and (4) attempts at commercialization of the emancipated space. This process is characterized by various disputes and negotiations regarding the use and form of consumption of the public space that is transformed. Government and market forces try to appropriate the space, attempting to transform it. In response, consumers develop actions to address the threats and mobilize a greater number of people to participate in the movement.

The conquest of the emancipated space occurs among and through the disputes between the market actors (consumer, company, and public authorities), which try to transform the public and emancipated space into a market space. In opposition to the participative nature of public and emancipated spaces, the market space has the logic of subjugation, which creates subjects supporting its idealizers (Castilhos & Dolbec, 2017). Our research advances in explaining how

different market forces engage in the production of the public space, trying to impede its transformation into an emancipated space and, at the same time, commercialize it.

While the public space includes people, the emancipated space ensures voluntary participation, providing it follows the prevalent ideology (Castilhos & Dolbec, 2017). In the case of the Belo Horizonte street carnival, the city as a space for everyone is crystalized through the occupation of routes and public squares in various places in the city to celebrate the carnival organized by the *blocos* of the social movements and their fighting agendas. The greater participation of consumers in the use and appropriation of the emancipated space increases the strength and pressure for maintenance and recognition from society for the new transformed space.

Our research also presents contributions to the discussion about the building and evolution of markets (Dalmoro & Fell, 2020; Giesler & Fischer, 2017). Humphreys (2010) highlights the importance of adopting a sociological approach that helps in understanding the impacts of the actions of the various political actors and those of society in the building and evolution of markets. Our work advances the discussion of this research line, detailing how companies, the government, and sociocultural structures have affected the evolution process of the carnival market in the city of Belo Horizonte.

While the formalized organization of consumers in the study of Kjeldgaard, Askergaard, Rasmussen, and Ostergaard (2017) enabled the political power needed for the transformations of the dominant logics of society, in our work, the political power of the informal organization has been acquired through the ascension of representatives of the movement in traditional politics. In the context studied, various activists have gained prominence in the process of structuring and holding the Belo Horizonte street carnival. As a result, some of the representatives of the social movements that hold the Belo Horizonte street carnival ran for the city council in 2018. An interesting opportunity for future research would be to observe and understand the political conquests of the social movements that were born or strengthened in the occupation of public spaces with the aim of transforming them into emancipated spaces.

The findings also provide thoughts on the carnival market in Belo Horizonte. If, until recently, that market has been restricted to the small samba school and fun *bloco* parades, which were quite unpopular festivities among the citizens of the Minas state capital, the retaking of the public spaces with small *blocos* has resulted in a new type of emancipated space for Belo Horizonte. Future studies could verify different impacts in contexts in which transitions between the spatial typologies are also verified. In those in which resistance actions occur, the research should examine the various strategies adopted by the consumers, as well as the ways in which they accumulate resources and the results achieved.

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Second author: conception (equal), data curation (support), formal analysis (equal), investigation (support), methodology (equal), project administration (support), visualization (support), writing – original draft (support), writing – reviewing and editing (equal).

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