

## Largo da Mariquita (Salvador – BA) after the renovation of 2015-2016: the public space as a moving project

### Largo da Mariquita (Salvador – BA) a partir da reforma ocorrida em 2015-2016: o espaço público como projeto em movimento

### Largo da Mariquita (Salvador – BA) después de la renovación de 2015-2016: el espacio público como un proyecto en evolución

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#### Abstract

This article aims to document how the Largo da Mariquita renovation project, conducted between 2015 and 2016 along the Rio Vermelho waterfront in Salvador (BA), was modified to accommodate the interests of different stakeholders, revealing power dynamics in urbanism. The project is not seen as something fixed, but as a moving



one, open to constant changes, both during its execution and after its inauguration. Ethnographic techniques and tools were used in this research to provide a description of urban transformations. The observations lead to the conclusion that in Largo da Mariquita, consumer activities that meet the expectations of the middle class have been prioritized, although there remain possibilities for resistance by actors who distance themselves from neoliberal urbanism.

**Keywords:** Moving project; Power relations; Making-city; Largo da Mariquita.

## Resumo

Este artigo busca registrar como o projeto de reforma do Largo da Mariquita, executado entre 2015 e 2016, na orla do Rio Vermelho, em Salvador (BA), foi sendo modificado para contemplar interesses de diversos atores, revelando relações de poder no fazer-cidade. Considera-se o projeto não como algo definido, mas sim como projeto em movimento, aberto a constantes alterações, seja ao longo da execução ou após sua inauguração. Nesta pesquisa, foram utilizadas técnicas e instrumentos comumente empregados na etnografia, de modo a compor uma descrição de transformações urbanas. As observações levam à conclusão de que, no Largo da Mariquita, foram priorizadas atividades de consumo que atendessem às expectativas das classes médias, mas com possibilidades de resistências de atores que se afastavam do urbanismo neoliberal.

**Palavras-chave:** Projeto em movimento; Relações de poder; Fazer-cidade; Largo da Mariquita.

## Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo documentar cómo el proyecto de renovación del Largo da Mariquita, llevado a cabo entre 2015 y 2016 a lo largo de la costa de Rio Vermelho en Salvador (BA), fue modificado para acomodar los intereses de diferentes actores, revelando dinámicas de poder en el urbanismo. El proyecto no se percibe como algo fijo, sino como uno en constante evolución, abierto a cambios continuos tanto durante su ejecución como después de su inauguración. En esta investigación se utilizaron técnicas y herramientas etnográficas para ofrecer una descripción de las transformaciones urbanas. Las observaciones llevan a la conclusión de que en el Largo da Mariquita se han priorizado las actividades de consumo que responden a las expectativas de la clase media, aunque aún existen posibilidades de resistencia por parte de actores que se distancian del urbanismo neoliberal.

**Palabras clave:** Proyecto en movimiento; Relaciones de poder; Hacer-ciudad; Largo da Mariquita.



## INTRODUCTION

This article is an excerpt from the research I conducted during my doctorate in Architecture and Urbanism, as part of the Graduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism at Federal University of Bahia, between 2016 and 2020, with updates and additions. Herein, I seek to understand how the renovation project of Largo da Mariquita, performed between 2015 and 2016 along the Rio Vermelho waterfront in Salvador (BA), was modified to accommodate the interests of various stakeholders, revealing power dynamics in the process of city-making. I used ethnographic techniques and tools — such as direct field engagement, participant observation, field notes, recorded conversations, photographs, newspaper articles, and other documents— to create a description of urban transformations, specifically those that occurred during the renovation of the Rio Vermelho waterfront and certain episodes that followed.

The text is divided into four parts, in addition to this introduction. In the first section, I present the concepts that underpin the research. The second part addresses the initial phase of the Rio Vermelho waterfront renovation. The third section focuses on the city-making process at Largo da Mariquita. In the final section, I offer concluding remarks.

### **City-making in public spaces: a moving project shaped by power relations**

Architecture and urban planning projects do not rely solely on the creativity and technical knowledge of professionals. They result from negotiations between various stakeholders, aiming to connect heterogeneous elements to achieve desirable outcomes (Costa; Azevedo; Pedro, 2018). This negotiation does not end when the project is handed over to those responsible for its construction; it continues during the construction process, as adjustments are often needed to address situations that arise only during execution. Therefore, architectural or urban planning projects are not final or immutable; one could argue that, through changes made during execution, the project continues to evolve.

Latour and Yaneva (2008) suggest that a building should not be viewed as a static structure but rather as a flow of transformations. Even after its completion, it ages, is altered by its users, and is modified by everything happening inside and outside of it. It may eventually deteriorate or be renovated, altered, and transformed beyond recognition. It is not difficult to draw an analogy between a building and a city (or a part of it, such as a neighborhood, square, street, or block), whether it originates from a technical project or not. Like buildings, cities are moving projects, constantly undergoing changes triggered by various actors (both human and non-human) who inhabit or pass through them. Cities are also subject to the



influence of actors who seem external to the urban space but intervene in it by taking actions that serve their interests.

Here, I propose to observe the transformations between what was planned, what was actually built, and what was later modified in Largo da Mariquita. The presence of changes in a project may indicate the influence of power relations that deserve to be observed and analyzed to better understand the process of city-making.

I use “city-making” herein as an expansion of the concept proposed by Michel Agier (2011; 2015). For Agier, city-making is the means to establish the right to the city, as proposed by Lefebvre (2011). I propose “city-making” as a broader concept, encompassing the movements of all urban actors, not only those fighting for the realization of the right to the city but also others whose actions contribute to increasing socio-spatial segregation as well as those in between these two extremes, avoiding dualistic approaches. Thus, I understand city-making as the ongoing (re)shaping of urban spaces driven by the movements and outcomes of all urban actors (Ramos, 2020).

The right to the city, as proposed by Lefebvre (2011), refers not only to access to urban spaces and services but also to participation in the decision-making processes surrounding the (re)shaping of urban spaces. It is the “right to change and reinvent the city in accordance with our deepest desires” (Harvey, 2014, p. 28), with the caveat that “reinventing the city inevitably depends on exercising collective power over the urbanization process” (Harvey, 2014, p. 28).

This collectivity encompasses diverse people, with various understandings and desires, making conflict inherent in the process of city-making. Power relations emerge between different actors to assert certain interests in this process. To understand power, I turn to Foucault (2008), who argued that power is not exclusively exercised by specific actors, nor does it permanently subjugate others. According to the philosopher, power functions as a network, alternating between different actors: while some may exercise power at certain times, they may be subject to its consequences at others. Viewed this way, power loses its negative connotation as something solely aimed at controlling or oppressing, instead becoming a creative force that permeates the entire social body, though we must remember that power is predominantly exercised by certain groups—this is hegemonic power. It is through this continuous alternation in the exercise of power that I understand the processes of city-making.

Foucault (1995) also contributes to our understanding of how power relations operate. For him, power relations are actions upon actions; they are actions that seek to prevent or hinder the actions of others, who are always seen as capable of resisting and finding ways to carry out their own actions. Actions, of course, always take place in a specific environment, a space. Moreover, not only can actions inhibit other actions, but the very (re)configuration of the environment



can also inhibit certain actions. Therefore, I propose that power relations in city-making correspond to the actions (movements) of actors who aim to inhibit the movements of others within urban spaces, as well as the constant (re)shaping of urban spaces, which also inhibits the movements of certain actors.

Building on Latour and Yaneva's (2008) idea that a building is not a static object but a moving project and extending this to the concept of city-making, I suggest that public space is also a moving project, shaped by power relations among various actors with conflicting interests in that space. Analyzing the modifications of architectural projects during their execution, as well as the ongoing (re)configurations of public spaces, can help map the power relations within these environments. This, in turn, can contribute to developing pathways toward inclusive cities, as envisioned by Marques and Rasteiro (2018): cities where all people, regardless of class, gender, race, ethnicity, or religion, are empowered and enabled to fully participate in the social, economic, and political opportunities that cities have to offer.

### **Rio Vermelho waterfront renovation (2015-2016)**

Since 2013, the city of Salvador, capital of Bahia, has undergone a series of public space reconfigurations along its waterfront, actions referred to by the Municipal Government as "revitalization" and "requalification." Several sections of the city's coastline have been renovated, including areas such as Boca do Rio, Ribeira, Barra, Piatã, Itapuã, among others.

I believe the terms used by the city to describe these urban interventions — "revitalization" or "requalification" — are not the most appropriate, as they imply that these spaces previously lacked quality or vitality, which would supposedly be restored through the interventions. I propose using the term renovation instead, as it suggests a reconfiguration of the space's form without passing judgment on its prior quality or vitality. By choosing the term renovation, I also acknowledge that the concept of refunctionalization of spaces is embedded within it. In other words, the need to refunctionalize these spaces to meet the demands of certain actors is what drives the renovation. Here, we recall Lefebvre's conceptual triad of form – function – structure to analyze social space. In this view, a society organized by capitalist modes of production and relationships (structure) demands spaces (form) that meet its consumption needs (function) (Lefebvre, 2013, p. 198-212).

Rio Vermelho is known as Salvador's most bohemian neighborhood, which boosts the city's tourism. The neighborhood's waterfront is lined with numerous bars and restaurants that draw large crowds, especially between Thursday and Saturday nights. Researches by Araújo (2013) and Santos (2013) provide insights into the typical patrons of Rio Vermelho's bars: they are mostly young (18 to 35 years old), middle-class to upper-class individuals, single, with or pursuing higher education.



They frequent the neighborhood's bars more than once a week, arriving by private vehicle or taxi, and cite the main issues in the area as insecurity, limited parking, and inadequate urban cleaning.

The Rio Vermelho waterfront renovation mobilized a variety of actors. In addition to city officials, the architect responsible for the project and their team, and the company awarded the construction contract, a polarization emerged between those who supported the renovation and those who questioned it. On one side, business owners and service providers located in the area to be renovated, along with members of the Rio Vermelho Residents and Friends Association (Amarv), formed the Rio Vermelho Works Monitoring Commission (Caor). This group met regularly with city representatives to oversee the project's timeline and service quality, aiming to avoid the issues that had arisen during and after the first phase of the Barra waterfront renovation, which had led to protests by local residents and business owners<sup>1</sup>. On the other side was the Rio Vermelho em Ação (RVA) collective, composed of neighborhood residents and regular visitors. This group was formed through online social media networks by people who had learned about the upcoming renovation but had not been part of the earlier debates about the project. The RVA demanded that the project has to be presented to the Rio Vermelho community and called for broader participation in the project to ensure that it reflected the interests of the neighborhood's residents, not just the real estate and commercial sectors<sup>2</sup>.

RVA's demands led the city government to publish the urban design plan for the Rio Vermelho waterfront renovation on the website [www.novaorla.salvador.ba.gov.br](http://www.novaorla.salvador.ba.gov.br) in July 2015. However, discussions about the execution of the works and any potential changes to the project were held exclusively with the Caor. The RVA refused to join the Caor, arguing that this group was legitimizing the city's intervention in the neighborhood's waterfront through a process that lacked broad enough participation (Ramos, 2020).

The first phase of the renovation was inaugurated on January 29, 2016, just a few days before the annual Festa de Iemanjá on February 2, which is celebrated in the renovated area. At the inauguration, then-mayor ACM Neto walked through the renovated section, unveiling commemorative plaques, followed by musical performances on a stage set up in Largo da Mariquita. A large crowd attended the event, causing traffic jams on the streets leading to the neighborhood. Most people positively assessed the renovation, which contributed to maintaining the mayor's high approval rating (Ramos, 2020).

The urban design plan for the Rio Vermelho waterfront renovation, published by the city, allowed for the mapping of changes made during the construction process, as well as additional modifications carried out after the renovation's

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1 Cf. Almeida (2014). Available at: <https://atarde.com.br/bahia/bahiasalvador/entidades-e-moradores-pedem-ajustes-na-barra-648075>.

2 <https://riovermelhoemacao.wordpress.com/o-coletivo/>



inauguration. We will now focus on these project modifications, particularly those affecting Largo da Mariquita.

### Moving project at Largo da Mariquita

Teixeira and Santos (2015) identified that the space of Largo da Mariquita encompasses three areas: Praça Colombo, located on the right bank of the Lucaia River; Praça Augusto Severo, situated on the left bank; and the land strip where the Mercado do Peixe is located. They describe this area as “a residual space, quite fragmented, defined by the road system that traverses it—composed of the ‘cuts’ of space that did not serve the layout of Oswaldo Cruz/João Gomes, Borges dos Reis, and Conselheiro Pedro Luiz Streets” (Teixeira; Santos, 2015, p. 100-102) (Figure 1). However, in news articles about the renovation and documents from Amarv, the name Praça Augusto Severo did not appear; references to this space were made using the designation Largo da Mariquita, delimiting the area not by the Lucaia River but by Rua Conselheiro Pedro Luiz. This indicates a general understanding that Largo da Mariquita refers to this space, which is the perspective I adopt in this text.



Figure 1: Largo da Mariquita and Praça Colombo in 2005. Source: excerpt from a photograph by Pierre André Leclercq under Creative Commons license. Available at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salvador\\_de\\_Bahia\\_vue\\_panoramique\\_2005.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salvador_de_Bahia_vue_panoramique_2005.jpg). Access on: 10 Mar. 2024.

Teixeira and Santos (2015) note that Largo da Mariquita is “at least in part, a subversion of a residual space, as it has been appropriated as a meeting place, unlike other spaces with similar morphological characteristics in the city” (Teixeira; Santos, 2015, p. 102). The authors also documented the privatization of public space through tables from bars scattered throughout the square, the presence of kiosks and food stands, as well as street vendors and homeless individuals sheltering under trees for sleep. They highlighted “the underuse or non-use of significant parts of spaces that are uninteresting to local entrepreneurs” (Teixeira; Santos, 2015, p. 107), criticizing the conception of the space that did not support uses beyond those already present.



The renovation plan for Largo da Mariquita presented by the city to residents, business owners, and workers in Rio Vermelho in February 2014 can be seen in Figure 2. It shows that the square's flooring design was different from what was ultimately executed in the renovation (see Figure 3). There is also a slab next to the Lucaia River along Avenida Juracy Magalhães Júnior, where cars are parked. A bike lane can be seen running from Rua Guedes Cabral, passing between the buildings of Praça Colombo and the sea, continuing to the entrance of Mercado do Peixe. The proposal to build a slab over the Lucaia River next to Largo da Mariquita to expand the square's flooring was already present in the image. Additionally, a reduction in the mass of vegetation formed by the tree canopies is noticeable, resulting in a decrease in shaded areas within the square.



Figure 2: Promotional image of the project for Largo da Mariquita, published in February 2014. Available at: <http://salvadoremumdia.blogspot.com.br/2014/02/apresentado-projeto-de-requalificacao.html>. Access on: 2 Apr. 2017.

The images of the Largo da Mariquita project released after the conclusion of the bidding show differences compared to the initial image and are aligned with the urban project published by the city hall in July 2015. One of these images can be seen in Figure 3. In this image, which also provides an aerial perspective of the square, the bike lane coming from Guedes Cabral Street and the slab over the Lucaia River next to Avenida Juracy Magalhães Júnior are no longer present. On the other hand, the interlocking concrete pavement for shared traffic is introduced, and the design of the square's pavement closely resembles what was actually executed (see Figure 4).

Caor requested modifications to the project from the city hall via letter<sup>3</sup> but was not attended to. In summary, the requests included: expanding the area of

3 <https://blogdoriovrmelho.blogspot.com/2015/10/carnaval-do-rio-vermelho-volta-pauta.html>





Figure 3: Promotional image of the Largo da Mariquita project, published in June 2015. Available at: <https://www.ibahia.com/salvador/obra-do-rio-vermelho-deve-ficar-pronta-ate-2-de-fevereiro-de-2016>. Access on: 11 June 2024.

gardens with larger vegetation to provide more shade; adding more benches for gatherings and attractions for users of the square; tables for playing dominoes; a large pergola with climbing plants to create shade for fairs, artistic events, or sports; a children's park with a nearby water fountain to create a cooler microclimate; an arena for capoeira practitioners; and more trash bins.

However, several differences can be observed between Figure 3 and what was executed, there were alterations to the urban project. In the image, there is only one pergola, which connects the red pavement to establish a link between Largo da Mariquita and the Mercado do Peixe; neither this pavement nor the pergola was executed. On the other hand, near Praça Colombo, two pergolas were erected that were not included in the original project. The image does not show the tables from the bars located at the corner of the square with Rua Oswaldo Cruz, which had been positioned there for years (see Figure 1) — instead, a small garden with trees was planned for that area; however, the planned garden was reduced, and the tables from the bars were retained after the construction, protected by awnings. The image also does not depict the kiosks for selling tapioca and acarajé, which were built during the square's renovation to accommodate workers who had been operating there prior to the intervention, but the urban project published by the city indicated the construction of only one kiosk for selling acarajé. I inquired with the city hall about how these project modifications came about, but did not receive a response. Figures 4 and 5 show Largo da Mariquita after the renovation works.

Another relevant fact is the neglect of certain aspects of urban mobility throughout the project and/or its execution. This neglect can be seen on the sidewalk of the



Figure 4: Aerial view of Largo da Mariquita after the renovation. Source: Photograph by Nilton Souza.



Figure 5: Tables from bars (a) and kiosks (b) in Largo da Mariquita. Source: Author's photographs taken on July 23, 2017.

street next to the square, particularly at the section of the bridge over the mouth of the river Lucaia. There, poles installed on the narrow sidewalk have hindered pedestrian traffic since before the renovation. The urban project published by the city did not address this issue, as it indicated the installation of poles in a section of the narrow sidewalk. Thus, the pre-existing mobility obstacles were not resolved in the renovation, as can be seen in Figure 6.



Figure 6: Shared traffic lane in Largo da Mariquita, where the pedestrian-only section has serious mobility issues caused by the installed poles. Source: Photograph by the author taken on June 11, 2024.



The tables and chairs of the bars in Largo da Mariquita, positioned in the public space, signify the privatization of this area, making it exclusively for the establishments' use to serve customers. In December 2017, a roof was constructed for the tables and chairs using eucalyptus structures, which, according to the president of Amarv, was requested by the bar owners in Largo da Mariquita from the Fundação Mário Leal Ferreira, the Salvador City Hall entity responsible for interventions in public spaces.

The roof over the tables and chairs marks the privatization of public space not only during the nights, when customer presence is higher, but throughout the entire week, even in the absence of customers (Figure 7). The public space, renovated with public funds, becomes exclusive to some business owners, in an agreement with municipal management that favors the market, aligning with neoliberal urbanism.

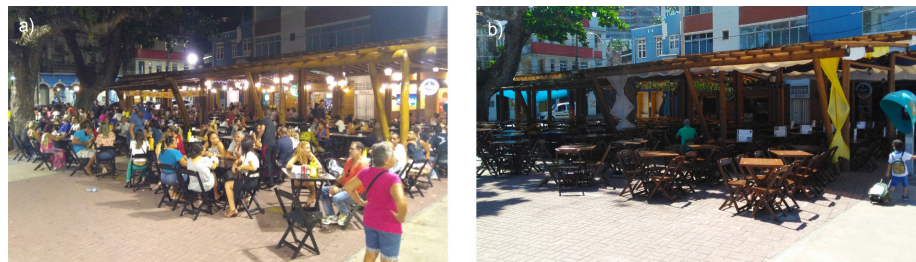


Figure 7: Tables and chairs of bars in Largo da Mariquita, with the roof constructed after the inauguration of the works, during the night (a) and during the day (b). Source: Photographs by the author taken on February 23, 2018 (a) and May 6, 2019 (b).

Other bars in Largo da Mariquita also maintain their tables, chairs, and benches in the public space during the night, but without the protection of a roof. This furniture is removed during the day, allowing for other uses of the public space. Nevertheless, it still represents a temporary privatization of the public area (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Bar in Largo da Mariquita that places tables and chairs in the public space at night (a) and removes them during the day (b). Source: Photographs by the author taken on May 5, 2019 (a) and May 6, 2019 (b).

Street vendors position themselves near the bars of Largo da Mariquita, attracted by the flow of people. Black women are visibly the majority in this group. Some vendors spread fabrics on the ground to display their products; others use the ground to support their displays; some grill cheese on small charcoal grills; others sell drinks from cooler boxes placed on baby strollers or shopping carts (Figure 9). The street vendors exhibit a degree of improvisation that could pose a danger to themselves and pedestrians. When I asked some of them about the actions of city



Figure 9: Street vendors near the bars of Largo da Mariquita and Vila Caramuru: a) grilling cheese on a metal stool, b) selling handicrafts on fabrics spread on the ground, c) selling drinks from cooler boxes placed on baby strollers or shopping carts. Source: Photographs by the author taken on May 5, 2019.

inspectors, they replied that the inspectors watched from a distance but had not encountered any problems with public authorities so far.

Clients of the bars at Largo da Mariquita attract street performers such as musicians, actors, and circus artists who perform temporarily. I recorded the performance of a group of three musicians — a singer and guitarist, a flutist, and a percussionist — and a group of four young percussionists playing samba-reggae. After playing for a while for the bar patrons, one member from each group would pass between the occupied tables to collect voluntary contributions.

The privatization of public space can also be observed, albeit temporarily, during arts and gastronomy fairs that set up in Largo da Mariquita. These fairs consist of booths and tents selling locally produced items such as crafts, clothing, bags, decorative pieces, plants, snacks, and offer activities for children and musical shows. I noticed that the most frequent fair was organized by the Bahia Craftsmen's Association (Adaba), usually held once a month. The fair would start setting up in the center of Largo da Mariquita on Thursday afternoon, operating from Friday to Sunday, generally from 4 PM to 11 PM. The tents were arranged in a circular pattern following the layout of the square, leaving the center of the largo open; this circular arrangement ignored the placement of some benches around the floral motif drawn on the square's pavement, resulting in people sitting facing the backs of the tents, which were covered with tarps. In the center of the square, street performers sometimes presented their acts: singers, instrumentalists, actors, among others. Children also played there with bicycles, scooters, balls, and other toys, supervised by their parents. There was a tent for the fair, near the center of the square, reserved for musical performances by artists brought in by Adaba. The fair attracted people of all ages (Figure 10).

The Largo da Mariquita consists of filled and empty spaces. Notably, the flooring design with a floral motif suggests radiation or convergence towards what would be the "center" of the square. However, attention should also be given to the "empty" space near the slab built over the Lucaia River, where there is no flooring design or tall vegetation. This space, despite its arid character (due to the almost complete absence of vegetation) and mineral appearance (from the paving used), opens to unforeseen uses, expanding the possibilities of city-making. Here, I observed artistic performances, such as the Cabaré Belas, Arretadas, and Fora da Casinha, as well as the weekly gatherings of skaters on Fridays and jugglers on Mondays, who would come to the square to exchange experiences and enjoy the public space in dynamics that move away from consumption, thus detaching from neoliberal urbanism (Ramos, 2020).

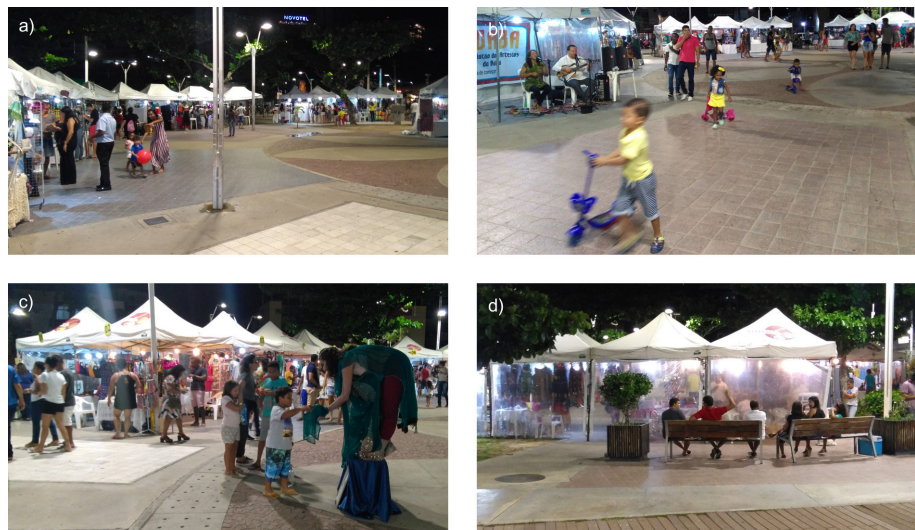


Figure 10: Adaba Fair at Largo da Mariquita: a) tents arranged in a circular pattern in the square; b) children playing while musicians perform; c) artist interacting with children; d) arrangement of the tents restricts visibility for people sitting on the benches in the square. Source: Photographs by the author taken on May 5, 2019 (a and b) and May 25, 2019 (c and d).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By following the urban project of the Largo da Mariquita reform, viewed as a moving project, and identifying its changes not only during the planning phase but also throughout execution and after the inauguration, we reveal power relations that reflect specific interests in city-making. The recorded observations indicate a prioritization of consumption activities that cater to the needs of the middle classes, as evidenced by the construction of a covering near the bars, the installation of tables and chairs (even if temporarily), and the hosting of arts and gastronomy fairs in the public space. Such power relations, established through (re)configurations of spaces, inhibit the movements of actors with interests that diverge from neoliberal urbanism. However, some of these actors, such as artists and athletes, seek out gaps and alternative ways to exercise power, occupying the empty spaces of the Largo da Mariquita project with their moving bodies, creating uses that may not have been envisioned by those responsible for the project's design and execution. I emphasize that, by considering the moving project within city-making, these actors can be seen, momentarily, as co-authors of this moving project, continually (re)configuring it.

It can be stated that, although the experience of the Largo da Mariquita reform aimed to enhance consumption in alignment with neoliberal urbanism, this (moving) project will never be fully realized due to the resistances that arise against it, such as the presence of street vendors, athletes, or artists, who may create discomfort for some individuals in the middle classes.

Mapping the power relations that lead to changes in this moving project can aid in the collective decision-making processes that make cities more inclusive, although this inclusive city project must also be viewed as a moving one, and thus subject to resistances and changes.

I would like to thank Nilton Souza, who generously provided a photograph, as seen in Figure 4, to illustrate this article.

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